



Situated Utterances: Texts, Bodies, and Cultural Representations

Harry Berger Jr., Judith Anderson

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Berger describes himself as a reconstructed old New Critic, and his publications over the past fifty years have centered on investigations of the ways in which texts represent both themselves and their situations of utterance. The thirteen chapters of the present book illustrate the range of his inquiry across several cultures and disciplines. They also demonstrate the interpretive richness, the theoretical acumen, and the energetic prose that characterize the work of one of America's premier close readers. *Situated Utterances* is divided into four parts. In Part One Berger designs an analytical model of New Criticism and shows how it was dismantled during the decades after the Second World War. He then proposes a reconstructed model in which the practice of ironic and suspicious close reading may be directed toward interactions among bodies, texts, and countertexts in different cultural settings. Part Two demonstrates this practice in studies of specific works in three genres: the pastoral Idylls of Theocritus, Edmund Spenser's epic, *The Faerie Queene*, and the Diaries of Samuel Pepys. The scope of the practice is broadened in Part Three to the connection between cultural representations and institutional change, a connection explored in four chapters that successively examine pre-capitalist forms of representation, the Old Testament, *Beowulf*, and the conflict between nakedness and nudity in Christian conceptions of the body. Part Four consists in three chapters on Plato's dialogues, which Berger interprets as critical of the general situation of utterance in a predominantly oral culture. He argues that Plato uses the resources of writing to depict the heroic pathos of a Socrates whose method and message are defeated by the politics of the oral medium. *Situated Utterances* concludes with *A Conspectus of Critical Moves: The Eleven-Step Program*. This is a summary account of the interpretive strategies put into play by the author throughout his long career.

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