Introductory Tools for Literary Analysis

1.1 Basics of Literary Study

Comprehension versus Interpretation

Comprehension concerns the conceptual assembly of textual information in a way that is precise and literally accurate. In order to discuss a literary work, the critic needs to know how personages are described and characterized, how settings are depicted and what details they include and possibly exclude, what actions take place and in what order, and what sorts of figural details and narrative devices the author has included. A good comprehension of a literary work will also include the ability to identify points of view, major themes, and key allusions (references to historical occurrences, myths, or passages in other influential texts, for example, the Bible). Everything that falls under the term comprehension has to do with gathering and assembling of evidence that can be used for justifying interpretations. For literary critics comprehension exceeds mere competence in that it leads to noticing details that others have missed. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* is masterful in its capacity to select minute details that have major historical significance in the development of representational styles in the West. An even closer reader of literature was Paul de Man in his seminal article "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in which he demonstrates complexities with respect to how allegory and symbol function in the late eighteenth century.[1]

In university, the teaching of literature tends to stress skills in *interpretation*. This exceeds mere literal comprehension and requires the ability to

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[1] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953). Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

see problems and offer hypotheses. For example, why is the order of events in a story told in a sequence that is unchronological, and why in the case of John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* do we not begin with the materials of Book 6 (Satan's revolt in heaven), which is much closer to the epic's real beginning? Books 1 and 2 start us out right after the rebellious angels have fallen down into hell *after* their revolt. Or, why does William Faulkner in the novel *The Sound and the Fury* not have Caddy Compson narrate a section of her own? How does this silencing of woman function in the novel? As sexual repression, if not sexism? As the deliberate formation of a lacuna in the text that impedes our ability to totalize the narrations that *are* given? As a perspective Faulkner expects us to construct for ourselves, which then makes it much more a part of ourselves? To answer such questions requires *interpretation*. Here one is required to perceive a significant problem, conceptualize that problem, analyze textual evidence, and offer some hypotheses and solutions.

Literary interpretation occurs when critics begin asking questions about what they have observed. How critics pose questions and formulate problems tells us how original and insightful they are. In fact, what distinguishes a seminal book or essay from a run of the mill study is the originality of the way in which a problematic is conceptualized and the surprising results to which it leads. In recent decades, we have seen many studies that have recycled the same questions and problems by way of applying them to new works, and with predictable results. The study of how yet another literary heroine subverts patriarchy may contribute somewhat to the understanding of yet another literary text, but as an interpretive project it would hardly indicate much originality of mind, given the many essays and books that have executed this very same project albeit with other primary texts. The same could be said about the many studies coming out right now in which critics look for hybrid social identities in order to show how characters in literature "negotiate" race or ethnicity in a represented social context. In the past, critics who were looking for ambiguity or archetypes in literary texts were engaging in very much the same sort of prescribed literary interpretive practice: the imitation of institutionally sanctioned projects pioneered by innovative thinkers in the profession. Major examples of original critical projects in the twentieth century would include Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble.*[2]

[2]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

READING

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (1953)
Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978)

1.2 Common Critical Practices

Four common types of critical practice are: close reading, contextual analysis, the application of a critical approach, and social critique.

Close Reading

Close reading concerns close attention to textual details with respect to elements such as setting, characterization, point of view, figuration, diction, rhetorical style, tone, rhythm, plot, and allusion. Often, close reading concerns the dichotomy between what the text literally says and what can be inferred. For example, we know in the case of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* that Emma Bovary is keyed to the color blue near the outset of the novel, but what does the author mean by this? What are we supposed to infer? Is the color blue thrown in by accident or does it actually point to something that has symbolic meaning? To know the answer to such a question, one has to notice, first of all, that the color choice is so consistent that it's likely Flaubert intended it. Next, one may notice from the context of what is being related that Emma's immature girlish interest in Catholicism is being thematized, which relates to the likelihood that in this context the color blue is likely to be symbolic of the Virgin Mary to whom Flaubert may well be comparing Emma with some irony, given that Emma will hardly turn out to be anything like the Virgin. Of course, this is an *interpretation* because a sequence of observations and logical connections had to be made by the reader in order to construct it. The proof of the interpretation, insofar as interpretations can be proven, is that it has explanatory power. It not only tells us what the color blue probably refers to, but how it functions to ironize Emma, to portray her one way while expecting the reader to see through that portrayal as misleadingly literal. Because there is so much evidence in the novel that supports this ironizing

tendency, the interpretation of the color blue seems credible, since it is consistent with what is at work elsewhere in the novel and since it connects elements that otherwise would go unexplained. We generally call this most typical sort of interpretation *close reading,* because the interpreter is looking very closely at even the most minor textual details in order to develop explanations for the question of why things are presented the way they are.

Contextual Analysis

Contextual analysis could be called the "connect the dots approach," because essentially the technique involves the establishment of a context (or contexts) within which to situate and determine the meanings of a work by drawing direct connections between elements within the work and elements within the context. This is the approach used by literary historians who generally work up the following contexts for analyzing a literary work: (i) philological history of the language; (ii) the literary tradition that has influenced the work and to which the work "belongs"; (iii) the biography of the author; and (iv) the social, political, and cultural contexts likely to have a bearing on the work's meanings. This type of study presumes that a work cannot mean anything in isolation. For example, the language of a literary work pre-exists it and determines what the words and sentences of, say, a novel, poem, or play would mean. Given that language changes over time, we would need to know the state of the language at any given time when a work was written in order to properly decode its meanings. Shakespeare's plays, for example, are usually accompanied by copious footnotes that define words, many of which have fallen out of use or that meant something different at the time Shakespeare was writing.

Literary tradition is an important context too in that it donates the norms and forms that authors adopt and modify to suit their inclinations and needs. Shakespeare, Sidney, and Milton inherited the genre of the sonnet from Petrarch and his followers, and therefore it is useful to compare elements in their work to what can be found in the context of the sonnet tradition. After all, the differences may tell us something about what the authors intended and hence how to better construe the meanings. Knowing the biography of the author can help, as well, if what one is looking for is the primary intention an author had in composing a work. Henry James, for example, was quite self-conscious about leaving accounts of what experiences led him to formulate an idea or premise for writing one of his great

novels. Although the initial experiences he had differ from the final works that he completed, it is useful to see the direction in which he was headed and how the work germinated. Indeed, James' *Notebooks* offer invaluable evidence for how the work was intended to be read and how we are to construe the meanings, if what we are after is Henry James' intentions.[3] Another good example would be Virginia Woolf's *Diaries*.[4]

The social, political, and cultural contexts within which authors have written are often quite vast, and literary historians naturally have to select something quite specific from these contexts in order to relate to a literary work. For example, a theme is often chosen. One might study the figure of the mermaid in Renaissance literature, drawing connections between the literary work and cultural context of the figure of the mermaid. One might study the writings of Franz Kafka in the context of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe – its genres, themes, etc. Given that this Yiddish culture isn't so well known to everyone, it can be illuminating to situate Kafka's work within it. Or, one could study the fiction of Jane Austen in the context of British empire building. Here again a theme contextualizes and circumscribes (and hence controls) the interrogation of meanings in the work.

Such studies are the most typical of what professors of literature produce and they are most typical of the research on literature that one is likely to find in a university library. This approach has various limitations, and four can be mentioned here. (i) A contextual approach presupposes the meaning of a work lies outside the work per se, which suggests a certain extrinsic determinism at work, (ii) it presupposes that the meanings are fixed or frozen in a period of historical time, which suggests our experience of how a work speaks to us is subordinated to or cancelled out by its artefactual significance, (iii) it is based on the construction of contexts that may be highly selective and conveniently managed to yield the results for which the researcher is looking, and (iv) contextual analysis reduces works of literature to ordinary norms that were widely held in society; therefore, *Hamlet* isn't seen as a unique work of art, but as merely a generic "revenger's tragedy" whose innovations are idiosyncratic. Finally,

[3] Henry James, *Notebooks*, ed. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).
[4] See *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 4 vols., ed. Anne Oliver Bell (New York: Harcourt, 1982).

traditional historicism never gets beyond the circumstantiality of evidence. One would think that Milton's *On Christian Doctrine* ought to explain *Paradise Lost*. Or that Edmund Spenser's famous letter to Sir Walter Raleigh about Spenser's composition of the *Faerie Queene* ought to explain this epic poem satisfactorily. But in fact such empirical evidence, even from the pens of the authors themselves, are merely circumstantial and turn out to be controversial given that there are so many ways in which to read them in relation to the texts that really interest us. In short, there are no smoking guns in historical analysis, which has the consequence of calling the whole approach to this sort of analysis in question (also see 5.2).

Application of a Critical Approach

Application of a *critical approach* is a more systematic example of interpretation in which a coherent body of thought (i.e. a theory) is mapped onto the literary work in order to explain its meaning. In its crudest form, this approach is blatantly allegorical. But if it has an advantage, it is that the researcher is working with a coherent body of analytical thought and not just making ad hoc determinations; plus the theory has been tested by others and has much more validity than an individual's ad hoc guesses and rationalizations.

Because methods and approaches quickly devolve into routines and habits of thinking, it is not surprising that researchers will want to avoid anything that seems hackneyed and trite. No one in the late 1960s wanted to hear yet another paper on ambiguity in poetry, because by then the topic had become entirely depleted. Today, few academics want to hear yet another gendered analysis of "the gaze," because they're all too familiar with Laura Mulvey's argument in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, which has passed into the domain of public knowledge. The same can be said for J.L. Austin's notion of performative speech acts. By now educated people know that the minister's act of saying "I pronounce you man and wife" before the couple he is marrying isn't a description, but an enactment of a legal and binding contract.[5]

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[5] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989). J.L. Austin *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1975).

As to how theories are applied, it's useful to take a more or less simple example. Some will recall that Sigmund Freud famously applied his theory of the Oedipus Complex to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, something that was developed by one of Freud's followers, Ernest Jones.[6] Freud (and Jones) speculated that Hamlet cannot easily kill Claudius, the man who killed Hamlet's father, because Hamlet as an Oedipal child had originally wanted to kill his father in order to keep his mother to himself. The famous bedroom scene in which Hamlet speaks to his mother about having married the very man who killed his father is filled with jealousy that masquerades as moral uprightness. In fact, Hamlet is thought to identify with Claudius, because Claudius did what Hamlet himself wanted to do as Oedipal son. In this scene, Hamlet wants Gertrude to withdraw from Claudius, which is a repetition of the original Oedipal wish. The fact that Hamlet will eventually kill Claudius and that the play will end in a horrible bloodbath speaks to the Oedipal aggression that motivates the play's psychology.

An application requires us to find considerable symmetry between the literary work and the theory. In the case of a Freudian reading of *Hamlet* the advantage is that the theory pulls the play together in a way that explains elements that otherwise would seem arbitrary or disconnected. In recent years, we have seen this put to good effect by Slavoj Žižek in his many books, which have often discussed popular cinema. Instead of using Freud, Žižek has turned to the theories of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in order to reveal psychological dynamics at work in popular culture no one has noticed or bothered to look for, given that for most people popular culture isn't imagined to be intellectually respectable. Speaking of David Lynch's film *Dune*, Žižek writes: "*Dune* is not 'totalitarian' in so far as it publicly displays the underlying obscene phantasmic support of 'totalitarianism' in all its inconsistency."[7] This obscene support is shown in terms of the monstrously large phallic sand worms with which a new totalitarian order has become allied.

> The point, of course, is that there never was a purely symbolic Power without an obscene supplement: the structure of a power edifice is always minimally inconsistent, so that it needs a minimum of sexualization, of

[6] Ernest Jones, *A Psycho-analytic Study of Hamlet* (London: International Psycho-analytical Press, 1922).
[7] Slavoj Žižek, *A Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 72.

the stain of obscenity, to reproduce itself. Another aspect of this failure is that a power relation becomes sexualized when an intrinsic ambiguity creeps in, so that it is no longer clear who is actually the master and who is the servant.[8]

Žižek's attempt is to advance a theory of totalitarianism and its subversion that employs insights taken from Lacanian psychoanalysis that admittedly is complex and concerns a terminology that is quite specialized. In this case, Žižek is addressing the obscene supplement (the added element) that reveals itself as an inconsistency in the structure of power.

Those who are critical of applied theories, whether they be psychoanalytical, anthropological, sociological, or whatever else, will complain that to read cultural works or events in this way is to reduce them to neat models that are reductive (simplistic). Indeed, application of critical theory will be disappointing if connecting a theory to a work is merely "plug and play." In this case, the transposition requires little of the one who performs it and often tells us just what we already know. This leads to the objection, once more, of predictability. Not only are the approaches made to seem conceptually predictable in terms of their itineraries, but the insights they yield can be figured out in the absence of reading someone's painstaking analysis. When the Modern Language Association's *Bibliography* began labeling articles with "feminist approach," "dialogical approach," or "Freudian approach," they were more or less saying: "Don't bother looking it up: you can figure the argument out for yourself." But in the case of someone like Žižek – and this is what makes him a best seller – the applications are mostly *unpredictable.* Moreover, the examples work in such a way that they help explain and develop a theory (Lacanian psychoanalysis) that to many people makes no sense without a key. This last point is important: an application ought to work two ways. The theory should illuminate a work, and a work should illuminate a theory.

READING

Ernest Jones, *A Psycho-analytic Study of Hamlet* (1922)
Slavoj Žižek, *A Plague of Fantasies* (1997)

[8] Žižek (1997), p. 71.

Social Criticism

Interpretations of literature (of any period) are often politically motivated by critics who are reading literature for the sake of responding to current affairs in the world or for the sake of modeling a sociological theory. When a critic argues that John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is about imperialism, that Adam and Eve are like native peoples in America, and that Satan is like an imperialist conqueror, then we can be sure that the critic is more influenced by contemporary issues having to do with how we are dealing with the colonial past than by what Milton probably intended. Recent interest among Renaissance scholars in empire, self-fashioning, and "Otherness" is much more a direct reflection of contemporary interests in these issues than a reflection of concerns intrinsically significant to the period, which is to say, that as a rule interests of the present drive interests in the past.

Typical of the sociological approach is the work of Christopher Caudwell who in the 1930s read English literature in order to prove Karl Marx's theories about class, base and superstructure (systems of industrial production versus bureaucratic social systems of control), and the rise of commodity culture. Caudwell was most interested in showing how a literary work both proves a theory and demonstrates that theory's historical accuracy in predicting what sorts of art will appear in what sorts of social circumstance. In "English Poets: The Period of Primitive Accumulation" of 1937, Caudwell was making the argument that in Shakespeare there is a very direct and simple correspondence between work and world. Social class interests, the rise of the bourgeoisie, are thought to easily explain what are otherwise very complex literary works and characters. Caudwell was dismissed in his day as a philistine by critics who found the sociological allegorization of literature to be crudely simplistic and aesthetically insensitive, because Caudwell was mainly interested in socially stereotyping what he read and in discrediting much literature as "bourgeois" and therefore morally suspect and hence unacceptable. Noticeable in Caudwell and most sociological criticism of the Anglo-American sort is an emphasis upon morality in the context of social justice. Caudwell remarks,

> Intemperate will, "bloody, bold and resolute," without norm or measure, is the spirit of this era of primitive accumulation. The absolute-individual

will overriding all other wills is therefore the principle of life for the Elizabethan age.[9]

This is morally problematic from the perspective of achieving social justice across all social echelons, which presumably Communism had committed itself to as a more enlightened form of social organization. Sociological critique, under either Marxist or other countercultural pretexts, has generally emphasized questions of inequality, relations of social power, and victimhood. In short, sociological critique is often about "haves and have nots," "perpetrators and victims," or, as it is often put, "masters and slaves."

Of course, there is much literature that has been written in order to protest social injustice, for example, Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, Émile Zola's *Germinal*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, just to name a few. This should remind us that one of the chief motivations for writing literature has been political protest and advocacy, the writing of stories about contemporary life whose purpose is to make the reader identify with the plight of victims and against the rapaciousness of victimizers so that consciousness about our social surroundings will be morally raised. Literary critics are not only interested in developing the consciousness raising element of the literature, but also tend to point out that a literary work observes social relations rather better than sociological theory, given that the theory is largely abstract and conceptual, whereas the literature is concrete and particular.

Among the objections to sociological critique is that it tends to reduce a text to *content analysis*, which is to say, discussion of the storyline (the ostensible content). Like the journalist, the sociological critic is mainly interested in who, what, when, where, and why. This puts the text on an equal footing with social content of everyday life, hence erasing the difference between real life and a depiction of that life. So called literary language (the "formalist" complexities of figuration or style, say) tends to be overlooked for the sake of talking about the "issues," which for the past several decades have focused on relations of power between social groups and how those result in prejudice, stratification, and injustice.

[9]Christopher Caudwell, "English Poets: The Period of Primitive Accumulation," in *Marxist Literary Theory*, ed. Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 92.

Whereas in the 1930s, sociological critique in Anglo-American circles was largely slanted from a Marxist perspective that focused on the concerns raised by Caudwell, in the 1970s a shift occurred whereby sociological critique was taken up by feminists who reversed a decades old practice of privileging aesthetics (formalist concerns) over moral concerns having to do with social justice. The New Critical interest in writers like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, and many others had strategically overlooked aspects of their works that were socially prejudicial (Lawrence's and Hemingway's sexism) or that were politically objectionable (Pound's fascism). In the 1970s that began to change with the influence of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1968), a book that, while initially dismissed by the mainstream, had opened the alternative of judging literature from a predominantly moral standpoint.[10] This challenged and eventually overturned the critical practice of allowing avant garde innovation to trump what has come to be known as "political correctness."

After a plethora of books began appearing on the woman question, sociologically oriented critics began investigating questions of race, gay and lesbian identity, ethnicity, and Western-non-Western social relations (postcoloniality, diaspora, etc.). In the 1990s an interest in what came to be called global studies emerged within which questions of human rights have come to the fore. Also studies in popular culture, which gained respectability under the moniker of Cultural Studies, began toeing the leftist ideological line of sociological criticism by emphasizing the "constructedness" of social identity in terms of how various groups engage in certain cultural practices.

Emphasis upon social constructivism has become more or less a dogma within social criticism and leads to an interesting inversion with respect to literature. The real social world is treated very much as if it's a fiction, whereas the fictional world of literature is treated as if it's tantamount to the real. This chiasmus is made possible, given that the real world and fiction are both viewed as "constructions" ("signifying practices"). People who are critical of this view note that it is compatible with "postmodernism," which is seen by some as a relativist cultural ideology that assumes

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[10]Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Boston: New English Free Press, 1968). Notice that the press that published Millet's book was not an academic press. Feminist literary readings were not considered legitimate within the academy at that time.

everything is a fiction. Although sociological critics tend to stay away from avant garde art (and the postmodern in particular), it is the case that in both literature and the visual arts many artists have been fascinated with radicalizing practices of simulation that insist upon the constructedness (or fictionality) of culture and society.

A well known philosophical source for both the avant garde and sociological theory is Friedrich Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense."

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding: truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn away by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigor, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins.[11]

This suggests that human reality is a rhetorical construction, an illusion of which we have forgotten that it is an illusion.

This view underwrites a concept of postmodernity as inherently simulative, but is also of major importance to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), a founding sociological text for recent theories of social construction. Of no less significance have been the writings of Michel Foucault, which are even more directly indebted to Nietzsche's thinking in the passage above, but that have interposed a history of bureaucratic development which mediates and modifies Nietzsche by arguing that individual human failing isn't the problem so much as the successful instrumentalization (or practical utilization) of knowledge via institutions that strategically adopt and manipulate rhetoric in order to project power.

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[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non Moral Sense," in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent Leitch et al., trans. Ronald Speirs (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 878. The essay was not published in Nietzsche's lifetime; it was composed in 1873.

READING

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972)
Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)
Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (1968)

1.3 Literary Language

Is there such a thing as literary language? In the earlier part of the twentieth century the Russian Formalists, Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, and Juri Tynianov were arguing that literary language deviates significantly from ordinary discourse. Shklovsky made the famous statement that literature is to be defined as the sum of its stylistic features.[12] These features could be seen as deviations from practical uses of discourse. Ordinary, day to day uses of language are utilitarian in terms of making one's intentions, requests, demands, and/or explanations clear to another person in the most down-to-earth ways. Literary language, by contrast, isn't merely utilitarian. A sentence in Marcel Proust's novels can be as long as a thousand words and will contain numerous embedded clauses in which one easily gets lost, something that from the perspective of an ordinary use of language isn't pragmatic if what one wants is to make one's meaning clear to another person. In the case of a police report of an accident, it is most utilitarian for there to be one logical, coherent, down to earth account of what happened in the most unambiguous terms. But in a novel by an author such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, one would be likely to get variants of the same account, each one puzzlingly different (5.10). As a whole these accounts would be so delicately incommensurate that one will start to wonder what if anything took place.

Victor Shklovsky famously spoke of literature in terms of "defamiliarization" (*ostranenie*) whereby normative representations are distorted in ways that make them unfamiliar and strange for the sake of destabilizing our automated cognitive responses to how we imagine things to be. Woolf's interacting streams of consciousness in *The Waves* have a very odd effect

[12]Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, ed. L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

on how we come to mentally see, hear, and feel; that is, they defamiliarize our ordinary experience of perception and the cognitions to which that experience leads. Art's purpose is to revolutionize our perception in such a way that we won't see the world as we ordinarily do. In this sense, it is as if literary language itself were a sort of revolutionary hero that reforms fallen (automatic, habitual) thinking.

Multiple Meanings

Some people are scandalized by the claim that what they're reading in a poem or play can mean so many different things. After all, shouldn't a text mean what it says literally? And if it doesn't, isn't there something wrong? This expectation is not naïve. The philosopher John Locke spoke of there being an abuse of language, by which he meant a perverse use of language that equivocates, ambiguates, and muddles up the sense. Metaphors and the like were clear violations of proper linguistic usage, in Locke's estimation. Effective communication, according to him, required a use of language that prohibited any misunderstanding. Locke presumed that *when we communicate with one another we're essentially entering into a contractual situation*: we're to take what we say to each other as honest and true; there should be no ambiguity in what we say to one another, because that would introduce the possibility of deception.

This ideal sounds commonsensical enough, but the reality is that it's very hard to make language perform in this way, a point that the eighteenth century novelist Laurence Sterne brought out in *Tristram Shandy*, a comical demonstration of how unrealistic Locke's expectations were. For as Sterne shows, people can't say one thing and not mean another, even if they try. There's a discussion in the novel of why women prefer men with long noses, but it goes on for so long that the reader has to realize at some point it isn't really noses that are being discussed but some other endowed part of the male anatomy. In other words, if something ordinary is discussed at too great a length, or with too much emotion, one starts to wonder if it is probably about something else. Further, Sterne is assuming that the reader cannot hold back from making all sorts of associations, in particular, naughty ones.

The concept of linguistic association was developed as well by others in the eighteenth century. And we can already see it in the comedy of manners by Richard Sheridan, Pierre de Marivaux, and others who played with the

idea that people have all sorts of idiosyncratic associations. The associations appear to have their own logic and form a sort of chain that can lead to all sorts of mischief and misunderstanding. A wonderful late twentieth-century imitation of this sort of comedy is the 1970s British television series *Fawlty Towers* in which a hotel operator, Mr. Fawlty (played by John Cleese) makes mental associations that always get the better of him and lead to catastrophically humiliating situations. Mr. Fawlty, as his name suggests, reads the wrong thing into what people say or do and jumps to all the wrong conclusions upon which, unfortunately, he takes action. Whereas the audience can see his mistake, the protagonist logically follows the train of his own fanciful associations based on what he experiences. Throughout, we can see things unfolding as they really are versus the protagonist's entirely rational but absurdly fanciful chain of associations, which are so hideously mistaken. When the protagonist takes action in a way that reveals his mistake to everyone, he is obviously exposed and embarrassed, because the associations reveal a suspicious and petty mentality that has opted to think the worst of others. As in the genre of tragedy, the comedy of manners is based upon a protagonist who is stubborn (filled with hubris) and who sees things logically but incorrectly (someone like Oedipus Rex who is blinded to the truth). Whereas the main character's actions at the beginning of the play aren't devastating, they become increasingly problematic until the point is reached when a revelation of the truth will come that is catastrophic. Whereas in tragedy the catastrophe usually involves serious physical harm to the protagonist, in comedy it is embarrassment and humiliation that the protagonist suffers – in other words, something akin to social death. Unlike tragedy, comedy works with the duplicity of language – its multiple meanings and associations – and the ease with which one can misread or misinterpret what others are saying and the illusions and mistakes this can produce. The lesson of comedy is that we don't necessarily know what others are thinking or saying, though we may think we do, and therein lies our hubris and the potential sorts of embarrassment this may cause.

Poetry and Plurisignation

Of course, readers of poetry have known about plurisignation (multiple meanings) and the ambiguities to which they can lead. Shakespeare's sonnets are a sort of interpretive boot camp for studying multiple meanings

and how they can fashion lines that have a double sense. Central to plurisig-
nation in both Shakespeare's lyric poetry and plays is the pun, which is
quite conspicuous in the popular culture of the turn of the seventeenth
century, as evidenced, for example, by early Stuart libels directed at the
Royal Court. Sonnet 152 is a typical example of the excesses to which
double entendre could accede in the late sixteenth century. The sonnet
begins with wordplay on swearing/forswearing.

> In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,
> But thou art twice forsworn to me love swearing,
> In act thy bed vow broke, and new faith torn
> In vowing new hate after new love bearing.   4
> But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
> When I break twenty? I am perjured most;
> For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
> And all my honest faith in thee is lost: 8
> For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,
> Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy,
> And, to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,
> Or made them swear against the thing they see: 12
>   For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,
>   To swear against the truth so foul a lie.[13]

To swear can mean to promise, to take an oath for an office (e.g. faithful
lover), to affirm something, to pledge allegiance to someone; whereas, to
forswear can mean to perjure or to abjure and renounce: to swear some-
thing off. The dominant sense of the opening concerns the admission that
both the speaker and his mistress have renounced their oaths to other
partners. In addition, the lady has apparently renounced the speaker, too.
So she is "twice forsworn" in swearing her love to him. The lines,

> In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn
> In vowing new hate after new love bearing

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[13]William Shakespeare's sonnets are easily accessible on the Internet, since they are
in the public domain. For those who require a critical edition, see Helen Vendler, *The
Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University,
1997).

speak not only to the lady's breaking her vows to her husband (the "bed vow), but also to "new hate" for the new lover, the speaker, after bearing him new love. However, the speaker himself admits breaking such vows of love all the time. The speaker says he is perjured most – that is, lying – when he makes vows that are only made to exploit his mistress: "to misuse thee." Hence it is no wonder the mistress is angry at her new lover. Katherine Duncan-Jones notes that "to misuse thee" means "to treat you badly, by deception or otherwise; to exploit you sexually; to lie about you, misrepresent you." She finds the latter meanings retroactively in lines 9–12.[14] Reference to swearing against the thing the speaker sees speaks to all the lies he has been telling himself and others about how superb the lady is. He makes his eyes swear – in the sense of testify – against the thing they see. This testimony is perjury. Hence the legal rhetoric of the poem and the close:

> For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,
> To swear against the truth so foul a lie.

The I has given false testimony that the lady is fair, and the "perjured eye" in fact is this "I." And it has testified a foul lie against the truth that the lady is as corrupt as the speaker. But the word "lie" at the end obviously has more than one meaning too, for it refers not to just false testimony but to the speaker's sexual congress with the woman.

Throughout the poem the swearing of oaths of fidelity to one another broaches forswearing, which makes the poet realize that swearing and forswearing can't be sorted out. Also it turns out that loving and lying aren't separable either. Lying in the sense of misstating the truth and in the sense of lying in bed with the woman are fused. To declare or swear one's love while lying with the woman is to forswear it at the same time and therefore lie. Then, too, there is the braiding of "I," "eye," and "lie" that relates to sexual seduction but also to testifying falsely against (denying) what ought to be apparent to the eye: that the lady is anything but innocent and sweet. This, then, is just a start on how to begin looking at multiple meanings in a poem that breaks down commonplace logical oppositions, something that mirrors or corresponds to the act of love making itself wherein

[14] *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997). See her note to "Sonnet 152."

a breakdown of difference is experienced in terms of sexual union. Shakespeare's trafficking in multiple meanings is hardly unique: the poetry of Milton, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Dickinson, Eliot, Auden, Plath and many others require an openness of mind to multiple meanings in play that lead to multiple interpretive constructions that are to be played off against one another.

READING

Stephen Booth, ed. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1977)
Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1997)

1.4   Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the Ancient Greek word for interpretation and pertains to the philosophical study of interpretation as well as to the various methods of interpreting texts.

Peshat and Derash

Already in antiquity Rabbis were making a distinction between what in Hebrew is called Peshat (literal meaning) and Derash (non-literal meaning). Peshat: what does the text literally say? One would think this is relatively easy to determine, and it often is, but as it happens, words can mean more than one thing or have a rather lengthy etymological history of meanings that may need to be taken into account. In the case of ancient Hebrew, it is not always easy to conceptualize what a word meant, because the way we categorize concepts may not translate directly into ancient Hebrew. For example, our understanding of a concept like Being, which has its foundation in Ancient Greek thinking, won't map well onto an ancient Hebraic understanding of such a concept, if it's a concept at all (concepts (categories of thought) are ancient Greek notions too). Given that we may lack the living context for determining ancient meanings, we are often relegated to speculation of what words could have meant.

Derash: what lies beyond the literal meaning? We are told some things in the Bible but not others, which prompts us to ask questions. Why does God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? Why does Abraham imagine that the voice that is speaking to him is God's and not that of an evil spirit? Why does Abraham see fit to follow God's command when it could appear to us as cruel, irrational, and unjust? Again, why is Isaac's name (He Who Laughs) tied together with his mother's laugh at God's proclamation that she will have a son, given her age? And does God threaten to sacrifice Isaac in revenge for this laugh of the mother? Readers of the Old Testament, Erich Auerbach among them, have noticed that this is not a text one can read without questions being elicited. To some it is even considered to be a "book of questions," questions that require answers based on study and debate that in itself forces us to move beyond what the text literally and simply says. This requires Derash: non-literal interpretations. In Jewish tradition, these questions also sometimes require *Midrash*, inspired commentary by means of story amplification that is considered an extension of the Scripture. We see this in Christian tradition too, namely, the invention of stories that fill in the missing parts or sequels to the stories we are given in Scripture. Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* fit this model. In fact, Milton's poem has influenced people to the point that what they imagine to take place in the Old Testament is, in fact, only told by him.

READING

Shai Cherry, *The Torah Through Time* (2008)

Medieval Hermeneutics: The Fourfold Method

Medieval Christian theologians have also made the distinction between the literal and the figural. But they went a step further than the Rabbis in advancing the view that the literal meaning is always accompanied by non-literal meaning much in the way that a musical note might always be accompanied by another musical note above it. Instead of leading to a polyphony of sounds, one winds up with a polyphony of meanings as more layers of meaning are added one on top of the other. Medieval theologians called this stack of layers a "superstructure" and commonly compared it to architecture, not music.

In the twelfth century, Hugh of Saint Victor argued that scripture is like a building founded on rough stones that are smoothed out as one builds on top of them. "Even so the divine page, in its literal sense, contains many things which seem both to be opposed to each other and, sometimes, to impart something which smacks of the absurd or the impossible. But the spiritual meaning admits no opposition; in it, many things can be different from one another, but none can be opposed." Hugh points out further that "The foundation which is under the earth we have said stands for history [this is akin to stones that are not always fitted] and the superstructure which is built upon it we have said suggests allegory." This approach to interpretation insists upon the rationality of scripture: that things that don't seem to make sense literally (historically) can be shown to make sense when transposed higher up into spirituality (by way of allegory). In reading 2 Corinthians 3:6, "The letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth," Hugh comments, "because it is certainly necessary that the student of the Scripture adhere staunchly to the truth of the spiritual meaning and that the high points of the literal meaning, which itself can sometimes be wrongly understood too, should not lead him away from the central concern in any way whatever." Here Hugh is reading St. Paul as allegorically speaking of how to interpret Scripture, that is, of how to apprehend the spiritual within the literal meaning.[15]

The superstructural reading of the Bible was done in various ways throughout the Middle Ages, among them, in terms of a "four fold" method that was described by Dante in *Il Convivio* (circa 1307). Dante specified that there are *literal*, *allegorical*, *moral*, and *anagogic* levels of meaning. The *literal* "does not go beyond that enunciated by the fictitious word"; the *allegorical* is "a truth hidden beneath a beautiful falsehood: such as when Ovid says that Orpheus tamed wild beasts with his lyre and made trees and stones move towards him, which shows how the wise man makes cruel hearts grow tame and humble with the instrument of his voice, and how he makes those who have no feeling for science and art move according to his will …"; the *moral* has to be treated most carefully, Dante says, "So, for example, one may note in the gospel that when Christ ascended the mountain to transfigure himself he took three of the twelve Apostles with him. The moral sense of this is that we should have few companions in our most

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[15] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalion*, in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, 1100–1375,* ed. A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 78, 81.

secret undertakings"; and the *anagogic* level, Dante says, is "above the senses" and appears "when one expounds the spiritual meaning of a text," which concerns "the supernal things of eternal glory." Dante's example of the anagogic is the comparison of the freedom of Judea after the exodus from Egypt with the freedom of the soul in its exodus from sin. Note that when Dante explained the allegorical level, he wasn't referring to Scripture but to Ovid's literary text, *The Metamorphoses,* a point that suggests literary and scriptural interpretation wasn't distinguished. In fact, he was probably assuming his reader would know that Orpheus is a metaphor or "type" (a precursor) for Christ.[16]

What makes the Christian tradition of Biblical interpretation quite different from Rabbinical interpretation is the emphasis in Christianity upon the ideal of systematicity: the absolute rational coherence of all the levels into one large edifice or structure that resembles a building. Like Hugh, Dante refers to the building up of knowledge in a manner similar to constructing a large building on a foundation. The aim is to develop strata or orders that become increasingly more spiritual and immaterial as one ascends, which is something we see in Gothic architecture as one moves up from huge blocks of stone to spires that seem to dissolve into the sky above. Ideally, the four fold method enables one to see how the literal is translated into various spiritual dimensions that work up to the realm of God. Essentially, this presupposes a system of corresponding orders that move up from the material to the spiritual.

READING

Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalion* (twelfth century)

Sympathetic Analogies

The fourfold method of interpretation is, in fact, rather streamlined, given that people during the medieval and Renaissance periods were quite interested in bodies of knowledge that today we label "occult." These bodies of knowledge were charted within complex tables of correspondence, such as follows:

[16]Danti Alighieri, *Il Convivio*, in Minnis and Scott, pp. 396–7.

Table 1.1 From *Second Book of Occult Philosophy, or Magic*, Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Sixteenth Century.

Intellectual World	Seraphim	Dominations	Archangels	Innocents	Four triplicities of intelligible hierarchies
	Cherubim	Powers		Martyrs	
	Thrones	Virtues		Confessors	
	Michael	Raphael	Gabriel	Uriel	Angels ruling four corners of earth
	Seraph	Cherub	Tharsis	Ariel	Rulers of elements
	Lion	Eagle	Man	Calf	Consecrated animals
	Mark	John	Matthew	Luke	Gospels
Elementary world of generation and corruption	Fire	Air	Water	Earth	Elements
	Seeds	Flowers	Leaves	Roots	Elements of plants
Man's world	Mind	Spirit	Soul	Body	Elements of Man
	Intellect	Reason	Phantasy	Sense	Four powers of Soul
	Choler	Blood	Phlegm	Melancholy	Humors
Infernal world	Samael	Azazel	Azael	Mahazael	Princes of Devils
	Phlegethon	Cocytus	Styx	Acheron	Infernal Rivers

This table is extrapolated from a much bigger one by Henry Cornelius Agrippa, a German occult thinker of the sixteenth century who lived in many parts of Europe, Paris among them, and spent his time gathering together various forms of secret knowledge.[17] The chart above is based on the scale of the number four. Of importance is that the various echelons are in sympathetic alignment. This means that entities, whether heavenly, earthly, or infernal work together in terms of their various powers, hence making something happen in the real world by way of alignment, which is the magician's art. The assumption is that *the universe is composed of sympathetic registers that have harmonic relations*, much as note to note intervals do in music and that some of these intervallic relations among the cosmic registers (stones, plants, animals, angels, etc.) diffuse or purify away that which is corrupt (bloodstone was worn by Roman soldiers to ward off disease). But some relations strengthen or amplify what is weak; for example, the stone lapis lazuli was worn to summon higher intellectual powers.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is already very structurally complex in terms of how various books and passages interrelate within the epic as a whole. However, the epic can also be read in terms of occult correspondences, as well. The four angels, Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Uriel in the chart above govern the four corners of the world and are to be associated with the four gospels, Mark, John, Matthew, and Luke respectively. To read any one of these gospels is to be in touch with these angels at a higher sympathetic level of existence. At the highest level, Michael is generally associated with Seraphim, Raphael with Powers and Virtues, Gabriel with Archangels, and Uriel with Innocents. As it happens, Uriel shows his innocence in pointing out to Satan the way to Eden at the end of Book 3, but this also relates to his lining up with the categories of experience (he learns from experience that he made an error) and slowness. Gabriel is associated with the Saturnine, as well as with water, winter, prudence, and phlegm. His discovery and triumph over Satan in Book 4 relates to his steadfastness as a stern being who cannot be daunted by another's emotional trickery and outward deception. Raphael is sent by God to teach Adam and Eve virtue, which is the angel's occult characteristic; he also manifests reason, his respective power of the soul; and Milton also associates him with air, which is one of the four elements basic to astrological, alchemical, and medical

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[17] Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed. Donald Tyson, trans. James Freake (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2005). The table above is my own very abridged construction of a chart made by Agrippa.

speculation (the four elements correspond to the four humors). Michael, who appears at the close of the epic to slowly usher Adam and Eve out of Paradise is associated with mind, intellect, faith, and justice, but also choler, and violence. Apparently, a reader familiar with angelology is supposed to know that it would be appropriate for Michael to appear *after* the fall. Finally, it is perhaps useful to know that astrologically Uriel is an earth sign (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn); Gabriel is a water sign (Cancer, Scorpio, Pices), Raphael is an air sign (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius); and Michael is a fire sign (Aries, Leo, Sagittarius).

Milton, we know, was quite aware of astrology and arranged his life in terms of astrological predictions of favorable and unfavorable times of the year. That he would blend this with Christianity may seem odd, but in the seventeenth century, intellectuals frequently entertained very different kinds of thinking at the same time. John Locke, a rational empirical thinker, also wrote on occult phenomena, Sir Isaac Newton, the well known physicist, practiced alchemy, but also wrote treatises on the Book of Revelations. Milton, a Protestant, seems to have had an interest in the occult. That said, the lesson for us is that literary meaning can be conceived in terms of a vast table of analogies or correspondences that function in terms of sympathetic thinking whereby a string of top-down associations function to strengthen or weaken the various forces that impinge upon individuals. Nevertheless, in *Paradise Lost* no matter how strong these forces are in concert, ultimately it is the free will of humankind that matters. In other words, Milton ultimately rejects analogical or sympathetic thinking for the sake of rational choice predicated upon faith in God. And yet, earth feels the wound when Eve falls; that is, the whole sympathetic system, within which Adam and Eve function, registers pain and starts to come apart. Hence, the intimacy among beings is shattered, something that becomes clear when Adam and Eve are expelled finally from Eden.

READING

Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (sixteenth century*)*

The Rise of Modern Literary Interpretation

Analogical thinking in the Renaissance, especially, led to a view of literature as something that encompassed at least the Old and New Testaments, Greek

mythology and literature, Latin history and literature, Arthurian tradition, other major medieval precedents (e.g. the *Moralized Ovid*), and folk culture. Dante Alighieri, Matteo Maria Boiardo, Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Edmund Spenser, and John Milton all wrote lengthy epic poetry of one sort or another that presumed a layering and hence cross-referencing of Judeo, Christian, Greek, Roman, and Medieval literatures.

Of course, writing literature on such a vast scale of textual analogies meant that literature was a rather unrestricted sort of enterprise. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, doesn't quite deny its pretension to be on a par with Biblical scripture. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* seems to be about everything that was ever written, or near to it. Elizabethan and Jacobean drama isn't exactly very restricted, either. Shakespeare's history plays are very broad ranging and are clearly about matters of state and history itself, not just dramatized entertainments that are narrow in scope. Taken as a whole, Shakespeare too is something of an epic literary writer whose works encompass history, comedy, tragedy, and irony. Also, much of the drama was based on analogical thinking, which took on allegorical force. Some plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries are set in Italy and show intrigues at court that are really allegories of goings on in England. In other words, a sort of double reading is required wherein different analogical layers are being brought into correspondence. It is a tendency that is foundational to metaphysical poetry, as well, especially the tendency in John Donne, Henry Vaughn, and others to think in terms of macrocosm and microcosm.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, however, analogical thinking contracts into satirical writing. That is, the correspondences suddenly are looked upon as silly and frivolous, even if they have the power to insult and impugn. Andrew Marvell's poem "Upon Appleton House" is a transitional work, part metaphysical, part satirical. But John Dryden's mock epic poem "Absolom and Achitophel" – about the English monarchy and intrigue at court – uses an improbable Biblical story of Absalom's revolt against King David to illuminate the politics of the Duke of Monmouth (an illegitimate son of Charles II and a Protestant) who was eager to succeed Charles II, hence supplanting the rightful heir James, Duke of York. This came to a crisis in 1681 when legislation was spearheaded by the Earl of Shaftesbury in Parliament to exclude James, who was a Catholic, from succession. In the poem, Monmouth is Absalom, and, of course, he is mocked from beginning to end in terms at once elevated and base. The upshot of a work like this concerns the fact that suddenly a literary work has a rather

restricted political aim and that it is advanced as an entertainment with a moralizing edge whose readers are comprised of people in the public sphere who have the education to parse such a work. Whereas Shakespeare was writing about historical events in what to him was already some sort of deep past, Dryden was publishing a satire that addressed current events. The analogy with the Bible didn't offset the directness of the criticism so much as it made Monmouth look all the more absurd. In other words, the more religious Dryden got, the more secular the poem became, because it is the nature of satire to invert relations. Poems like this, in the early 1680s, set the stage for literary production that focused more one dimensionally upon the present, though often with the aid of a satirical analogue, for example, Jonathan Swift's invention of Gulliver's travelogue (in *Gulliver's Travels*), which imitates strange accounts of English travelers who have come back from far away adventures. In such works, the use of double or analogous reading is highlighted as artificial and distorting, *not* sympathetic, as it is in Spenser and Milton. Moreover, by the end of the eighteenth century, writers like Jane Austen will have junked the double reading model altogether in various works. *Pride and Prejudice* is about its ostensive content. It's not an allegory about something else.

Satire and the realist literature that accompanied and/or followed from it were quite oriented in terms of what was then the historical moment of the present, a moment which the reading public shared in terms of direct experience. References to the Bible, to the Greeks, or to whatever other sort of body of writing were greatly subordinated to the experience or *Bildung* (development, formation) of the contemporary individual person or social group. Literature in the eighteenth century was becoming a far more restricted sort of communication in that it pertained much more to the here and now of lived experience. One read for pleasure, that is, for imaginative delight, but one also read for what Dr. Samuel Johnson called "improvement." Johnson's various prefaces to major writers – "Preface to Shakespeare" is a classic example of criticism in the eighteenth century that we would recognize as modern – survey major British authors in order to establish their canonical significance. Of importance to Johnson was the genius of the writer and how the writer's gifts were employed for better or for worse. Johnson's aim, in other words, was evaluative. However, he situated his evaluation within the parameters of a portrait of the writer and that writer's achievements, hence emphasizing the uniqueness and particularity of an author's output. What makes Johnson modern is that he has an understanding of a literary work as an art form that has to be understood

as a thing in itself. How an author crafts plots, characters, situations, and so forth interests Johnson to some very great extent, which is to say, technique matters. Central for Johnson is the understanding of the work in the context of the here and now. He is not interested in sympathetic correspondences or a four fold method of interpretation.

READING

Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare* (eighteenth century)

Philosophical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, the ancient Greek word for interpretation, was revived as a discipline by religious thinkers in the Enlightenment. However, it has come to concern modern ways of approaching problems of textual interpretation that have been mediated by philosophy, in particular, the thinking of Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Wilhelm Dilthey, F. Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida. As a starting point, everyone defers to the work of the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher who argued that it wasn't enough to know the etymology of words, the historical context in which a text was written, the genres upon which that work was based, the opinions of the author or his or her contemporaries, or even the very minute particulars of the text itself, for what that yielded was merely explanation, whereas what was required was something known as *understanding.*

Understanding concerned the critic's experience of the work as a synthetic whole and not just a collection of parts. The whole exudes a spirit that the parts don't have and this spirit is understandable in terms of the author whom the critic has come to know better than the author knew himself or herself. Unlike the author, who didn't necessarily work through all of a text's problems to satisfaction, the interpreter should have a much better grasp of what the problems were, why they couldn't be resolved, and how they might have been overcome. The interpreter also should have a much better understanding of the contradictions and muddles that an author wasn't able to fix or didn't know existed.

Perhaps most important, Schleiermacher realized that when one is reading a literary text, one isn't just reading language in general but a language that reflects individual thoughts that aren't generic but extremely unique and only fully comprehendible by those who have an intimate knowledge of the author's works. In other words, works have a psychological aspect that the interpreter can know only by way of becoming familiar with the consciousness that is represented by the language. Schleiermacher was saying, therefore, that interpretation isn't simply a technical skill, but the cultivation of a sort of empathic wisdom regarding an author's work. It is towards such an understanding of a text that in England early modern literary critics, such as Johnson and Joseph Addison, were already moving.

The idea that the lived experience of another can be known through the commonality of linguistic meaning was key to the thinking of the nineteenth century philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey. Of importance is that these meanings are apprehended by us not just as referents but as sensations and that through reflection we can elevate these sensations to facts of consciousness that can be grasped as something in particular that enables us to experience the experiences of another. A good example of that might be the color blue in Van Gogh's painting *Starry Night*. We obviously know that the color blue is referring us to the night sky. But that knowledge is merely abstract and empty without the *sensation* of the color, the thickness of the paint, and the swirling lines. Moreover, only through reflection can one translate these sensations into facts of consciousness (the self-awareness that one has experienced something in particular), which in turn can be grasped as a psychic experience that another could and probably may have had, as well. In terms of poetry, one would have to ask how words, phrases, and sentences convey sensations that particularize their referents in terms of experiences that are sharable but not necessarily common. During the mid-twentieth century, a group of literary critics who identified themselves as part of the Geneva School did, in fact, attempt to practice this sort of hermeneutic. They included Albert Beguin, Jean-Pierre Richard, Georges Poulet, Marcel Raymond, and Jean Starobinski. Gaston Bachelard, who wasn't officially part of this group, exemplified a highly sophisticated ability to analyze the subjectivity of experience as a fact of consciousness that had objective significance. As a group, these critics are sometimes identified with the term "phenomenological criticism."

READING

Wilhelm Dilthey, *Poetry and Experience* (1985)

The Hermeneutic Circle

Schleiermacher and his followers in the German philosophical tradition discovered a very disturbing technical paradox with respect to interpretation that can be considered a tool for analysis, known as "the hermeneutical circle."

Essentially it was noticed that the more detailed the textual evidence we consider, the truer our account, even if it will necessarily be less consistent and coherent than if we considered the text from a broader perspective in which fewer details were accounted for. Conversely, the broader and less detailed the examination of the whole, the more coherent and consistently plausible the explanation of it will be, though the less validity that interpretation will have, since an examination of the minute particulars will tend to invalidate its most general and consistent claims.

The paradox is that the closer one gets to the details of a text, the less likely it is to produce a satisfactory interpretation of any kind, though one is, in fact, closer to the truth of the literal particulars; whereas, the further one gets from the numerous details the more likely it is to produce a plausible and convincing interpretation that takes account of the whole as a totalizing truth, even if that comes at the price of ignoring or even distorting the details.

The conflict boils down to that of particulars versus universals, something that bothered nineteenth-century historians such as Leopold Von Ranke in "The Idea of Universal History" (circa 1830).

> Philosophy always reminds us of the claims of the supreme idea. History, on the other hand, reminds us of the conditions of existence. The former lends weight to the universal interest, the latter to the particular interest.[18]

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[18] Leopold Von Ranke, "The Idea of Universal History," in *Philosophies of History*, ed. R.M. Burns and H. Rayment-Picard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 92.

As for the philosopher Hegel, the question for Ranke concerned the teasing out of dominant historical tendencies that characterized the development of a national people as a spiritual people who are self-conscious of their past, present, and future. Primitive peoples, Hegel argued, have no history, only the particulars of day to day life. Ranke agreed: "Just as there exists the particular, the connection of the one to the other, so there finally exists totality … There is … something total in each life; it becomes, it exerts an effect, it acquires influence, it passes away."[19] But, of course, this can only happen to a people who are conscious that they have a past, present, and future that can be represented as a totality, in other words, as civilization, not just situation or mere emplacement (indigenous habitation for however much time).

The problem, of course, is that the totality has to be confronted with particulars that can affect and change it in order to ensure that the totality exists in time as a developing whole that produces and overcomes contradictions, rational limitations, and so on. But in so doing the particulars bring down the whole as a totalizing entity. Of course, this is but another way of positing the hermeneutic circle whereby the particulars invalidate the whole as a logical, rational totality, whereas the totality ignores and contradicts particulars in order to establish itself as a logical whole. This is a problem that Hegel thought he had solved by means of advancing what he called "the dialectic," the idea that contradictions will be logically produced that then have to engage in a struggle by means of which they are sublated (pulled up) to a higher order wherein the totality is transformed and the contradictions resolved. Ever since the 1930s, French thinkers have argued that this solution was far too optimistic and that sublation is much more problematic than Hegel realized. Certainly, sublation doesn't resolve the universal/particular problem, as the French critic and novelist Georges Bataille made very clear in many of his writings of the 1930s and after, and as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida reconfirmed in his work on Hegel in the 1960s and 1970s.

And yet, there is another possibility for dealing with the viciousness of the hermeneutic circle, something that Derrida more or less had shown without necessarily taking the step of addressing the hermeneutic circle itself. Speaking to Henri Ronse in 1967, Derrida said, "In what you call my books, what is first of all put in question is the unity of the book … One can take *Of Grammatology* as a long essay articulated in two parts … *into*

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[19]Ranke (2000), p. 93.

the middle of which one could staple *Writing and Difference* … Inversely, one could insert *Of Grammatology into the middle of Writing and Difference*"[20] This speaks to writing (i.e. Derrida's own texts) as a multidimensional object made up of multiple constructions that can be moved around so that one will recontextualize and reinscribe the other, so to speak. Following the philosophical work of the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, Derrida, while a student in the 1950s, had noticed that Husserlian phenomenology requires multiple constructions in analysis. Indeed, Husserl's writings too can be inserted into the middle of each other, much as Derrida was suggesting with respect to his own work. Additionally, that was also true for Sigmund Freud's writings, also of much importance to Derrida, in which the phrase, "multiple constructions in analysis," is coined. In short, Husserl, Freud, and Derrida had figured out that instead of restricting oneself to the closure of a single work with a linear (or teleological) beginning, middle, and end and a central rationale or argument that governs the whole completely, one ought to be thinking in terms of multiple interpretations that construct the same materials differently or construct different materials that when put side by side reveal strong identities.

A brilliant example of this occurs in the work of Derrida during the mid-1980s with respect to a project on a polysemous German word, *Geschlecht*, which means sex, race, gender, family, kin, and stock. Derrida was to publish four essays, three of which made it into print. "Geschlecht I" was on sexual difference in Heidegger, "Geschlecht II" was on monstrosity and the figure of the hand in Heidegger's *What is called Thinking?*, "Geschlecht III" (which didn't get redacted but was given in lecture) investigated Heidegger's readings of Trakl in *On the Way to Language*, and "Geschlecht IV" was on the topic of *Mitsein* (Being-with) in Heidegger's early writings.[21] Although these essays are on different topics, they all can be folded within one another in terms of their unfolding the many meanings that Heidegger gave to the word *Geschlecht* throughout the course of his life as a philosopher.

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[20] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 4.

[21] Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht I" and "GeschlechtII" appear in *Psyche*, ed. P. Kamuf and E. Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). "Geschlecht IV" appears at the end of *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994). It is not included in the English translation.

Without dwelling on the particular arguments, it is notable that these essays are essentially very different and very identical at the same time and that they evade the vicious circle of moving from particular to universal and back again, because they (i) refuse universalization – the reduction of all particulars to a central general rationale – and (ii) posit the possibility that there could always be more essays to come, because the particulars are hardly ever exhausted. What dictates the viciousness of the hermeneutic circle is simply closure, the positing of a finite limit within which everything ought to be made accountable according to a relatively simple rationale that by its very logocentric nature – its circular self-referentiality – is not able to convincingly present the difference between its universalizing claims and its evidentiary particulars, if only because logocentrism forces one to choose between a neat system of relations or all those particulars that won't fit into that system.

Of course, Derrida is not the only person to have escaped the hermeneutic circle (i.e. logocentricism per se), for one can find strategies by other thinkers, such as Gilles Deleuze (rhizomatic writing, 5.9), Jacques Lacan (via topology theory, 5.11), Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak (her use of fragmentary development), and Slavoj Žižek (the collision of multiple perspectives and particulars versus the virtual sublation of a master logic). Of immense advantage is that by exiting the hermeneutic circle, one exits the thesis trap: advancing a thesis that is merely a point of view in a cavalcade of such views that others can repudiate in the interests of their own counterclaims. What speaks against the exiting of the hermeneutic circle (by academics, in particular) is that suddenly much more effort needs to be taken to read, assemble, assess, and hermeneutically process what someone has advanced.

One of the reasons Husserl isn't better received in many quarters is that his writings are very much like an infinitely open series of writings that were revised many times over, each time advancing a somewhat different notion of phenomenology. Freud's corpus isn't altogether different in that it too is in a process of constant self-revision, or reiteration and difference that isn't easily translated into universal claims, though many people have done precisely this in order to make the whole more comprehensible and influential. If the thesis approach to writing has a strength, it is that despite the inadequacy of dealing with particulars and universals, one does at least come away with a quick understanding of what the critic's central positions are, something that makes debate easy and clear cut. The alternative is complex, open ended, rhizomatic writings, that, as in the case of Husserl,

are inconclusive and fraught with methodological inconsistencies and aporias. One encounters this too in other major figures like Novalis, Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, writers who worked with fragments that could be interleaved.

READING

Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1981)
Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1979)

1.5 Major Twentieth-Century Schools of Critical Analysis

Critical schools emerge when certain methods become adopted by a number of major figures who form part of what can be called a movement or school. This section will survey Historicism, New Criticism, Marxism, Structuralism, Phenomenology, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Reader Response Criticism, and Post-Structuralism. The following section (1.6) will survey sociologically inspired forms of criticism (feminism, constructivism, race, gay and lesbian studies, ethnicity, cultural studies, global studies, and post-colonialism). The overviews only touch on issues of central importance and are not exhaustive. However, given how major sociological criticism has become over the past 40 years, some aspects will be elaborated in some greater detail.

Traditional and New Historicisms

Traditional historicism claims that the meaning of a text is established by its historical context, which is seen as a rational totality that norms the text by means of revealing meanings in terms of publicly held understandings that can be found in the historical record. Because traditional historicism assumes that works are explained by their immediate historical contexts, these researchers are arguing that the work is a sort of artefact frozen in historical time, much like an object retrieved from a dig in Mesopotamia or Egypt. Hence the work cannot transcend its moment, which is odd when one begins to realize that quite essential to art is its ability to communicate

rather profoundly with audiences in any historical time without the aid of historical scholarship. Also suspect is the traditional historian's idea that works of art would conform to the norms and forms of their historical period when, in fact, it is the tendency of major art to be innovative and therefore to break with establishment norms and forms, if not with the commonplace horizon of ordinary thinking that is advanced by the artist's contemporaries. Indeed, history shows us that the last people who could have understood Rembrandt or Shakespeare very well would have been their contemporaries. But one saw this at work too as recently as the 1960s when art critics and the media were making fun of Andy Warhol's paintings of soup cans and his deployment of "pop" images. Today Warhol is considered a major transitional figure in the history of late twentieth century American art.

The New Historicism, by contrast, is a movement begun in the 1970s and 1980s that argued the literary text shouldn't be viewed as a privileged object at the center of a totalizing rational context, but that the text is itself a context among many different contexts that are neither totalizing nor rationally configured as a whole, given how contradictory and conflicted they often are in relation to one another. Unlike traditional historians, the New Historicists argue that history is discontinuous and that there is no coherent world picture at any given time (no Elizabethan World Picture, as traditional historicism has argued), because history is a site of conflicting social, political, and cultural processes, which are expressed as material practices, of which literary production is but one. All material practices turn out to be established in terms of resistance and power, but it is how resistance and power are strategized and deployed that matters. Unlike the traditional historicists, the New Historicists, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher among them, were open to the idea that literary and non-literary texts were equal in terms of being material practices of power and resistance. What the New Historians shared with their predecessors, however, is the idea that the author traffics in shared social/cultural meanings which are being used, in the New Historical understanding, for the sake of renegotiating social values by means of entering a stream of ongoing social discourses that are part and parcel of the public sphere. This idea led to a rather predictable critical aim: the discovery of literary texts that were in the process of renegotiating social values with respect to a theme of importance to left of center intellectuals: social justice (or, simply, "power"). This critical aim mirrored the one launched by feminism during the 1970s and 1980s: the discovery of female writings that contested and renegotiated

social values deemed to be patriarchal. Again, power was of central concern, and it was hardly surprising that the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault on power had become of central importance to feminists and the New Historicists.

READING

Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse* (1990)
Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987)

New Criticism

New Criticism emerged in the 1930s and still forms the bedrock of much literary analysis, whether people admit it or not. Unlike traditional historicism, New Criticism saw the internal workings of the literary text as its *own* context. Meaning was self-generated by the text as what the leading New Critic, Cleanth Brooks, called a "well wrought urn," an autotelic object that constitutes its own forms of meaning that break with so called ordinary language. Irony, paradox, ambiguity, imagery, symbolism, metaphor, and so on were known as "devices" that were said to break with ordinary uses of language that would be part of a work's context; hence, it was mistaken to think that a work's meanings could be established by way of imagining a stable external content based on commonsense public experiences of language use. This argument becomes quite self-evident when one looks at works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*, which don't map very well onto *ordinary* language, which is why the proverbial man in the street would have a tough time reading such works unaided.

The New Criticism is also known for advancing close reading, detailed attention to how a text is written and how it constitutes meaning at various levels. The strength of New Critical analysis is that it uses textual evidence as its primary source for analysis, but that it can make use of historical context in order to corroborate that textual evidence, if it needs to. New Critical analysis emphasizes the complexity of meaning, the study of structure and pattern in literature, and emphasizes the importance of immanent textual interpretation as opposed to contextual analysis. It is compatible with structuralism and post-structuralism as evidenced by its adaptability to narratology (the structuralist approach to narrative) and to

deconstruction (as shown by Yale School criticism in the 1970s – work by Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man, and Harold Bloom that advanced post-structuralist reading strategies). In fact, the New Criticism is still very much the default approach to much literary interpretation that is undertaken in the languages and literatures, however subordinated to other interests (historical, sociological, philosophical, psychological).

READING

Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947)
René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (1949)

Marxism

Marxism in the West is generally studied not in revolutionary terms – that is, as a preparation for outright violent social revolt – but as a critique of bourgeois society and the capitalist economy upon which it is based. Particularly after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1992 and the slightly earlier breakup of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and after the remarkable shift in Communist China, at around the same time, to what is essentially an early stage of capitalist development, it's unconvincing to argue for Marxist revolution today, given the obvious failures of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thinking in practice. Nevertheless, Marxism still holds considerable legitimacy as a critique of capitalism, and there is no reason to imagine it might not be reformulated and practiced in ways that might well succeed where earlier forms of it had failed.

The various forms that Marxism has taken include Diamat or dialectical materialism, an economic slant that was central to Leninist-Stalinist think-ing, the study of class relations and class consciousness typified by the work of Georg Lukács (a Hungarian Communist), cultural Marxism, which was advanced by Leon Trotsky but developed more significantly by the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno, Marx Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas), existential Marxism, which is influenced mainly by the philosopher Hegel and was advanced in one form or other by Alexander Kojève, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and structuralist Marxism which at times overlapped with existen-tial Marxism, but which is most generally associated with the writings of

Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, Pierre Macherey, and Roger Establet in their major collaboration, *Lire le Capital* (abridged in English as *Reading Capital* with texts only by Althusser and Balibar).

In France, thinkers associated with the Tel Quel movement of the 1960s advanced a structuralist understanding of language in terms of Marx's notion of a mode of production, something that Jacques Derrida saw as a site for "deconstruction," hence posing a set of different structural alternatives for Marxist thought. More recently, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have emerged as major figures in terms of advancing updated understandings of cultural hegemony, which stem from the work of the Italian Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is an alternative to the standard Marxist understanding of class conflict and poses a much more plastic and flexible understanding of social coalition. Also well known is work by Fredric Jameson, an American Marxist known for his concept of the "political unconscious" (literature as the hidden symbolic mediation of a perceived collective destiny of culture), and Slavoj Žižek, whose work blends Lacanian psychoanalysis with various forms of Marxist analysis, some of them harking back to Stalin and Lenin in the interests of putting certain social critiques into question, particularly, those of the "political correctness" movement (e.g. academic liberalism). Of major concern to literary critics has been "ideology critique," discussed at length in 6.2.

READING

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1999)
Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (1981)
Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (1978)

Structuralism

Structuralism has its roots in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (circa 1915) and argues, essentially, that with respect to signifying systems the whole comes before its parts (5.3). Structuralism argues, moreover, that systems are constructed in terms of simple binary oppositions that establish patterns of identity and difference that encode signs and make them functional as meaningful elements within a system of differentiations and

equivalences. A radical claim made by structuralism is that the human subject does not invent language but is preceded by language and is born into it. That sounds odd, until one realizes that DNA is a semiotic system with properties rather like language and that our ability to converse was prepared for long before humans evolved, given that animals had most of the features of speech and the basic sociality to go with it long before we evolved. Because the "wholism" of structuralism is so at odds with how people have been habituated to think about language, the movement never became widely popular, though conceptually it really is more robust than, say, New Criticism or traditional historicism. The work by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss is considered a major bulwark of structuralism, though structuralism has been practiced with considerable success by literary critics, among them, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Philippe Hamon, Michael Riffaterre, Tzvetan Todorov, and Julia Kristeva. The advantage to structuralism is that it doesn't begin with the assumption that literature is a semiotic representation of some independent mental reality (or content) that exists transcendentally either out in the world or in the writer's imagination. In other words, structuralism abandons the mimetic fallacy of a pre-existing reality, whether mental or concrete, that the writer is translating into signs. Rather, structuralism argues that the reality effect of a text is *produced* by the sign system, not *reproduced* by it. This seems like a small difference, but in fact this shift has very significant consequences from an interpretive point of view. For one thing, it demystifies the idea that a novel is very much like a photograph of some independent reality.

READING

Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (1967)
Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (1980)
Tzvetan Todorov, *Poetics of Prose* (1977)

Phenomenological Literary Analysis

Phenomenological literary analysis is usually associated with critics of the Geneva School: Albert Beguin, Marcel Raymond, Georges Poulet, Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Rousset, and Jean Starobinski. But one sees it practiced too in various forms by critics such as Gaston Bachelard,

Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, Hélène Cixous, Emmanuel Levinas, and Martin Heidegger. Phenomenological literary analysis is an orientation rather than a rigorous method; it assumes an understanding of consciousness along Husserlian lines as a mental set of processes that aren't to be grounded, a priori, in a central controlling ego that self-consciously wills (intends) expression. Yet, phenomenological criticism does often resemble biographical criticism in that it searches for "themes" that are the signature of a particular artistic consciousness. Whereas Husserl didn't believe in mental faculties, phenomenological critics do refer to the imagination (which is a faculty of mind) and some also tend to think in terms of an author's psychology (the id is a sort of faculty), which puts them in close proximity with psychoanalytic literary analysis. Hence figures like J-B. Pontalis (a psychoanalyst who writes penetratingly about culture) tend to straddle the two domains.

These reservations aside, phenomenological criticism is concerned with the subjective manifestation of an author's consciousness in words. Reading is considered the "consciousness of consciousness" (Marcel Raymond) and is itself a subjective act in response that must strive to imagine the psychic life of the writer, that is, his or her consciousness as a process of thought that is always in flux. How does this flux relate to the structure of authorial experience? According to Poulet, the thought of the critic should turn into the thought of the author. This view, which was shared by hermeneuts like Schleiermacher at the turn of the nineteenth century, is radicalized in that the process of identification is intersubjective (the interrelating and even merging of subjectivities). It's not merely a matter of *connaissance* (that is, of simple familiarity). However, some phenomenological readers are also aware of their own consciousness, its themes (preoccupations, obsessions, concerns, interests), and how reading is the sharing of an experience that is deeply felt and expressed in words that have to be worked through by the reader in order to be fulfilled. Speaking of Marcel Raymond's work, the critic J. Hillis Miller wrote that, "The self-consciousness with which Raymond seeks to identify himself … is … a primitive sense of existence, preceding the identification of any distinct objects, a state of mind more emotive than rational, scarcely differentiated as that of one particular self."[22] In Gaston Bachelard's work, the aim of the critic is to understand a text chiefly by way of empathic self-experience. For example, Bachelard

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[22] J. Hillis Miller, "The Geneva School," in *Modern French Criticism*, ed. John Simon (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), p. 294.

studied the literary image in terms of a psycho-dynamics that revealed a common structure of experience of a surprisingly intimate nature. The trait proper to the image, he said, is its suddenness and brevity. This it shares with language itself. Such perceptions are insights taken from Bachelard's own experience and applied to what he read.

READING

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1969)
Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time* (1970)

Psychoanalytic Criticism

As we saw earlier, psychoanalytic criticism consists of the application of various theories developed by Freud to literature and culture, which can be seen as expressions of individual and collective psychology. Central to Freud's contribution were the features of dream language that correspond to practices within imaginative written expression, in particular, *displacement, condensation, secondary revision, symbolization,* and *projection*.

Displacement is substitution rather like the figure of metaphor, but in displacement one forgets and disconnects the relationship between the analogy. In *Paradise Lost*, the female figure of Sin is the displaced, hellish, monstrous figure, guarding the gates of Hell that stands for Eve after the fall. Sin is displaced in that she turns up long before we are even introduced to Eve in the epic, as if Milton had repressed the connection.

Condensation takes place when a whole is encountered in terms of one of its split off parts that has become dissociated. The smile of the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* that remains behind after the Cat vanishes is a condensation. Notable is that smiles don't generally exist in isolation as things in themselves. Here the dissociative aspect of the condensation is most evident.

Secondary revision speaks to how people fill in their dreams with content as they recall them. This filling in is part of the dreamwork, too, Freud said. When we read, we "revise" the text by means of a tendency to fill in the gaps and render details in our own terms. How I imagine a street of St. Petersburg in Dostoyevsky's fiction has as much to do with my imagination as it does with his description. Here day-dreaming facilitates the reading process.

Symbolization is discussed in "On Dreams" (1901). Freud wrote that "the majority of dream-symbols serve to represent persons, parts of the body and activities invested with erotic interest; in particular, the genitals are represented by a number of often very surprising symbols, and the greatest variety of objects are employed to denote them symbolically."[23] This speaks to *psychosexual* symbolization, the idea of which in the beginning of the twentieth century scandalized polite society whose norms foreclosed the idea that sexuality might be a mental preoccupation. Freud insisted that whether something is a symbol or not required work with the patient in terms of making free associations and that not everything in a dream is symbolic. However, in the Grimms' fairy tale of the frog and the princess, there is some agreement that the frog is a psychosexual symbol for the male scrotum. The incredulity with which people take this suggestion is a good indication that the symbol is a successful displacement that represses the unacceptable associations that one would have to make in the context of the frog asking for a kiss. (Freud would call our discomfort with this argument "resistance.")

Projection is yet another form of dissociation in which one ascribes a characteristic to an other which one has oneself. If I ask someone, "Why are you so angry?", it may well be me who is the angry party. In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, there is considerable projection at work with respect to the white whale. Ahab projects a whole narrative on to the whale with which Moby Dick obviously has nothing to do.

Aside from Freud's work on unconscious processes and his reading of literary texts (Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, etc.), there is well known work by Carl Jung, one of Freud's followers who broke away to develop his own theories of symbolization. Jung's ideas became popular after World War Two, particularly with respect to his development of archetypal analysis. He had postulated that the unconscious is collective and contains patterns of psychic energy that are realized in dreams as images. The images are universal symbols relative to psychological development and represent what are, ultimately, social-psychological relationships in the context of one's life cycle (*Lebenslauf*). The archetypal image is primordial and supposedly a phylogenetic residue of inherited experiences. Archetypal critics such as Northrop Frye dispensed with the phylogenetic argument

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[23] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. 5, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 683.

and noted that primordial images and figures turn up in the history of literature with such regularity that the textual record really speaks for itself. Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* is a magisterial analysis of literary symbolism and types based on archetypal analysis. It had its heyday in the 1960s.[24]

Beginning in the 1970s there was a switch to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan was a medical doctor who in the early 1950s began giving an extraordinary series of lectures (he called them seminars) that went on for some three decades and by the late 1960s attracted some hundreds of listeners.[25] Lacan's ideas had sources in surrealism, existential Hegelianism, and structuralism. Various slogans, which served as points of reference, still give the flavor of Lacan's teachings: the unconscious is structured like a language, there is no Other of the Other, a signifier presents a subject to another signifier, and woman does not exist. These are provocative statements that obviously require substantial explanation. Two hallmarks of Lacanian criticism are (i) Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" (self-perception as misrecognition, self-perception as paranoid perception) and (ii) retroaction (that the subject comes to be a subject retroactively in the wake of the signification of an Other [e.g. Society]).

Much of Lacan's thinking is inspired by philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's work on concrete relations with others in *Being and Nothingness* and by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's work on the primacy of social structure – the order of the symbolic – in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.[26] It is the hybridizing of these two major influences together with Freud that makes up the core of Lacanian thinking (6.3).

READING

Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1917)
Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, *Love, Hate, and Reparation* (1937)
Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" (1953)

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[24]Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[25]See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006).

[26]Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. by James Harle Bell et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

Reader Response Criticism

Reader response criticism was quite significant in the 1970s and had its source in Germany in the Konstanz School where Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser were active. Like the Geneva School, the Konstanz School was quite aware that a literary work doesn't exist on the page, only instructions for constructing it exist there. Literary works, therefore, only truly exist insofar as they are constituted in the consciousness of a reader. But that said, how do readers actually constitute a text? What do we do with the instructions on the page? How do we handle aspects of a text for which information isn't given? Wolfgang Iser famously spoke of gaps, blanks that the reader is required to fill in by means of implication, reason, fantasy, and so on. Jauss, who came out of a more conservative intellectual background, was quite interested in reconstituting an aesthetic experience of reading in the context of a historically determined under-standing of what a text means. This goes back to the Biblical hermeneut's question of how to understand a work in ways that go beyond mere historicism.

In America, Norman Holland, a psychoanalytical critic, investigated how readers read subjectively, arguing that reading a text properly never actually happens, given all the personal psychological issues we transfer onto the experience of reading. For example, it's difficult to imagine reading a novel without identifying with or against certain characters. Whether we like a novel or not seems to have quite a bit to do with our own psychological make up, which is why, for example, feminism became very popular, given that it promoted literary readings women could identify with and get excited about in terms of their content. Reader response, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology are sympathetic critical orientations. What tends to turn critics away from such approaches is that they are per-ceived to argue for reading as an arbitrary subjective act, which is problem-atic when one considers that in a research institution like a university, one is supposed to be getting at absolute truth, never mind the process of how one actually reads (5.7). During the 1980s, especially, Stanley Fish had great fun harassing the academy with his reader response approach that argued, essentially, that with regard to interpretations, might makes right. That is, only the institutionally powerful get heard and repeated in the classroom, given that academic readers respond to power, and not to the colleague in the office next door.

READING

Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978)
Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980)

Post-Structuralism

To be sure, the term post-structuralism is an American neologism repudi-
ated by everyone the term covers, but the term is quite helpful for the rest
of us, because it refers to young French intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s
whose work was written in opposition to those aspects of structuralism
that weren't quite radical enough to effect a significant epistemic break with
the past. An epistemic break or paradigm shift refers to a sort of Copernican
Revolution in thought whereby deeply held assumptions of the past are
unmasked as being false and fraudulent. Post-structuralism isn't a single
philosophy or doctrine or body of ideas that intellectuals held in common
so much as it was indicative of a number of innovative attempts to pull
away from formalist closure (bounded systematicity), the law of non-
contradiction (either p or not-p), and a traditional logic of the particular
in relation to the universal.

The thinkers most often associated with post-structuralism include
Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jean-François
Lyotard, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Luc Nancy,
Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Sarah Kofman, Jacques Lacan, Alain Badiou,
and Jacques Derrida. Derrida's concept of dissemination (5.8) was directed
against closure, his understanding of undecidability in language broke with
the law of non-contradiction, he dismantled the hermeneutical circle, and
his emphasis upon singularity deconstituted a traditional understanding of
the particular and the universal. Lacan's emphasis upon mathematical
topology theory (non-Euclidean geometry) also accomplished much the
same thing by breaking apart a notion of bounded topos (or spatial field)
while insisting upon it, hence making closure undecidable, while dealing
with non-Euclidean topological figures (the Moebius strip, the Klein bottle)
as mathematical sets that did and didn't belong to one another, hence
breaking apart the particular/universal distinction (5.11). Michel Foucault's
notion of power (6.3) deconstituted the particular/universal distinction as
well, and his examination of series and genealogies negated closure. His

concept of "man" was at times undecidable in that he both presupposed and eliminated it. Most recently people have been studying the work of Alain Badiou which resorts to mathematical theory in order to harass the same distinctions (5.13). Although *deconstruction* is the word that Jacques Derrida coined in order to label his own particular analytical strategies, it more or less speaks to parallel tactics in work by many of his contemporaries.

READING

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967)
Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (1988)

1.6   Socio-Political Analyses

Sociological Criticism has become extremely dominant over the past 40 years and consists of many subfields, some of which are themselves quite large, among them, *feminism and gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, race studies, ethnicity studies, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and global studies*. All of these fields presuppose left-of-center political views, advocate for liberalization of society, dwell on identitarian issues, and celebrate difference (diversity); however, their main thrust is to address social injustices that stem from social inequality. In that sense, these subfields are very much heirs to the civil rights agenda in America of the 1960s, which was a watershed historical moment that called mainstream values, and the social structures they articulated, into question. From the standpoint of the humanities, social criticism addresses the accusation that humanists are navel gazers who don't do anything that is socially useful. That, plus the emphasis upon linking the personal identity of the scholar with his or her respective subfield, has made social criticism a very compelling activity.

Feminism

Feminism is discussed here as well as in the following section on social constructivism. Feminism transitioned from a fringe social interest to a

mainstream academic discipline in the 1970s, reached its apogee in the 1980s, and transitioned into gender studies in the 1990s. Today it is somewhat in decline, though of all the subfields, feminism was most successful in institutionalizing itself in terms of the creation of formal women's studies programs. Feminism has had the following main concerns: the critique of patriarchy, transformation of curricula in order that more female intellectuals be admitted to various canons of study, resolution of the question of whether "difference" is an essentialist distinction or not, and eventual acceptance of the thesis that social identities are "constructed" subject positions. The latter two points require some explanation, because much has followed from these determinations in the other subfields, which overlap to a great extent with feminism in terms of how social reality is conceptualized.

Around 1980 there was considerable debate as to whether, as the philosopher and novelist Simone de Beauvoir had put it in the late 1940s, women are born or made. To be *born* a woman is to be naturally and essentially female, feminine, womanly. To be *made* a woman is to be anti-essentially fashioned, constructed, or constituted as woman by social forces. To put this yet another way, the debate was over whether woman is nature or culture. *Écriture feminine*, which was a concept advanced by Hélène Cixous, the French intellectual and literary writer, presupposed an essential relation between writing and the innate nature of female sexuality (the female body). Luce Irigaray, a French linguist, philosopher, and practitioner of psychoanalysis, advanced a theory of the feminine that was grounded upon the female body as essentially unphallic, multiply erogenous, and fluid. For her the lesbian body is most essentially woman, most naturally female. According to this view, sexual difference is absolute and biologically determined, though obviously there will be variation among women. In America, meanwhile, Gayle Rubin in an article, "The Traffic of Women" (1975), posited a distinction between sex and gender (in French there is no corollary for these two terms: *sexe* refers to both), arguing that gender is *a socially constructed identity* that determines how sex is made manifest in society.[27] How women are expected to dress, in what they are expected to be educated, how they are expected to function as wives, mothers, workers are all predicated on assumptions about what a woman is supposed to be in terms of social roles. Here too there is variation, but

[27] Gayle Rubin, "Traffic in Women," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

the mainstream norms are fairly obvious. And, as feminists noticed, these norms ultimately benefited patriarchy (the "father knows best approach") more than they benefited women.

The anti-essentialist view, as it happened, had some ideological implications more in tune with pragmatic political activism than did the essentialist view. Anti-essentialism led to visions of liberalized, non-conformist self-fashioning – the performance of gender made popular by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* of 1989. But politically it was also a variant of pro-choice, which in America was a slogan that referred to the right of a woman to have an abortion. There too nature was being overridden by culture. Whereas the essentialist arguments advanced by mainly Continental feminists were given a hearing and commented upon, the political direction of countercultural forces in the United States was such that freedom of choice would become, paradoxically, the essence of anti-essentialism. This, in turn, paved the way for the ascent of *social constructivism*, which argued that social reality, of which the objectification of gender is a part, can be "negotiated" (e.g. chosen, changed, overturned, revolted against) by way of performing the self in everyday social interactions that have the effect of changing perceived social reality (its typifications). Hence the slogan: "the personal is the political."

READING

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1989)

Social Constructivism: Berger and Luckmann versus Michel Foucault

Two major sources of inspiration for embracing *the constructedness argument* are *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann and Michel Foucault's trilogy, *The History of Sexuality* (*The Will to Knowledge, Uses of Pleasure, Care of the Self, 1976–84*).[28] While by far the most referenced theorist is Foucault, in reality Berger and

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[28] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1990).

Luckmann have probably had the most influence, given that their arguments are simpler and more in tune with Anglo-American pragmatics. Plus Berger and Luckmann were more directly counter-cultural in the 1960s sense, because their work was published and read in America in that decade.

Berger and Luckmann argued that our perception of social reality is relative to how that reality is "constructed" by parties motivated, not surprisingly, by self-interests. In their view, "taken-for-granted reality" is, in fact, a complex network of assumptions and objectifications that are promoted by religions, disciplinary bureaucratic agencies within society, class consciousness, the culture industry (book publishing, musical entertainment) and much else. Despite this, we "apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them …" (21) Berger and Luckmann note that the reality of everyday life is lived as continuous, self-evident, and unquestionable and is shared with others as such. However, that reality is predicated upon "typifications" (a secretary, a professor, a CEO, or, a vacation).

> The social reality of everyday life is thus apprehended in a continuum of typifications, which are progressively anonymous as they are removed from the "here and now" of the face-to-face situation. At one pole of the continuum are those others with whom I frequently and intensively interact in the face to face situations – my "inner circle," as it were. At the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction. Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them. As such, social structure is an essential element of the reality of everyday life.[29]

Representations of women in society (in other words, gendered identity) usually reinforce these typifications, because they are what people assume without question to be actual and therefore real. Feminists pointed out that such typifications also reinforce a social structure that is predicated on social injustice, a perceived inequality between men and women that leads to paying women lower wages for doing the same job as a man.

During the 1970s, feminists had become very interested in examining *social stereotypes* in order to show that social identities are, in fact,

[29] Berger and Luckmann, p. 33.

"constructed" by means of the use of signs that can be manipulated to index subjective meanings that embed value distinctions. These distinctions establish social status. A stereotype is a social shorthand that indexes not only subjective meanings but the value distinctions they embed. A good recent example might be Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's pants suits, which index her belonging to a world of work made up chiefly of men who wear suits that include pants. Notice, there are no men in her world who would suddenly wear a skirt in order to mirror females. The pants suit she wears is clearly a sign that indicates her wanting equal status with men at the same time that it indicates her subordination (required conformity) to what feminists call patriarchy (in this context, a male dominated social superstructure). As a stereotype, the pants suit makes her "one of the boys" even while it reveals gender difference and the secondary status of women even in high office.

Central to the *constructedness thesis*, which over the past 15 years has become something of a sociological dogma within English departments, is the idea that people can contest and reconfigure social representations by changing their codes. There was a spoof on this back in the 1990s on an American television show, *Saturday Night Live*, in which an androgynous character known as "Pat" stumps everyone by speaking in such ambiguous ways that no one can figure out whether they're talking to a male or a female. The more people try to pose questions that would require "Pat" to reveal whether he/she is male or female, the more they are confronted with annoyingly ambiguous responses, the point being that people can't deal with not knowing what sex the person is to whom they are speaking. The skits demonstrate that social deconstruction of sexual difference might not actually transform social stereotypes with respect to sexual difference; rather, challenging gender difference winds up becoming a very frustrating impediment to socialization, given that face to face communication requires some social determinacy. After all, the addressee's identity provides *the context* for selecting what we will and won't say, let alone, how we will or won't say something. At the very least, we don't usually want to offend, alienate, or complicate relations with others, if it is going to make our lives more difficult.

Despite this, there are those within academia who have argued that stereotypes can be contested, reformulated, and used to transform social typifications and, ultimately, social structure. The most important figure to advance this argument has been Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble* argued for how social subjects are agents who can perform gender in ways

that both critique and modify the ways in which society accepts certain gender stereotypes as part of the unquestioned social reality of everyday life. Butler argues that through repeated performative practices in the social sphere, certain behaviors with respect to gender become normatized and come to be associated with a stable, objectified typification of gender. No individual can call gender into question simply by adopting a certain manner of performing it, but social groups may well do so. "Gender bending" within certain social groups tests the boundaries of gender typifications. Of course, the way in which gay men and lesbian women have creatively manipulated aspects of gender coding is precisely the sort of thing to which Butler was pointing. Feminism, queer theory, postcolonial critique, ethnic and race studies, and the study of nationhood and national identity have all been quite sensitive to Butler's understandings of performativity and identity construction.

As for the influence of Michel Foucault, which belongs more to the world of so-called "high theory," academics back in the 1970s were noticing that he had made a major conceptual breakthrough in terms of thinking of power as something distributed throughout society in terms of disciplinary regimes of regulating the self and others. Foucault saw that these disciplinary regimes had always been institutionalized but that in the eighteenth century, bureaucracies were emerging that had become quite efficient in linking power with knowledge, which was then exercised to discipline the social order, both collectively and individually. Foucault's most well known work in the 1970s was his masterful *Discipline and Punish* (1975), which was about the development of the modern prison in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[30] Foucault proved that bureaucracies mobilize various rhetorics of discipline that then cross-over from one institution to the other, for example, the educational and prison systems in France. Moreover, Foucault pointed out that the various social objects of study (the student, the criminal, the insane) were very much the "constructions" of the various rhetorics of knowledge that sought to describe such social subjects. Very much in line with structuralist thinking, Foucault argued that the social subject is an effect of the bureaucratic language that sets out to define him or her, not an a priori object that has an essence one either represents correctly or not.

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[30] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1979).

In an essay entitled "What is an Author?" Foucault argued that the author is a bureaucratic construction, too.

> Unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the author remains at the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain types of discourse within a society and culture. The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence. Consequently, we can say that in our culture, the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others: a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and, similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author. In this sense, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.[31]

In his trilogy on the history of sexuality, Foucault looked at disciplines of the self, which is to say, practices by individuals that concerned their own bodies and identities. Here too there is an exercise of power – over the self – that goes along with socially institutionalized discourses that depict the sorts of identity that such power is attempting to constitute, or constitutes de facto. Two major historical moments of interest to Foucault were, first, the discourses associated with "confession of the flesh" in the Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation, and second, the proliferation of discourses about sexuality that occurred during the Enlightenment and that continued on up through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first historical moment concerns self-examination and disclosure of what the individual keeps secret with respect to sexual practices, experiences, and so forth, whereas the second historical moment concerns the organized bureaucratic observation and classification of such practices, with the result that people are classified into "types" based on the logic, regularity, and systematicity of practices deemed to be sexual. It is by way of this

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[31] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 123.

second historical moment that the subject known as the homosexual is constituted or constructed, even if society would claim that the homosexual had merely been "discovered" or "understood."

> The Middle Ages had organized around the theme of the flesh and the practice of penance a discourse that was markedly unitary. In the course of recent centuries, this relative uniformity was broken apart, scattered, and multiplied in an explosion of distinct discursivities which took form in demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, and political criticism.[32]

Of major importance is that according to Foucault the more or less unified theological set of discourses that related to sexuality in the Middle Ages and the period of Counter-Reformation were subjected in the Enlightenment to an epistemic break – that is, a radical paradigm shift – that inaugurated a decentering of discursive regimes: their dispersion and dissemination among a number of different areas of study. Thus,

> there has occurred, since the eighteenth century, a whole series of tensions, conflicts, efforts at adjustment and attempts at retranscription. So it is not simply in terms of a continual extension that we must speak of this discursive growth; it should be seen rather as a dispersion of centers from which discourses emanated, a diversification of their forms, and the complex deployment of the network connecting them.[33]

As in the case of the author concept, subjects of sexual discourse turn out to be the effects of this sort of discursive dispersion, which Foucault saw as quite massive and excessive. Like Berger and Luckmann, Foucault was arguing that social reality and the subjects within it are discursively constructed (that is, *defined*). But Foucault went further in suggesting that constructivism is itself the inevitable effect of institutionalized discourses of investigation that require methods of surveillance, examination, and analysis that necessitate the use of bureaucratic power over individuals.

In a lecture course of the 1970s, Foucault outlined how this fit in with questions of *raison d'état* (the logic of a state's self-interests) and concerns about security (of individuals, populations, and of the state itself). Whereas

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[32] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 33.
[33] Foucault (1978), p. 34.

Berger and Luckmann mainly see the expression of power in terms of oppression whereby one social group cynically manages another in order to exploit it, Foucault demonstrated that this is far too simplistic and naïve an assumption and that power isn't the unilateral expression of an elite – at least, not in modern Europe – but dispersed among a complex of bureaucracies that are themselves constituted in terms of discursive practices that are investigative and knowledge driven, and that *raison d'état* is the motive, not the greed of an elite, a greed that could never be influential enough to determine so many discourses and institutions. Here we can clearly see a structuralist objection to what in Berger and Luckmann is an "actor" driven model, one that presumes conspiratorial agency (patriarchy, corporations, the bourgeoisie, the super rich).

Whereas gender studies has embraced the approach developed by Foucault, feminists have tended more often to embrace the model advanced by Berger and Luckmann. Whereas Foucault saw literature as part of a very complex regime of discourses that were economic, historical, scientific, medical, sociological, psychological, and political, feminists within the languages and literatures have been far more focused on the study of literature, which they have used as a project to study women authors who have been historically overlooked or ignored, women the feminists have wanted to turn into the historical actors they were not allowed to be in the past – that is, agents of social influence and change. Consequently, feminists have been eager to delegitimize so-called patriarchal discourses by means of appealing to the idea that social reality is constructed and on account of that is a fiction, something that puts this discourse on a par with the very literary writings by women the feminists are trying to privilege, writings whose thinking ought to supersede patriarchy, in their minds. But, of course, there is a simpler and more straightforward way to consider this: feminists want women's writings to bring about change in the public sphere.

READING

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966)
Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (1978–84)

Race Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Ethnic Studies

These schools are quite indebted to Foucault in the sense that they don't accept that sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity are transcendental,

essentialist categories. The order of race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity is revealing in that of the three race is the most physically marked whereas ethnicity can be the least physically marked (one can't tell Irish Catholics and Protestants apart in Northern Ireland merely by looking at them). Gays and lesbians may or may not be noticeable depending upon how they comport themselves. Of course, race and ethnicity are combined with one another; and obviously sexual orientation enters into that relation as well. This raises the question of whether these three fields can be usefully separated out as individual domains, given how intertwined they are. What Judith Butler noticed in relation to gender is perhaps even more relevant to the race, sexual orientation, ethnicity nexus in that the freedom to perform one's identity however one pleases appears to be rather more present in the case of ethnicity where people can choose whether to identify with a group or not. This freedom is often far more restricted with respect to race (say, in the case of color), a topic central to Nella Larson's novel *Passing*, which concerns the unusual instance in which a person of color can pass for being Caucasian. Eve Sedgwick's well known *Epistemology of the Closet* more or less deals with this issue too in terms of showing/hiding one's sexual identity, in this case, relative to anxieties about disclosure and, contrariwise, modes of self-presentation that signal homosexual identity to those "in the know."[34] Here again questions of personal freedom are of central importance. To what extent is the social subject free to determine his or her own identity? And what are the social, cultural, and political constraints and latitudes?

These areas of study presuppose notions of social constructedness along the lines Foucault set out concerning bureaucratized discourse practices engaged in the nexus of power/knowledge, something that relates to their historical orientation, given that historically notions of sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity have changed quite radically. With respect to sexuality, Foucault notices that with the rise of the bourgeoisie, norms are imposed with respect to normal matrimonial sexuality – heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive – versus "unproductive sexual activities." The bureaucratic aim, Foucault says, was to "ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative."[35] In other words, the very utilitarianism that led to the concept of "unproductive sexual

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[34] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).
[35] Foucault (1978), p. 37.

activities," led to the formation of the homosexual as a category. Notions, such as "acts contrary to nature," "debauchery," and "perversion" became reference points, however vague, for discursive regimes tied to legislation, discipline, and punishment. People once considered peripheral – "children wise beyond their years, precocious little girls, ambiguous schoolboys, dubious servants and educators, cruel or maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses" – were suddenly the focus of investigative attention and the desire to diagnose and categorize what came increasingly under the concept of deviance. Such people bore the stamp of "moral folly, "genital neurosis," "aberration of the genetic instinct," "degenerescence," and "physical imbalance."[36] Such terms have a very particular history, however fuzzy and transitional they may be. Indeed, the decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality in Western nations during the late twentieth century is but another moment in a history of sexuality that, in this case, had undergone a shift the moment homosexuals became an effective political faction that could talk back to power within the public sphere. The major lesson here is that organized political activism is required if social minorities are to have a say in how society will integrate them into itself. Civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s taught the same lesson with respect to race relations, and, with respect to ethnicity, it's the case that Hispanics in America have put the brakes on governmental practices that would be persecutory for illegal aliens who have crossed over into the United States from Latin America.

A theorist quite relevant to ethnic and race studies is Hannah Arendt, who, in her groundbreaking *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948) had undertaken a lengthy analysis of the relation of race and ethnicity to the granting and taking away of human rights in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Central to her work is the danger of ethnicity trumping nationality and the citizenship that goes with it. The pan-German movement in the decades even before Hitler came to power was an attempt to delegitimize national borders and certain notions of political belonging to a social body predicated upon citizenship. This tendency worked in the service of imagining a Europe with new borders based on ethnic (if not racial) identity (Germanic *Lebensraum*). The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to violent conflict precisely because the hysteria of ethnic identity (racialized blood

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[36] Foucault (1978), p. 40.

relations) was allowed to trump rationally organized national identities. Arendt had noticed that under Nazism the tendency to privilege ethnicity and race under the pan-German way of thinking made it possible, also, for groups that had national citizenship and hence national identity to be denationalized and their citizenships revoked in the name of race, which came to replace ethnicity as a social category. This led to deportation and mass murder of Jews and Gypsies in various concentration camps that were posing as transit stops for populations that were said to be undergoing "evacuation" and "relocation."

According to Arendt,

> Nations entered the scene of history and were emancipated when peoples had acquired a consciousness of themselves as cultural and historical entities, and of their territory as a permanent home, where history had left its visible traces, whose cultivation was the product of the common labor of their ancestors and whose future would depend upon the course of a common civilization. Wherever nation states came into being, migrations came to an end, while, on the other hand, in the Eastern and Southern European regions the establishment of nation states failed because they could not fall back upon firmly rooted peasant classes.[37]

Whereas in North America one tends to think of nations as absolutely fixed places to which people emigrate from all parts of the globe and mix in terms of what has been called "the melting pot," many Europeans have known their regions to be ever changing with respect to borderlines and have been aware that populations tend to be on the move with respect to migration. The rather sizable Turkish population in Germany today is an example of this. What melts in the European melting pot in some rather visible instances has been the nation state itself and, of course, it is this push and pull between nation and ethnic populations that has given rise to considerable political instability, totalitarian reaction, and as a consequence unimaginable catastrophe. Here, of course, issues of nation, ethnicity/race, and disapora come into play, as evidenced, once more, by war in areas of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

[37] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p. 229.

READING

Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)

Cultural, Global, and Post-Colonial Studies

Cultural studies is not very easy to pin down as any one school, given that it refers to the study of, among other approaches, (i) a specific cultural, historical formation (Paris Dada, the Harlem Renaissance, the New York School of Abstract Expressionism, the Darmstadt School); (ii) critique of culture as an industry and context for industrialization and massification of populations (the Frankfurt School approach); (iii) the study of culture as a signifying system or semiotic (Roland Barthes' study of popular culture in terms of "mythologies," his study of the "fashion system"); (iv) Marxist critique of the media (the penetrating work of Guy Debord); (v) psychoanalytical critique of culture and society (most recently exemplified in work by Slavoj Žižek, for example, *Looking Awry*, *A Plague of Fantasies*, *For They Know Not What They Do*); (vi) analysis of the postmodern condition (by Fredric Jameson, Donna Haraway, David Harvey); (vii) the study of so-called sub-cultures, such as Dick Hebdige's study of Punk culture or Trinh T. Minh ha's examinations of Vietnamese exilic culture, and (viii) the writing of factual social and cultural histories that rectify misconceptions or incorrect assumptions about a subject–for example, Raymond Williams' social history of advertising in *The Long Revolution* delves into the three centuries prior to 1900 in order to show that our assumptions about advertising and industrialization may well be factually inaccurate.[38] Of course, it can hardly be surprising that cultural studies has merged with global and postcolonial studies, something that suggests cultural studies is perhaps always already at work, no matter what field we choose to study.

    Global studies is extremely compatible with culturalist approaches in that globalization refers to recent changes of an economic, political, and

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[38] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1991), *A Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York; Routledge, 2003), David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

cultural sort that make it impossible for us to not realize that the globe has become a unified space linked by means of satellite communications; a continuous streaming of cargo planes, trucks, and ships; and the crossing of national boundaries by an industrial complex in a way that has impacted on the economic sovereignty of nation states, hence disempowering those who are economically disadvantaged when industry decides to phase out jobs in one part of the world and create those very same jobs somewhere else. Globalization, furthermore, has made it plain that capitalism has never really been transformed to the extent people had thought, because globalization is such a convenient strategy for industry to revert to the brutal capitalism of Marx's day when industry engaged in wage slavery: paying barely enough to live on, working workers for unreasonable shifts (24 hours or more is not an atypical shift in non-Western parts of the world), and providing workers nothing in the way of security and benefits, let alone the opportunity to organize into unions and have a say in what happens in the workplace. Globalization, from this perspective, proves Marx and Engels to have been right, which has theoretical consequences in that it disproves Marxists who imagined capitalism had undergone profound transformations that made the application of classical Marxism (as set forth in works like *Das Kapital*) irrelevant.

Additionally, capitalism's exploitation of "surplus labor" abroad and its having callously deserted work forces in first world nations, which had developed equitable labor standards in the workplace, reveals the inadequacy of culturalist forms of Marxist analysis that seem rather superficial and less relevant to the current global situation than the sorts of analyses usually associated with economics. In fact, this tension between classical and cultural forms of Marxist analysis has been at the bottom of various debates in the field, among them, issues concerning human rights and socio-economic justice.

Politically, globalization raises questions about the effectiveness of public spheres, particularly when corporations operate outside those spheres and escape their influence or jurisdiction. However, the European Union may be an instructive example of a different sort of globalized situation. Whereas the EU passes laws and makes policies that affect its member states, those states don't always live up to their agreements and make exceptions where necessary, which suggests that national sovereignty may well take precedence over the EU's governing powers. And yet, there could be no EU if member states didn't cede sovereignty to it, such as occurs with respect to the euro, which is the currency in various (not all) EU member states and

as such regulated by the EU. In other words, sovereignty seems to be a give and take sort of affair within the EU.

Relative to this matter is the question whether there is an EU public sphere. It appears that in fact Europe has many public spheres that are embedded within the various nation states, all of them speaking their own national languages, having their own media (television, newspapers), and developing their own political ideologies and legislative mechanisms and outcomes. Yet all of these public spheres are outflanked by the globalizing architecture of the EU itself, which can be seen as a super-government with the potential to overrule any public sphere and nation at will or even a number of them. Certainly, demonstrations at various summits like the G8 are to some extent protests over the construction of super-governmental structures that will overrule any if not all public spheres – in such cases, to the benefit of the multinationals, if not to globalized restructuring of government generally. Given that literature and the arts as a whole have always addressed themselves in large part to ideas relevant to discussions within the public sphere, globalization poses a threat to the aims of those artists who wish to affect how people see the world and should respond to it in ways that have collective significance. This is very different from the idea, prevalent in Europe, that art is the treasure of past historical moments that can be capitalized as tourist attractions. Here the work of art as fetish object complements the high priced fetish objects in upscale boutiques of major highstreets.

Quite conspicuous is that the globalization of culture has promoted a one-size-fits-all consumer culture of luxury goods. Hello Kitty, Ferrari, and Louis Vuitton are part of the language of global culture and can be found in New York, Tokyo, Dubai, Sydney, or anywhere else one is likely to find upscale shopping outlets. This culture is obviously class based and grounded in status symbols that identify the super rich who are unfettered by national boundaries. As such, it signifies to those who aren't so cosmopolitan that the good life has something to do with mobility, borderless living, existence outside the nation state, which, by the way, mirrors multinational corporate behavior, though it also broaches questions concerning nomadism as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*.

This nomadism also speaks to a certain decentering and hybridzing of culture, as well. This is known as transculturation and is evident in independent music making, recording, and distribution wherein quite a bit of musical collaboration and cross-over among cultures is in evidence, as if music itself were migratory. And, naturally, given the Internet, it is. Notice,

as well, the exporting of Anime books and videos to the West from Japan. In Anime one sees both a unification of all sorts of pulp fictional clichés drawn from the West that are imported into Japanese culture and subjected to a decentering in which we can see split off bits of different cultural traditions: for example, the presence of German text, American pin ups, Ninja warriors, British schoolboys, a French chateau, and a typically Japanese account of mutation following some nuclear catastrophe resulting in beautiful mutant pubescent girls with special powers. The emphasis upon monstrosity and mutation in this graphic fiction is itself a meta-commentary on Anime as culturally transient, hybrid, mutant, and ambivalently perverse. That it is being exported to the West as something Non-Western is, of course, an example of the defamiliarizing nature of the recursivity of transculturation: the return of the Same as Different.

Post-colonial studies, like global studies, is very interested in the question of "who calls the shots," because, as in the case of globalization, colonial populations are being dictated to or having their circumstances determined by historical actors who exist outside their national boundaries and whose interests are largely exploitative. Whereas global studies is quite concerned with transit across the globe – that is to say, with mobility and its expression as power – post-colonial studies has been concerned with inter-cultural relations and their expression in terms of domination and subjection. The most major example of this is Edward Said's foundational study, *Orientalism*, which examines inter-cultural relations between the West and the Middle and Far East.

Said was quite influenced by Michel Foucault's work on knowledge/ power, which was just emerging during the time when Said was at work on his book, and, of course, the constructedness thesis had been of paramount importance already then. But Said had also wanted to work in the manner of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* whereby he could offer a detailed analysis of the historical embeddedness of representational styles within texts that were purporting to depict reality in a mimetic way when, in fact, this mimesis was a hodgepodge of conflicting and biased representations that were held together by the hubris of imperialist superiority and (via Foucault's insights) its mechanisms of surveillance, categorization, valorization, and administration. Orientalism was the official name of the academic study that went hand in glove with projections of administrative power that held the colonized in a state of subjection. Central to Orientalism is the mentality that the Westerner knows the colonized better than the colonized know themselves. This amounts to a sort of theft of another person's identity.

Also important has been the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who has been investigating discursive representations in relation to actual social subjects in non-Western societies and the complexities and contradictions that occur when the two intersect. How are non-Western subjects depicted epistemologically, politically, culturally, and historically? And how do all those depictions interfere with one another and cancel one another out in certain respects and not in others? To make matters even more difficult, Spivak herself mobilizes a vast array of critical discourses drawn from Marx, Freud, Derrida, Foucault, and Antonio Negri that in and of themselves are in rather visible conflict as well, as if to say that no analytic is innocent of representational impasses and defects. Unlike critics who attempt to set out some rather clear models whereby to show the vicissitudes of non-Western identity, Spivak describes the representational impasses in order to better expose a much more vexed discursive problem somewhat akin to Heisenberg's principle, which holds that the very act of observation interferes with the reality one is trying to comprehend. In a famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak accuses both Foucault and Gilles Deleuze of imagining they can occupy a vantage point outside a system wherein exploitation occurs.[39] She, by contrast, is showing that such a perspective is unavailable and that to imagine otherwise is to fall into the sort of colonizing discourse that one ought to avoid. Here, too, the question of knowledge/power is central.

A third major figure in post-colonial studies is Homi Bhabha who introduced a critique of Said, but also his great predecessor Frantz Fanon, both of whom, in Bhabha's view, were too Manichean in terms of a good versus evil model. Hence Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) introduced the concept of an ambivalent psychological identification wherein colonizer and colonized both desire and feel repelled by the other at once.[40] Identity, according to Bhabha, is a liminal psychological zone in which hybrid identifications take place. Given that this liminal zone is a psychic space within which considerable ambivalence is felt if not acted out, the relation between colonized and colonizer is perpetually in movement and typified by moments of resistance and, presumably, subversion. Indeed, the very fundamentals of mutual recognition are made quite

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[39] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[40] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

complex in terms of this ambivalence whereby the colonized subject both does and doesn't recognize the authority if not the identity of the colonizer.

Bhabha's concept of *mimicry* has also been quite influential in that it speaks once more to the vicissitudes of recognition and identification, in this instance, with respect to how the colonized mimics the colonizer. In order to succeed that mimicry must be perfect but also be somehow different from what it is the colonizer does in order that the difference in status between colonizer/colonized be preserved. This is an impossible task for the colonized to fulfill, which reveals itself as a certain resistance to absolute compliance or undecidable sort of Derridean difference that has the potential of deconstructing recognition. Bhabha doesn't seem to be aware of it, but anti-Semitism in France during the early twentieth century made the criticism that French Jews speak French so perfectly that one can see they aren't really French, because a true Frenchman makes grammatical errors. Adolf Hitler makes a similar argument in *Mein Kampf* with respect to how well Jews supposedly only imitate German culture, because, in Hitler's view, they are merely parasitical and have no originality or genius. In other words, mimicry has also been quite embedded in racist discourses within Europe as well.

Post-colonialism and global studies share quite a bit in common, but it is probably best to end on the following observation. The kind of mobility that is easy and liberatory in a very advantageous way for the super rich within the context of multi-nationalism plays out very differently for populations who are very poor or who have been made homeless on account of armed conflicts. There, too, a certain nomadism obtains in terms of people crossing borders in order to find somewhere to relocate, but in such cases statelessness is a curse, not an advantage. Certainly illegal aliens are liberated from what were intolerable conditions when they migrate; however, living in foreign lands illegally is very much like living as a fugitive. One is constantly looking over one's shoulder and living in fear of being caught out. Rather than speak in terms of globalization in such cases, people speak in terms of diaspora, which is a very important dimension of post-colonial study, as it raises questions of human rights, of who gets the privilege to live multinationally, and of what it means to think in terms of borders. What one often sees in the distinction between global and post-colonial study is therefore something that hasn't been mentioned so far: class. At the end of the day, economic class is still a major factor in these sorts of social studies.

READING

Arjun Appandurai, *Modernity at Large* (1996)
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965)
Michael Hardt, *Antonio Negri, Empire* (2001)
Trinh T. Minh ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (1969)