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"The Validity of E.D. Hirsch"

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THE VALIDITY OF E. D. HIRSCH, JR.**Patrick Scott, Department of English, University of South Carolina****By way of introduction:**

Hirsch's Philosophy of Composition is a book that has aroused a lot of hostility and a lot of misunderstanding. Indeed, in the composition journals and in the recent guides to composition research, I've seldom come across a review or even the briefest mention that doesn't brush it off as unsound. Erika Lindemann in Freshman English News judged that "the first three chapters of this book are better left unread" and condemns Hirsch's view as "limited" and "narrowed" (p. 18). Susan Miller in College Composition and Communication wished the book "only limited success," because its "narrow view of writing" reveals "very little understanding of the situation of most composition teachers and students," and "certainly" suggests "ignorance of the enterprise of contemporary rhetoricians." Wallace Douglas in College English concurred: Hirsch, he wrote, "seems to know little or nothing about the traditions in the teaching of composition" (p. 93), and though he calls the book "a quite stunning explanation," he was being ironic, for he concludes that the real philosophy of composition "seems of no great interest to Professor Hirsch" (pp. 91, 99).

Some of these criticisms were a bit unfair, because Hirsch himself had already noted in his introduction that the book omitted large areas of composition, such as invention, and in any case Hirsch's critics were divided over exactly what was wrong with his book, with Lindemann praising the later chapters and rejecting the earlier, while Miller voted the other way. And, too, Hirsch didn't fully know the audience to whom he was

writing; he has since recounted ruefully how in the mid-seventies he had to ask Mina Shaughnessy for advice because he was finding it so difficult to break into "the convention world of composition experts" (Hirsch, 1980).

Looking back now, we'd all agree, Hirsch himself would agree, that the book had its faults, if judged as a complete guide to composition; it was too narrow and decontextualized in its ideas of writing. Since its publication Hirsch has repudiated both the adequacy of the book's skills-centered pedagogy and the claim to absoluteness in its theory of relative readability, but that still doesn't dispel for me an uneasy feeling that the reviewers weren't really reading Hirsch, that they were too concerned to defend the process paradigm against Hirsch's alien objectivism to recognize the very radical and tough intellectual stance he represented.

I think what happened was that the reviewers weren't equipped through prior reading to cope with Hirsch's style of argument, and Hirsch himself made a bad tactical error in prefacing the book with what was meant to be a disarming mid-life crisis proclamation that it represented a new departure for him and had no relation to any of his prior work. In fact, its interest, its ironies, its implied reader, all rest on the continuities and validity of Hirsch's previous general intellectual position. My purpose in this paper is to suggest an appropriate intellectual context through which Hirsch's two distinct phases of composition research can be interpreted, and the form I've chosen is the career study, stage by stage through his books up through his recent scattered essays on cultural literacy. The continuities far outweigh the changes, and the earlier works in literature and literary theory lay out all the groundwork for his later stances about composition.

An overview of Hirsch's career:

Hirsch was born in 1928 in Memphis, Tennessee, the son of Eric Donald Hirsch and Leah Aschaffenburg Hirsch. He went to college at Cornell (B.A., 1950), served in the U.S. Naval Reserve on active duty in 1950-1952, and then returned to graduate school at Yale (M.A., 1953; Ph.D., 1957). His dissertation at Yale, the Wordsworth book, was written under F. A. Pottle, whose Idiom of Poetry (1946) was one of the chief (?only) anti-New Critical theoretical, historical-relativist statements from Yale in the fifties; Pottle's book adumbrates, from Tintern Abbey, much the position Hirsch took in his first book about the Immortality Ode, and it amazes me that the relation between Pottle and Hirsch seems to be ignored in the recent critical literature. But Hirsch also added significantly to the sophistication of Pottle's position, and took formal work in philosophy at that time.

From 1957 to 1966, he taught at Yale, as an instructor, assistant professor and associate professor; he married in 1958, and has three (or is it four?) children. The major development in his self-consciousness as a critic came in 1960-61, when he had a Morse fellowship, and not only developed his basic thesis for the Blake book but also formulated the thesis of "Objective Interpretation," the basis of all Hirsch's later work, developed through conversation with R. S. Crane and William K. Wimsatt with whom he had met up on leave in London.

This move into formal literary theory, not yet then a fashionable field, he consolidated while on a Guggenheim fellowship in 1964-65, drafting the book Validity in Interpretation. In 1966, after the success and controversy of his Blake book and his initial theoretical articles, he was raided to the University of Virginia as professor, where he extended

his interests in literary theory, philosophy and linguistics, and where he became chairman two years later (1968-71).

At the end of his term (in the famous or notorious dust-jacket phrase) Hirsch "stepped down as chairman to become director of freshman writing" (though he had a year on an N.E.H. fellowship first, in 1971-72, to study linguistics, speech-act theory, etc.). In 1972, he was named William R. Kenan Professor at Virginia. To follow up The Philosophy of Composition, he conducted a large-scale empirical research study (again with N.E.H. support) into the effect of technical readability on reading speed and comprehension; from the mixed results of this research he announced yet another intellectual conversion, repudiating The Philosophy of Composition, and stressing instead his new theory of "cultural literacy," about which more later. Also in the later nineteen-seventies, he worked closely with the New York Board of Regents in their state-wide writing assessment programs. He is a member of the American Rhododendron Society.

Stage by Stage through Hirsch's Writings: a selected bibliography

So much for the externals of Hirsch's career; his intellectual career from the nineteen-fifties to the nineteen-eighties merits closer study, and can conveniently be broken down into four, slightly overlapping, phases:

Phase I: The Practice of Historical Interpretation

Hirsch's first two books were conventional single-author studies of major Romantic poets, Wordsworth and Blake, but they were remarkable in the degree of explicitness he accorded to his critical method, and in his willingness to debate the intellectual status of literary-critical

interpretation. Both show a certain amount of deference to the New Critical emphasis on close analysis, but both argue explicitly that the critic approaches a text, for heuristic purposes, through a type, or general idea, of the kind of meanings to be expected within it.

Wordsworth and Schelling, A Typological Study of Romanticism, Yale Studies in English, no. 145
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

-- dedicated to his mother and father. A comparative study of two major Romantic figures, with a heavy philosophical and methodological slant, drawing on, e.g., Dilthey and on psychological theory of typification. Interesting in adumbrating some of Hirsch's later stances both on interpretative method and cultural identity. For instance, he praises Schelling as having "broken through the subjective barrier" (p. 2). He posits for the authors a similarity of Weltanschauungen, "not a mere nexus of causes . . . an organic system, a cultural selfhood with a logic and autonomy of its own" (p.5). "In the present study I shall be concerned to understand a Weltanschauung from the inside, to grasp its inner coherence . . . as any student of Wordsworth will testify, it is very difficult to deduce the contours of Wordsworth's outlook from his poetry alone" (p. 6). "Poetry and philosophy are separate only as disciplines" (p. 7).

The book in fact presents a theory of interpretation very close to that of his later work in literary theory and his recent work on culture in reading comprehension. "Categories are inevitably constitutive" (p. 11). "All too often the abstract genre is considered to be a real entity which helps define a fictive amalgamation like the "realm of literature. . . . If, however, textual interpretation is conceived to be an idiographic

discipline, the genre properly functions as a guiding idea about general formal aims. . . . A Weltanschauung type may have a similar function whenever the text does not provide sufficient clues to the direction of its meaning. . . . When one is confronted with a problematical passage, capable of being construed plausibly in different ways, it is helpful to adopt sympathetically the author's type of outlook in order to determine which meaning is the most typical and probable" (p. 13).

Innocence and Experience; An Introduction to Blake

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964)

-- Explicator Prize, 1964. Dedicated "For Polly." The idea of the book is that objective interpretation of Blake's poetry is not possible if his works are all regarded as part of a single synchronic philosophy or system. Instead, each phase of Blake's writings must be studied, on the pattern of the Wordsworth book, for its own characteristic type or character, and the works of that period reexamined in the light of the successive types. Hirsch scored a number of particular successes in his reinterpretations, because he explored much more fully than most critics in the formalist tradition the new bibliographical evidence about Blake's preintings and revisions turned up by Geoffrey Keynes. In particular, Hirsch argues, against almost everyone else, that the Songs of Innocence can only be properly interpreted if kept distinct from the Songs of Experience and from the successive systems of contraries in which Blake embedded them. "The soundest interpretation of the Songs and of all works by Blake is one that attempts to understand them in relation to the original impulse out of which they were composed" (p. 13). "The history of commentary on Blake's Songs shows that the critic's conception of their

general character plays a larger role in their interpretation than the actual words of the individual poems" (p. 14)-- that is, at least initially, we read words through ideas, not ideas through words. Much of the Blake book is devoted to a careful explication of individual songs in the light of this theory, but the implications of the argument were fully spelt out in the next stage of Hirsch's work.

Phase II: Defining and Defending Historical Interpretation

This second phase really overlaps with the writing of the Blake book, for it begins with Hirsch's epochal repudiation of the New Criticism in his article in PMLA in 1960. Thereafter, like the first phase, Hirsch works out the basic idea in one book, and then refines and extends it in a second one.

"Objective Interpretation,"

P. M. L. A., 75 (1960), 463-479; reprinted as an appendix to Validity in Interpretation, and in On Literary Intention, ed. David Newton-de Molina (Edinburgh, 1976).

-- the first shot in the battle, distinguishing the "two horizons of textual meaning," meaning and significance, and asserting the essential determinateness of textual meaning itself.

Validity in Interpretation

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967; eighth printing 1978).

-- dedicated to Ronald S. Crane and William K. Wimsatt. This book is not just about interpreting literature but instead is concerned to show the shared general principles underlying the interpretation of texts in all

humane disciplines, and to bring together the theoretical insights into interpretation from law, biblical hermeneutics, and philosophy, as well as critical theory.

Hirsch begins fairly easily, having great fun exposing such New Critical fallacies as "The Meaning of a Text changes--even for the Author," "It does not matter what an author means--only what his text says," "An author often does not know what he means," and so on. It then gets into deeper waters arguing the determinacy and reproducibility of meaning, against psychologistic and radical-historicist objections. Hirsch links back to his earlier books, by developing the idea that we read texts through an idea of their intrinsic genre or type (which includes expectations of meaning, not just of form); basic to this concept is the temporal nature of texts, that must be serially processed, an idea he returns to in his composition research. He concludes the book with a survey of some basic principles for validating one interpretation over another. A second appendix tackles head-on the then-new ideas of Heidegger's truant pupil Gadamer, who had radically relativized theories of interpretation or hermeneutics by claiming against the German philological tradition that every reading is necessarily and irremediably a new cognition of the work in terms of the interpreter's own historical culture, and that recovery of an author's meaning is therefore theoretically impossible, rather than merely difficult.

The Aims of Interpretation

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976)

-- dedicated to his children. Though this book presents a connected argument, it is mostly collected from essays published earlier, in two groups, one written before Hirsch began work on composition and the other

written either in parallel to (or perhaps even after) his research for Philosophy.

The earlier group (part II of the book, chs. 6-8) is concerned with late nineteen-sixties-style questions neglected in the earlier book, the problems of "significance" or evaluation. Hirsch argues, correctly but counter to the New Critical tradition, against the privileging of "literary" criteria or literary significance over other kinds; these chapters first appeared in 1968-70, except for a delayed festschrift chapter (ch. 8).

The later group (Part I, chs. 2-5) is philosophically tougher, tackling nineteen-seventies-style linguistic and literary-theoretical questions; it defends and extends Hirsch's distinction (in Validity) between "meaning" and "significance." He now makes explicit that "intentional meaning" includes affect and value, draws on psycholinguistic theory to underpin the importance of prior categories in the construction of meaning, attacks the metaphors of perspectival theory, and attacks the stylistic assumption that identical meanings require identical linguistic form (remarkably, the section in Philosophy dealing with this topic makes essentially the same point from different sources and arguments). This second group was all published in journals in 1975.

The "Afterword" (ch. 9) includes material from Hirsch's article in Daedalus (1970), which spurns not only Derrida and post-structuralist literary theory but also Kuhn's paradigm theory, as wantonly relativist. It also contains mention of the worth of extrinsic criteria in evaluating research (e.g. as between literary criticism and literacy research).

Reviewed by Paul Ricouer in T.L.S.

Phase III: Theorizing about Prose Style -- the Move to Composition

My underlying case should by now be clear, for the tenacious undertext of all Hirsch's writings so far has been an attack on relativism as intellectually unrespectable, and an assertion that meaning resides, not in the words of the text, but in the reader's processing of that text to reconstruct authorial intention. It is necessary first to cast one's mind back to the way, the sophistic way, in which composition was commonly taught in the better, intellectually more ambitious colleges of the late nineteen-sixties; as far as one can glean, behind the simplified historical schema of "product-centered instruction" that has been created by commentators of the nineteen-seventies, the problem was that beyond a certain basic level at which texts were very prescriptive, no one really believed that good writing could be taught; it was a matter of taste, a je ne sais quoi, an ineffable something about which clear discussion was very difficult. No one any longer really believed the old textbooks nostrums, yet no one had formulated a theory that could replace them about the evaluation, and therefore the teaching aims, of good writing. Certainly, formalist New Criticism wasn't going to help, for that is based on the teleological fallacy, that the text must be a perfect expression of its own meaning, thus precluding improvement. The situation was an open field for Hirsch's kind of tough-minded, interdisciplinary scrutiny, but it must be remembered that his initial target in writing the book was high-cultural stylistic scepticism, rhetorical relativists, rather than the humbler prescriptive textbooks that were the target of the contemporary process theorists at the 4 Cs; he was, one might say, writing for a different audience than the one that reviewed him.

The Philosophy of Composition

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

-- dedicated "to my fellow composition teachers." You've all read the book, so there is not a lot of point in me rehearsing it in detail. What I would point out is how conscious it always is of the general intellectual implications of any particular stylistic or psycholinguistic assertion. The whole idea of "relative readability," of judging a work in terms of the author's intended meaning, echoes back to Hirsch's literary theory, as does the emphasis on the heuristic benefits of projected closure over open forms. I believe that Hirsch felt his job had been done, in putting composition teaching on a sound intellectual basis, that is a basis his literary colleagues couldn't deny or refute, once he had founded a secure objective basis for preferring one version of a sentence or paragraph over another, and that he never intended to get into questions of pedagogic application; the book is, in short, an objectivist or rationalist theory of comparative stylistics, rather than a philosophy of composition.

That is a point well made by some of the hostile compositionist reviewers whom I have already quoted, and, as I say, Hirsch would now accept that. There's some internal evidence that the book was finished about 1974, before Shaughnessy's work on the pedagogic implications of stylistic normativeness came out, and that it was read the University of Chicago Press by Ross Winterowd and Richard Young, who commented harshly on the book without denying its intellectual achievement--hence the disclaimer Hirsch offers in the preface about omitting invention, and hence, too, I think, the rhetorically-misconceived dedication and reference in the preface to himself as a convert to composition from literature. What outraged the composition reviewers, I think, was the obscure fear that

Hirsch's whole mode of argument, his intellectual concerns and philosophical connections, were alien to them, that he had written a book about composition that grew out of a minority, conservative, objectivist tradition, a tradition quite different from the romantic, psychologistic, tradition that dominated pedagogy in the mid-seventies, and that they couldn't refute his separate statements because they didn't share his underlying attitudes. As Erika Lindemann wrote, "It is difficult to find a single passage which [sic] typifies my objections to Professor Hirsch's reasoning" (p. 17). And note that this sense of frustration (the word is Lindemann's) was not just because Hirsch came to composition from literature, or even from literary theory, but because of the special kind of rationalist intellectual tradition and rationalist commitment that he brought to the study of prose evaluation.

Reviewed by D. C. Freeman, Chronicle of Higher Education, 16 (April 3 1978), 18; in Choice, 15 (April 1978), 222; by J. Baum, in Change, 10 (December 1978), 74-76; by M. Scardamalia and C. Bereiter, in Harvard Educational Review, 49 (February 1979), 116; by Allan Cooper, in Library Journal, 103 (January 15 1978), 167; by G. H. Brook, in Prairie Schooner, 52 (Summer 1978), 196-197; E. Smith, in Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65 (December 1979), 450; M. Gessner, in English Journal, 69 (May 1980), 80-81; Wallace Douglas, in College English, 40 (September 1978), 90-99; Allan Rodway, in Times Higher Educational Supplement, 329 (February 24 1978), 16; Susan Miller, in College Composition and Communication, 30 (February 1979), 104-105; W. L. Benzon, Modern Language Notes, 93 (December 1978), 1080-1087; L. Behrens, Journal of Aesthetics, 38:1 (Fall 1979), 98-101; Erika Lindemann, in Freshman English News, 7:1 (Spring 1978), 15-19.

Phase IV: Cultural Literacy and the Politics of Curriculum

Since the publication of his first composition book, Hirsch has repudiated it. He now stigmatizes it, unjustly in my view, as merely formalist and largely irrelevant to basic education in literacy. The reason he gives for the change of mind is the counter-intuitive results he got from large-scale empirical research in the later nineteen-seventies. Certainly, he now writes about composition, and literacy education, in a much broader cultural context, and with much greater awareness of social and political constraints on pedagogy than he had previously discussed. In some ways, this fourth phase, or the second phase of his composition work, is much more consonant with the cultural, contextualist, theories of reading and interpretation he formulated in the first two phases of his career. Hirsch has also become much more politically savvy, and often manages to deal with sticky political issues in the teaching of writing without instantly taking on every education professor in the country (as in his comments on the issue of the need for teachers to know the linguistics of Black English, in the 1981 article). But his underlying commitment to rationalist theorizing remains, and one is being treated to the extraordinary, delightful, but unexpected spectacle of an essentially Arnoldian cultural and educational program being argued on the basis of psycholinguistic theory and reading research.

"Remarks on Composition to the Yale English Department,"

ADE Bulletin, no. 62 (Sept.-Nov. 1979), 63-5.

-- an interesting piece, that can be read in two ways, one (as seen by the ADE editors) as a call for renewed status for composition teaching in university English departments, the other as both a rather elitist call for

composition teachers to share in high literary culture and as yet another round in Hirsch's argument against the Yale formalism he had attacked in his early career.

"Culture and Literacy,"

Journal of Basic Writing, 3:1 (Fall-Winter 1980), 27-47.

-- the basic article, first given as a talk to the Mina Shaugnessy memorial conference at C.U.N.Y., reporting the results from Hirsch's N.E.H. research on evaluating readability through giving matched groups of readers the original and improved or degraded versions of essays and book sections (Will Durant, Bruce Catton, Virginia freshmen papers, etc.). Hirsch announced that "the craft of writing is only half the story . . . we have stressed the process and product of writing at the expense of the huge domain of tacit knowledge which is never written down at all, but which, though quite invisible, is just as operative [in determining readability] as the visible written word" (p. 28). "An advancement in cultural literacy is a firm prerequisite for advancement in the skill of writing" (p. 43). Writing anxiety is not anxiety about defective skills, but about lack of shared cultural knowledge with a prospective readership (p. 46). What's significant about this version of the argument is the clear summaries of the empirical research on which it bases Hirsch's expanded educational agenda.

(co-auth. with David Harrington) "Measuring the Communicative Effectiveness of Prose," in Writing, ed. J. Domininc et al. (Hillsdale, N.J.; Erlbaum Associates, 1981).

-- a more technical report on the matched-group readability research.

"The Contents of English Literature,"

Times Literary Supplement (December 10 1982).

-- a contribution to a symposium on the changed nature of academic English studies, in which Hirsch recounts the change and fragmentation of the high school and college English curriculum since the 1880s (very entertainingly), and connects the loss of certainty in interpretation to a loss of shared cultural knowledge about the canon.

"Cultural Literacy,"

American Scholar, 52 (1983), 159-169.

-- "technical research is not going to remedy the national decline in our literacy that is documented in the decline of verbal SAT scores. . . . Raising [students'] writing and reading levels will depend far less on our methods of instruction (there are many acceptable methods) than on the specific contents of our school curricula" (p.159). "During most of the time that I was pursuing research in literacy I was, like others in the field, a confirmed formalist" (p. 162) But "reading involves both "linguistic-schemata" (systems of expectation) and "content-schemata" as well. . . . the assumptions of educational formalism are incorrect. . . . A certain extent of shared, canonical knowledge is inherently necessary to a literate democracy . . . ["cultural literacy"] is the translinguistic knowledge on which linguistic literacy depends" (p. 165). Such a canon of knowledge is not fixed and immutable, but it is consciously and politically constructed, not just passively evolved, in a highly pluralist society (pp. 166-167). "Our current national effort in the schools is largely run on the premise that the best way to proceed is through a culturally neutral, skills-approach to reading and writing. But if skill in writing and reading comes about chiefly through what I have termed cultural literacy,

then radical consequences follow. . . . acting upon them would involve our dismantling and casting aside the leading educational assumptions of the past half-century" (p. 169).

"Reading, Writing, and Cultural Literacy,"

in Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap, ed. Winifred B. Horner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 144ff.

-- essentially a summary statement of the earlier pieces, again calling for composition teachers themselves to know the literary canon.

"'English' and the Perils of Formalism,"

American Scholar, 52 (1983), 369-379.

-- an address to English department chairmen, appealing for them to avoid replicating in the field of writing the formalist heresy from the field of literary studies: "the fastest and best way for a culture to adjust to new developments in technology is for its members to be culturally literate. Narrow technological literacy may be short-lived in a rapidly changing world" (p. 374). "Neither composition nor literature is an intellectual field in its own right. . . . Both are primarily cultural subjects with cultural missions of unparalleled importance. To the extent that we evade those missions under the banner of some neutral formalism or disciplinary pretense, we are neglecting our primary educational responsibilities and are also making an empirical mistake (p. 377). "The more we combine the domains of reading and writing, literature and literacy within our English courses, and the more we make sure that they are taught by people who are themselves literate, the more we will be fulfilling our mission" (p. 378). "We will not have a literate culture just by hoping that an invisible hand will determine the humanistic curriculum If we turn away from the

seductions of educational formalism, we can look forward to an interesting national debate about what (heterogeneous) knowledge should now be the canonical knowledge of our tribe" (p. 379).

"A Comment on 'Reading and Writing a Text',"

College English, 46 (October 1984), 622.

-- "I write to support the strong criticisms of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. . . . Dr. Salvatori rightly objects to Hirsch's statement [in Philosophy], that "composition is a craft" separate from literature, reading, and humanistic subjects. Further criticism of this mistaken view can be found in [list of Hirsch's cultural literacy essays]. . . . I am grateful to Dr. Salvatori for adding more ammunition to the critique of a skills-approach to writing, and for giving me this further chance to mention my repudiation of that view."

"Cultural Literacy doesn't mean Core Curriculum,"

English Journal, 74 (October 1985), 47-49.

-- a response to criticism that "cultural literacy" meant a return to requiring Silas Marner, a static core list of set books, and a repressive WASP monopoly on multicultural diversity.

Conclusions:

Far from showing discontinuity and change, Hirsch's career is remarkable for its certainty and continuity, its authenticity perhaps, if not exactly or necessarily its validity. Indeed, the later phases of Hirsch's work can hardly be understood at all without knowing about the earlier ones. The

continuing strands may be quite simply summarized:

1. the rejection of intellectual relativism, and the search for objective or at least shared standards of knowledge;
2. the rejection of formalism, of the doctrine that viewing signs or sign structures is intrinsically meaningful, without external concepts or categories of meaning to bring to the sign;
3. the assertion that texts are not understood immediately, but through genres, types, schemata, cultural canons, or whatever, and that these categories must command agreement before there can be agreement on interpretation;
4. the awareness of a modern intellectual and philosophical context, inimical to almost all of Hirsch's intellectual stands, but within which, point by point, he must maintain his minority positions--Hirsch is not a know-nothing intellectual reactionary, but a very venturesome, risk-taking intellect, itching to argue point by point the validity of his general intellectual stance and its particular consequences.

Lesson or moral: validity in scholarship, whatever our field, lies in not just in the passive acquiescence of our colleagues, our acceptability, but in intellectual commitment, the refusal of the safe platitudes of our professional communities, the toughness of questioning we bring to received opinion and that we expect to meet on behalf of our assertions. It's a rather daunting as well as an inspiring thought.

Published Discussions of Hirsch's Work (excluding reviews):

William E. Cain, "Authority, 'Cognitive Atheism,' and the Aims of Interpretation," College English, 39 (1977), 333-345 (and also in his The Crisis in Criticism).

George L. Dillon, Constructing Texts (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, ?1982).

-- the heaviest weight linguistic rebuttal of Hirsch's views on linear language processing and the importance of short-term memory in readability

Paul C. Doherty, "Hirsch's Philosophy of Composition: An Evaluation of the Argument," College English, 33:2 (May 1982), 184-195.

-- a respectful, but unconvinced, linguistic analysis

Audrey T. Edwards, "Cultural Literacy: What are our Goals," English Journal (April 1984).

-- criticism of Hirsch's "cultural literacy" as reactionary and repressive in its curricular effects.

Frank Lentricchia, "E. D. Hirsch: the Hermeneutics of Innocence," ch. 7 in his After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 256-280.

--"As a theorist who speaks unapologetically for rational values, E. D. Hirsch stands pretty much by himself in the landscape of contemporary critical theory . . . warning us again and again of the dangers of subjectivism and relativism" (p. 257).