



Dialogue and Literature: Apostrophe, Auditors, and the Collapse of Romantic Discourse

By Michael Macovski

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Extending and reframing the works of Bakhtin, Gadamer, Ong, and Foucault--with particular emphasis on Bakhtin's late essays --Macovski constructs a theoretical model of literary dialogue and applies it to a range of Romantic texts. In reconsidering specific works within the context of cultural heuristics, rhetorical theory, and literary history, Macovski redefines Romantic discourse as both extratextual and agonistic. He thereby re-evaluates such Romantic topics as the history of the autotelic self, the proliferation of lyric orality, and the nineteenth-century critique of rhetoric. He examines poetry by Wordsworth and Coleridge, as well as such nineteenth-century prose works as *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Heart of Darkness*.

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Dialogue and Literature: Apostrophe, Auditors, and the Collapse of Romantic Discourse By Michael Macovski Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #7347789 in Books
- Published on: 1994-05-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.56" h x .97" w x 5.75" l, 1.12 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

Extending and reframing the works of Bakhtin, Gadamer, Ong, and Foucault, Macovski constructs a theoretical model of literary dialogue and applies it to a range of Romantic texts. He conceives of literary discourse as a matrix of interactive voices which are not only contained within the text, but extend beyond it to other works, authors, and interpretations. A given speaker engages not only fellow characters, but his or her own past, present, and future. According to this view, literary meaning is rendered not by a single speaker, nor even by a single author, but through a communal construction and exchange. Maintaining that the manifestations of dialogue are particularly pronounced during the Romantic epoch, Macovski traces the evolution of this concept within Romantic discourse, first examining poetry by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and then turning to three nineteenth-century prose works that are often discussed as "Romantic": *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Heart of Darkness*. Throughout the study, Macovski combines theories of rhetorical analysis, critical inquiry, and literary dialogue to account for the nineteenth-century proliferation of apostrophe, auditors, and readerly address during the period. Within this scheme, he reconsiders such Romantic topics as the history of the autotelic self, the dissemination of lyric orality, and the nineteenth-century critique of rhetoric. At the same time, he defines "Romantic dialogue" as a transtemporal idiom, one that has particular implications for the Romantics' twin concerns with revision and prophecy. The first book to make extensive use of Bakhtin's late essays, *Dialogue and Literature* compares these concepts to related formulations by Foucault, Ong, and Gadamer. It then applies the paradigm of literary dialogue to such parallel processes as the nineteenth-century transformation of confession into self-decipherment, the psychoanalytic rhetoric of temporal reconstruction, and the Coleridgean enactment of ontological "outness". What is most striking about such dialogic paradigms, however, is that the Romantic interlocutor is an agon: the auditors can never apprehend what they hear. In the end, the book proposes that literary dialogue operates as a heuristic in which investigation becomes a function of otherness.

About the Author

Michael Macovski is at Fordham University.

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