

novel's original audience by suggesting that they would only know the immediate headline context of Wyoming's bid for statehood and its constitutional inclusion of female suffrage. They would have been familiar with the elements of the typological agenda as well. The richer literary and historical ramifications, some posted by Wisterian design, some automatic with "the matter of Virginia," make *The Virginian* an interesting book indeed—certainly capable of, and perhaps actually successful in, doing more than the "two things at once" (67) in Mitchell's estimate.

MICHAEL KREYLING  
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*Reply:*

Michael Kreyling's letter calls for little in the way of response. His terms are inexact (his is hardly a "typological" approach). His main point has been anticipated by others in standard readings of the novel (starting with Douglas Branch half a century ago). And he is prone to contentious assertions that are either wrong (Wister's reference to "the Virginian" patently does "leave his main figure 'unnamed'"); misleading (I never imply my interpretation was the "only" one available to the novel's first readers); or unhelpfully silly ("Wisterical"?). Most important, if Kreyling aspires to debate constructively, he should focus more closely on the question raised by the author he chides. I remind him that in this case that question was, Why did Wister's novel fail to fit the popular formula it inspired? Nothing Kreyling says helps explain that failure or makes it any less baffling.

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**Social Reality**

To the Editor:

Sandy Petrey's article "Castration, Speech Acts, and the Realist Difference: *S/Z* versus *Sarrasine*" (102 [1987]: 153–65) is a stimulating contribution to the current debate about realism. A difficulty arises, however, from the claim that the "dissociation of the constative from its referent furnishes a way to separate realist mimesis from the referential fallacy as well" (155). It seems to me that Petrey is merely shifting the locus of that fallacy in his argument that "realism enacts a constative vision of the world by simultaneously denying language's connection to objective truth and affirming its expression of social truth" (155).

The concept of the "social" recurs throughout the article in a variety of forms: "social reality" (157); "not

physical realities but social fabrications" (157); "[t]he process of meaning in *Sarrasine* is not the road to objective reality but the expression of what society accepts as real" (162); "social consensus" (164). In every instance a "social" reality is played off against an "objective" or "physical" reality. In the very act of dethroning objective reality as the referent for the literary text, Petrey appears to be enthroning another—undefined—social reality as the arbiter of authority.

What needs to be addressed is the ontological status of the category "social." Petrey's argument would be more persuasive if he were willing to push it a step further through the recognition that "society" and "social" are themselves products of the text. At more than one point in the article he seems on the verge of such a recognition, for example, when he emphasizes that "*Sarrasine* certainly negates all its affirmations of sexual identity, but not 'as uttered,' not before establishing a context in which their constative validity is secure" (156) and that "*Sarrasine* is a fully developed demonstration that words name not in *fact* but only in communities" (157). It is essential to acknowledge that the communities in question here are *internal* to the text, which establishes its *own* context to ensure the validity of the constative utterance. It does this by positing an internal field of reference, which acts as a cognitive frame for the formation of consensus, that is, "the idea others form of it," in the phrase Petrey cites from Balzac (157).

If the realist fallacy is not to be reinstated in another form, those "others," who collectively make up society, and on whose reading the fact depends, must be seen as intrinsic to the text. In *S/Z*, Petrey maintains, "what is real in realism are those textual elements deprived of meaning" (164). But having been deprived of referential meaning, they are reinvested with an "other" meaning created within the parameters of the text and contained in its codes.

LILIAN R. FURST  
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*Reply:*

Lilian Furst is correct to bring to the foreground what my article left implicit: every definition of reality in a literary text necessarily addresses a textual ontology, "an internal field of reference, which acts as a cognitive frame" during the reading experience rather than for all time. Social reality in and of itself authorizes realist discourse no more than does physical reality. Balzac's contradictory names for a single character become facts because the work in which they appear establishes (rather than reproduces) contexts in which their validity is secure, and my article should indeed have paid more attention to how this establishment takes effect.

Yet I disagree with what I take to be Furst's assump-