A Short History of Literary Criticism

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Front cover: "Honesty" by Atanas Karaçoban

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INTRODUCTION

It is a critical cliché to start a book on literary theory and criticism by bringing into discussion the name of Matthew Arnold and to claim that what has shown itself as a modality capable enough to reassure and strengthen the role of literature as an agent able to satisfy the intellectual needs of humans is the permanent re-evaluation of the past national and international literary heritage, and the study of the contemporary literary practice, in the context of what Matthew Arnold more than one hundred years ago described as a disinterested effort to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. This endeavour, the Victorian scholar believes, is the 'real estimate', the real approach to literature, leading to its true understanding and to "a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy" to be drawn from literary text. These ideas seem nowadays superfluous and obsolete, being long ago rejected and replaced by the more scientific and methodological critical perspectives of formalism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and other approaches developed by the twentieth century literary theory and criticism.

In the most general terms, the previous and subsequent to Matthew Arnold periods have developed in the field of literary studies three major perspectives of approach to literature, three directions offering theoretical and practical possibilities to study and understand literature, and which are commonly referred to as critical, theoretical, and historical. The three approaches to literature – literary theory (the theory of literature), literary criticism, and literary history (the history of literature) – despite the huge debates over their functions and even necessity, represent three distinct scientific disciplines having their own definitions, characteristics, terminology, objects of study, and methodologies; they are interconnected, having obvious points of identification and separation.

The standard dictionary definition regards history of literature as the diachronic approach to literature (including literary periods, movements, trends, doctrines, and writing practice). Literary criticism is the study/analysis/investigation/approach to particular literary texts on both thematic and structural levels. Literary theory develops and offers general methodologies and principles of research of the literary phenomena.

If the first approach embarks on a diachronic perspective in literary studies and investigates the development of a national and world literature, the second is considered synchronic, and the third one is referred to as universal. In matters of subjectivism and objectivism, the history of literature and, especially, literary theory are designated as sciences, requiring normative and methodological objectivism, whereas literary criticism allows subjectivism to intermingle with objective reasoning, art with science, fusing in one discourse the personal responses to literature and the scientific

research, but what the critical discourse requires most is the accurate balance between the subjective and objective component.

Literary theory, literary criticism, and literary history are interrelated and interdependent, and co-exist in the field of literary studies as bound by their major and common object of study, which is the literary work. Their interrelationship and interdependence form a permanent circular movement from the historically placed literary practice to literary criticism, from literary criticism to literary theory and from literary theory back to criticism. The text – either produced recently or representing an earlier period in literary history – is subject to literary criticism whose concluding reflections (the necessary outcome of literary criticism), if generally accepted and proved valid in connection to other thematically and structurally similar literary texts, emerge into the domain of literary theory, become its general principles of approach to literature, and are applicable to the study of literature in general.

Literary criticism uses them in practical matters of research whenever the study of particular literary works is required, adding to the objective theory the critic's individual response to the text, and the expected result is, on one hand, the development of new or alternative theoretical perspectives, and, on the other hand, the change, promotion, discouragement, revival or in some other ways the influence upon the literary practice of its own historical period, and the influence upon the literary attitude of the reading audience concerning the contemporary and past literary tradition.

Literary criticism is thus not to be regarded as just the analysis or evaluation of particular literary works but also as the formulation of general principles of approach to such works. Co-existing in the field of literary studies with literary history and literary theory, literary criticism combines the theoretical/scientific and practical levels of literary analysis. Criticism as science follows and applies the general principles and methods of research from literary theory, but it also reveals an artistic aspect when the critic personalizes the discourse by his/her own opinions. The true literary critic uses literary theory to evaluate the literary text, and out of the synthesis of the borrowed theory with his/her personal opinions the critic develops other theoretical perspectives while keeping the proper balance between the objective and subjective component, between the use of theory and personal contribution. This relationship of the three approaches to literature suggests that literary history is more of a distinct discipline, standing apart, whereas literary theory and literary criticism are stronger connected, hence their consideration as one discipline under the generic name of 'literary theory and criticism'. However, this relationship of the three approaches to literature also points to the fact that literary theory, literary criticism, and the history of literature are parts of a single cognitive system, a single discourse whose aim is to form or facilitate a particular type of communication which involves the producer of literature and its receiver.

Literature, a cultural phenomenon, one of the arts, the verbal art, is in the simplest way defined as imaginative writing and is likewise better understood as a system of elements framed within the boundaries of a communicative situation. The six elements in communication, in general, as identified by Roman Jakobson in *Linguistics and Poetics* (1963), are

<div align="center">

Context

Addresser   Message   Addressee

Contact

Code

</div>
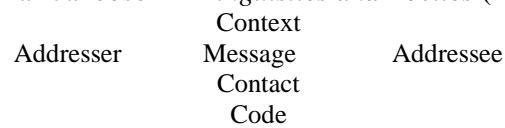
In his book on literary criticism[1], Raman Selden gives an interesting interpretation of Jakobson's diagram, and changes it according to the purpose of literary criticism. Considering that 'contact' can be omitted in discussing literature, "since contact is usually through the printed word (except in drama)", Selden rewrites the diagram as

<div align="center">

Context

Writer   Writing   Reader

Code

</div>
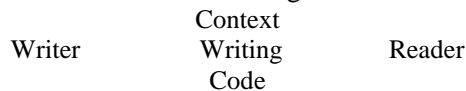
and then places a number of critical theories according to their focus on a particular element in the diagram:

<div align="center">

Marxist

Romantic   Formalistic   Reader-oriented

Structuralist

</div>
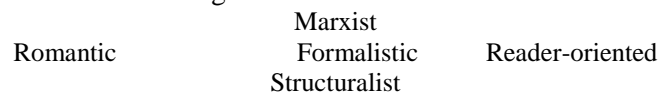
Indeed, the six elements in communication, as identified by Roman Jakobson, each having a corresponding function of language (referential, emotive, poetic, conative, phatic, and metalingual), receive in literary communication their equivalent parts ('addresser' or 'sender' is the 'author' or 'writer', 'message' is the 'text', 'addressee' or 'receiver' is the 'reader', and so on) which constitute the elements of the literary system.

Guy Cook identifies and places these elements in a simple but comprehensive structure of the literary communicative situation[2]:

<div align="center">

Society

Author   Text   (Performer)   Reader

Texts   Language

</div>

Every literary work represents a text, the product of an author, known to us or anonymous; the literary work addresses a reader; its material is language; it is produced in relation to a certain social background; and it always exists in relation to other texts that represent previous literary traditions or the contemporary to the given literary work period. The literary work in itself and the different relations between the text and other elements of the literary system gave birth to different theories, trends and schools in modern literary theory and criticism. As a result, the contemporary literary

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[1] Raman Selden. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, pp. 3-4.

[2] Guy Cook. *Discourse and Literature: The Interplay of Form and Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 128.

critic faces a multitude of schools and theories that correspond to the categories from the structure of the literary system. Instead of heavily borrowing ideas and providing quotations from the existing critical and theoretical studies, the critic may relate and apply them to his/her particular matters of concern. A more skilled critic considers the essence of different theories, modifying it according to the specificity of the research, and, by providing personal points of view and ideas, the critic progresses to certain interpretative modalities of his/her own.

Concerning the most important critical theories, trends and schools, and according to Guy Cook's literary communicative situation, in the field of literary theory and criticism the 'author' is the matter of concern of literary scholarship and biography; 'text' is studied by formalism, linguistics, linguistic criticism, and stylistics; 'performer' by acting theory; 'reader' by phenomenology, hermeneutics, reception theory, reader-oriented and reader-response theory, as well as by psychoanalysis, feminism, and post-structuralism; 'society' by Marxist theories, cultural materialism, new historicism, and feminism; 'texts' by structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction; and corresponding to 'language' are the theories of linguistics and stylistics. Literature on the whole and the particular elements of the literary system are also the matters of critical concern of rhetoric, semiotics, Bakhtinian criticism, archetypal and myth criticism, ethnic literary studies, racial studies, colonial, postcolonial and transnational studies, cultural studies, environmentalism and ecocriticism, and other contemporary trends and schools in humanities and in literary theory and criticism.

These theories, trends and schools represent the twentieth century and the contemporary scientific, objective, and methodological literary theory and criticism. The process of development of world literary theory and criticism has its origins in ancient period, whereas concerning the rise and development of the theoretical and critical discourse on literature in Britain, one should consider Renaissance and its subsequent periods until the rise of the formal approach to literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. All the way through the periods, including twentieth century, the field of literary theory and criticism reveals a threefold perspective of development. First, one may argue that the development of literary criticism is dependent on literary genres and movements that are dominant in different periods. This is the case of literary criticism especially for the periods until twentieth century. Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch[3] exemplify this aspect by the theory of Classicism that "should be understood as a generalization of the drama and epic of the time". Similarly, the biographical method in criticism is viewed as "one of the effects of Romanticism, which drew

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[3] Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch. *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century: Structuralism, Marxism, Aesthetics of Reception, Semiotics*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1995, p. 1-2.

largely on autobiographical material". Another example would be that the psychological novel which "is responsible for the psychological approach in literary criticism". Also, "the view has been defended that Russian Formalism is indebted to the ideals and slogans of Futurism." Second, which is mainly the case of literary scholarship in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, trends and schools in literary criticism are also related to, or rather determined by, the new developments in science, philosophy, and society. Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch again: "There is an unmistakable influence of Freudian psychology in psychologically-oriented literary criticism" and "Marxist literary criticism has been intertwined with particular political and sociological views." Also, the "search for a literary system or structure has certainly been inspired by *Gestalt* psychology. Russian Formalism is not only indebted to Futurism, but also to new developments in linguistics. Third, argue these critics, where some trends in literary criticism "are closer to new trends in creative literature, others are directly related to current developments in scholarship and society", there are trends which "are somewhere in between" or rather emerging, as some twentieth century trends in literary criticism, from within the interpretative perspectives of the discipline of literary theory and criticism itself (for instance, Narratology developed from within Structuralism).

In most general terms, with focus on art and in this respect on literature as one of the arts, it is art criticism that provides the analysis, study, and evaluation of individual works of art, as well as the formulation of general principles for the examination of such works. M. H. Abrams, in his celebrated *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), has pointed out that all critical theories, as different as they could be, concentrate around four constituents, or major elements, that represent "the total situation of a work of art". These are (1) the *work*, that is, the artist product, the thing made by the maker; (2) the *artist*, that is, the creator of the work; (3) the *universe*, that is, the nature which is imitated, and, if art is viewed as imitation, the materials of the real world or the world of ideas which become the substance of the work and out of which the work may be thought to take its subjects; and (4) the *audience*, that is, the addressee, to whom the work is addressed. According to Abrams, the concern with one of these four elements results in a special critical theory on art. Thus, the critic that focuses exclusively on the work of art and views it as a self-contained entity, approaching art basically in its own terms, follows the so-called *objective theory*. If art is discussed in relation to the artist, the work being understood as the expression of the maker's own psychological and emotional states, the approach is called the *expressive theory*. To view art in terms of universe, which is in terms of what is imitated in the work of art, is to follow the *mimetic theory*. Finally, to regard art in relation to audience, studying the effects of the work of art on the receiver, is to follow the *rhetorical* or *pragmatic theory*.

Furthermore, Abrams believes, when viewed diachronically, the development of art and art criticism in the Western world reveals these theories as dominant in different historical periods. In ancient classical age, the most characteristic theory was the mimetic theory, with Aristotle as its promoter; however, with Horace's idea of art as *utile et dulce*, as instruction and pleasure, the pragmatic theory emerged in ancient period as another dominant perspective to view art in critical terms. From Antiquity through the most of the eighteenth century these two theories remained dominant, in particular the pragmatic theory with its focus on the art's usefulness and its effects on audience, although in Renaissance and especially in Neoclassical period the principle of imitation was also central to the evaluation of art.

The linearity of the aesthetic attitude of the Western world governed by the view of art as a major source of instruction mingled with delight and pleasure – and thus subject to normative prescriptions – and by the confidence in the imitative nature of art was broken by the Romantic rejection of tradition and rules by the claim of the freedom of artistic expression, the revival of the innovative principle in art, and the emphasis on the artist's own emotional and psychological states. With Romanticism, the artist became the centre of attention, his/her power of imagination, creative flight, sensibility, subjective and psychological experience expressed in the work of art, and the expressive theory emerged as the most characteristic of the Romantic attitudes towards art. Also dominant in the nineteenth century and later in the twentieth century was the objective theory on art, based on the idea of art for its own sake, art *per se*, the work being viewed as separate entity, complex enough in its range of symbols and imagery, and its patterns of structure and form, to be a matter of critical concern in itself. However, the present diversity of approaches to art keeps the contemporary critic aware of all the four major theories in his/her endeavour to evaluate art.

A closer look at the rise of the critical tradition in Britain reveals a process of development during certain periods or stages generally corresponding to periods and movements in English art and literature. British literary criticism, in particular, reveals some concerns with literature in medieval period, but its actual beginnings are found in Renaissance, and its development and consolidation occurred during the subsequent periods of Restoration, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Victorian Age, as to establish itself in the twentieth century as a scientific discipline.

The major twentieth century and contemporary approaches to literature reified by certain trends include the formal approach to literature (Formalism, New Criticism and Structuralism), approach through reading (hermeneutics, phenomenology, and reader-oriented theories), the approach through socio-cultural context (Marxist theories, cultural materialism, and New Historicism), the feminist approach, the psychoanalytical approach, poststructuralism and deconstruction, reception theory, stylistics, semiotics, archetypal and myth criticism, cultural studies, ethnic and racial studies,

postcolonial and transnational studies, environmentalism and ecocriticism, and others. Indeed an age of criticism, the twentieth century gave rise to a great number of critical schools and trends offering at the beginning of a new millennium a great number of approaches characterised by complexity of methods and objects of study, richness of their systems, scientific rigour of theory and its practical application to the elements of the literary system.

The present book is a survey tracing the development of Western, with a special emphasis on English, literary theory and criticism. It should be useful to a more general reader or anyone concerned with the theoretical and practical consideration and understanding of literature, in general, and of English literary phenomenon, in particular, and whose knowledge on certain aspects of literature and literary criticism in Britain might be enriched by the reading of the present book. However, the primary aim of the book regards the needs of students in their literature classes, aiming at introducing them to the domain of literary theory and criticism, and the book meets the requirements of a teaching aid, while also representing an attempt of academic research in the field of literary theory and criticism.

The book is conceived in two distinct parts. First, considering the development of English literary theory and criticism in relation to the history of literary practice, the present book focuses diachronically on English literary criticism from its beginnings to the end of nineteenth century, and it covers some of the most important periods and experiences of English critical history, including Renaissance, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Victorian Age. In this respect, besides acquiring the knowledge of literary terminology, theoretical and critical perspectives on textual and critical typology belonging to different periods, movements, trends and genres, the reader of the present book learns the characteristics and literary conventions of certain movements, trends and genres, the main writers and major works, and the literary interaction and continuity of the given periods. Second, the present book regards the twentieth century critical discourse, and the reader of the present book is invited to discover its major European and not only trends and schools, with a special emphasis on Anglo-American critical tradition in literary studies, and the reader learns the basic terminology, major concerns, methods of research and objects of study, the theoretical and critical perspectives of certain critics, and the origins, continuity and interaction of the main approaches to literature reifying a number of schools and trends in contemporary literary theory and criticism.

In both cases, the major texts in the history of critical thought are placed in the contexts of their time, and the periods and trends in literary criticism are presented in relation to their origin, representatives, critical concerns, terminology, methodology, importance and effectiveness. In both cases, the special emphasis is on the growth of English literature-related critical and theoretical thought leading to the rise, development and consolidation of a national critical tradition.

1.

The Foundations of Literary Criticism

Petru Golban

Preliminaries

All the way throughout its history, literary criticism reveals a threefold perspective of development: first, for the periods before twentieth century, literary criticism is dependent on some dominant in those periods trends and movements of creative literature (for instance, classical or Neoclassical criticism, Romantic criticism, and others); second, especially in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emerge trends in criticism which are also related to new developments in science, philosophy, and society (for instance, historical criticism, realistic criticism, Marxist criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, feminist criticism, and others); third, in twentieth century, some trends in literary criticism were developed from within the critical practice itself (for instance, narratology in the structuralist approach, or deconstruction in the poststructuralist approach to literature).

Starting from the hypothesis that from its beginnings in Renaissance to the end of nineteenth century, British literary criticism is dependent on and closely connected to literary practice, or even considered as part of literary world, the main stages in the history of English criticism correspond actually to the main phases of the literary phenomenon represented by periods and movements. Until twentieth century, literary criticism is conceived as belonging to a literary movement or trend, as being determined by literary activity and in its turn determining the literary practice, and finally as representing a process of rise and development through certain stages which correspond to the major periods of English literature, where for the most of the periods, with some exceptions in Victorian Age, the major critics were also the major writers of those periods or movements.

Namely, Renaissance period and Renaissance criticism, represented by Philip Sidney the writer and critic; Restoration period and Restoration criticism represented by John Dryden; he is followed by Alexander Pope and Henry Fielding, who, among others, represent the eighteenth century English literature: the former as a Neoclassical poet and critic and the latter as one of the founders of the English novel writing tradition, the criticism of both revealing the peculiarities of their particular literary experience. The major Romantic writers William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley are also the exponents of the Romantic aesthetic doctrine. In Victorian Age, Matthew Arnold is a poet and a major critical voice, but the period already gave professional critics on art and literature, who, like John Ruskin and Walter Pater, without being writers, were theoreticians advocating different literary and critical movements in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Renaissance, Restoration, the eighteenth century Neoclassicism and the rise of the novel, Romanticism, and Victorian Age – the major periods in the history of English literature – represent also the major stages in the history of English literary criticism preceding the twentieth century. The

study of the development of criticism in England from its beginnings in Renaissance until its consolidation as a scientific approach in the twentieth century is to be conceived in two directions: (1) present diachronically the affirmation of certain critical doctrines, the major critical voices, their interdependence and influence, their similarities and differences; and (2) the critical act in itself by the textual approach to the fragments from a number of major critical works discussing their origins, form, concern, main critical ideas and the characteristics of the critical discourse, where metacriticism is the method of critical examination of criticism itself, the criticism of criticism, the analysis of meaning and organization of the critical reasoning.

In the examination of the critical texts that represent the periods in English literary criticism from Renaissance to Victorian Age, one may consider four steps: the period, the critic, the critical text in general, and some fragments from the critical text. First, given the interdependence of criticism and literature, the focus is on the period and its literary practice, where the condition and characteristics of literature are discussed not in general, but in relation to those aspects that would better reveal the condition of criticism. For instance, in relation to Philip Sidney and his critical text *Defence of Poesie*, the focus is not on Renaissance or Elizabethan period in general, but on the condition of lyrical poetry in that period, namely pastoral poems and the sonnet from the second half of the sixteenth century, and the rise of the Puritan movement.

Second, given the fact that most of the critics are also writers, the focus is on the literary activity of the critic, his place and interaction in contemporary literature, again concerning only those aspects that are related to and revelatory for the critical discourse. In case of Sidney, for example, the major characteristics of his poetry and the Puritan attacks on his writings would help the understanding of his critical treatise *Defence of Poesie*.

Third, the critical text must be known in general, including the origin, form, influences, and the main ideas expressed in it. Finally, some fragments would certainly provide a more clear understanding of the critical judgement and reveal its main characteristics and the type of criticism it belongs to.

The approach to these critical texts, following successively the focus on the period, critic, text in general, and fragments from the texts, would provide answers to a number of questions about the critical texts, which are judged both diachronically as well as from a comparative perspective: (1) *Can we consider a given text to be of literary criticism?*; (2) *Did the critic make conscious attempts at writing literary criticism?*; (3) *What is the origin of the critical text?*; (4) *What is the form of the critical text?*; (5) *What are the main characteristics of English literary criticism for the periods preceding twentieth century?*; and (6) *What is the prevalence of the main characteristics in relation to each text?*.

In this respect, one may start with Sir Philip Sidney and his *Defence of Poesie* to understand the condition of English criticism in its first phase, which is Renaissance. John Dryden and his *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* would better show the condition of English criticism in Restoration. The eighteenth century criticism dependent on Neoclassical principles can be better seen in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man*, and the rise of the English novel in the same century receives a critical expression in Henry Fielding's Preface to *Joseph Andrews*. The Romantic period in the history of English literary criticism would be better revealed by focusing on William Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*. The condition of literary criticism in the last before twentieth century stage in the development of English criticism, which is Victorian Age, might be better disclosed by the assessment of Matthew Arnold's *The Study of Poetry*, John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*.

In the Western world, the literary theory and criticism originated in ancient Greece and Rome, continued in Middle Ages, which also showed some attempts at criticism in other countries of Europe, including England.

Ancient and Medieval Criticism

In the Western tradition, the first expounders of the critical theories on literature were the ancient scholars Aristotle, Plato, Longinus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and Lucian among the Greeks; and Horace, Cicero, Seneca, Petronius, Quintilian, and Macrobius among the Romans. Among them all, paving the way for the future systemic studies on literature, the foremost and highly influential were Aristotle, Plato, and Horace.

In ancient period, the literary criticism emerged when first verbal artworks of imaginative invention originally performed orally were encoded in written texts, which occurred in classical Greece in the sixth to fourth centuries BCE. The verbal works of art became literature, and this led to coming into being of literary criticism, says the critic Andrea Nightingale. Concerning the first critical voices raising questions about the value of literary texts, and apart from the fourth century BCE Athenian philosopher Plato and his pupil Aristotle, there were the Greek critics named *kritai* ('judges') emerging in the same fourth century BCE. As described by Andrea Nightingale, these critics

> were elite, cultured men who studied literary texts as artistic, social, and ideological discourses. These individuals set out to define the differences between good and bad literature, and indeed, to analyse the very nature and status of literary fiction. They raised the questions that have dominated literary criticism right up to the current day: What is fictional representation, and how does it differ from the real world? Can fiction tell the truth? If so, what is the nature of fictional truth? How does the reader or audience affect the reception of artistic texts? And how, in turn, does a text or artwork influence the audience's response? Who decides, and on what grounds, which texts are good and worth canonizing? Should good literature be defined in technical and aesthetic terms? Or should we judge artworks in their social and political contexts, as discourses embedded within ideological systems?[4]

The first articulation and examination of the issues related to imaginative writing were done in a highly theoretical fashion as embodied in the philosophical discourse, and also an integral part of this literary criticism – since in ancient Greece the epics, plays, and odes were performed to audiences – was the art of rhetoric, the discipline developing as the result of the great attention given by the ancients to oratory. Among the proponents of this rhetorical criticism the most important were Demetrius, Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and the Sophists.

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[4] Andrea Nightingale. "Mimesis: ancient Greek literary theory" in Patricia Waugh, ed. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 37.

In the Greek world, the fourth century *Poetics* by Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was the first important critical treatise on literature and for centuries to come has proved to be the most influential one, especially starting with Renaissance due to the revival of ancient classical tradition in that period. It is said that Aristotle also wrote a critical treatise on Homer's epic, which has not survived. In *Poetics*, applying a scientific method of analysis to literature, the ancient Greek philosopher discusses epic in relation to tragedy, as well as poetry, which Aristotle treats as the idealised representation of human action.

The main focus is on tragedy, and Aristotle discriminates a number of major elements, such as tragic character and related to its status *peripeteia* ('reversal of fortune'), *anagnorisis* ('recognition of an unknown person or fact'), and *hamartia* ('tragic mistake'). Aristotle also discusses the unity of action in the genre of tragedy, for which a unified and complete structure with a beginning, middle and end is required, and which is represented by literary *mimesis* ('imitation'). For Aristotle, tragedy is

> an imitation of an action that is serious, and complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with every kind of artistic ornament, the various kinds being found in different parts of the play; it represents men in action rather than using narrative, through pity and fear affecting the proper *catharsis* of these emotions.

The most important term in Aristotle's theory of literary imitation is *catharsis* ('purgation' or 'purification'). Unlike poetry, tragic literature is a serious representation or imitation of some human actions or experiences of universal, mythic relevance for human condition. The tragic projection of human life arouses a set of emotions – namely fear and pity for the tragic hero's experience consisting of a reversal of fortune, a fall into misery – leading the audience to the pleasurable and, at the same time, healthy experience of *catharsis*. Subject to critical debate for centuries, the term has received medical, ethical and cognitive interpretations, but for Andrea Nightingale *catharsis* is

> an emotional rather than a cognitive experience. On this view, the tragic plot and characters arouse our pity and fear to a very high degree, but end up releasing and purging these very emotions, thus producing pleasure.[5]

Different from Aristotle is Plato (ca. 427-347 BCE), whose perhaps most difficult concept is 'idealism', naming the doctrine of an eternal realm of perpetual Forms that shape the material and changeable world of the humans. Contrary to his pupil's, that is, Aristotle's, emphasis on material aspects of the world, and against the notions of the Sophists, Plato develops

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

a dualistic philosophy in which he differentiates between a metaphysical sphere and a physical realm, emphasising the spiritual over the concrete, the superiority of the metaphysical over the physical, of a 'world of ideas' in relation to which the parts and aspects of the human, material world are nothing but mere copies. The 'really real', as Plato puts it, meaning true reality, exists only in the metaphysical, spiritual existence that is beyond the physical world of the humans, which is a world of 'becoming' or 'appearance' that resembles only the true reality residing in the metaphysical realm of ideas.

In other words, the metaphysical world – that can be grasped only by the philosophical activity of the mind – is the truly real sphere of existence and represents the realm of reality, whereas the physical world just appears to be real and represents the realm of appearance.

Literature is viewed by Plato in relation to the physical, material, human realm of appearance, and, in discussing literature and writers, Plato introduces the concept of *mimesis*, which proved to be his major contribution to the rise of the discipline of literary criticism. The term is difficult to translate since Plato himself uses it in several different ways. The term is often translated as 'imitation' or 'miming', and, for Andrea Nightingale, Plato meant by it imitation or, more precisely, artistic representation of events and agents in the world in the medium of language, where "artistic representation has a different status from the people, objects, and events in the ordinary world: literature does not depict the *reality* of its objects, but rather portrays the way they *appear*."[6] *Mimesis* represents thus things in the realm of appearance, of non-reality; literature does not represent the real, metaphysical world, and literature as *mimesis* is just another appearance of appearances in the physical world, another image of the things in the physical world, a copy or imitation of the copies or appearances forming the physical, material world. Using the example of a bed – in that divinity creates the idea of the bed, the craftsman creates an actual bed, and the artist imitates that actual bed – Plato argues that the poet, or artist in general, offers, as understood by Richard Dutton, the verbal or visual versions of the bed, which are "less satisfactory even than the practical reality of the carpenter's bed and infinitely far-removed from the intellectual truth of the idea of the bed". In other words, according to Plato's 'theory of ideas or forms', "everything that exists in this world is an imperfect copy of an 'ideal' object" that exists intellectually, metaphysically, mathematically, outside the world as humans perceive it; in this respect, artists and poets produce creations that are "mere copies of copies of 'ideal' reality, are third-hand distortions of truth, valueless and indeed potentially misleading"[7].

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[7] Richard Dutton. *An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1984, p. 17.

In this way, by representing false, not real values and ideas, literature is morally and theologically harmful, and does damage to the receiver of literature, who accepts and internalizes things which are false but taken as true. Thus, Plato confers to poets an inferior status, aggravated also by using 'untrustworthy' intuition rather than reason, and banishes them from his Republic. Towards the end of Book 2 and the beginning of Book 3 of the *Republic*, Plato also attacks poets for suggesting that divinity might not be perfect in all respects:

> he [the poet] must say that what gods did was right and just, and that those who suffered were the better for being punished (…) it is most expressly to be denied that gods, being good, can be the cause of evil to anyone – this may neither be said nor sung, in either prose or verse, by any person either young or old, if our commonwealth is to be properly governed. Such a story would be impious, injurious and ill-conceived.

Aristotle defended the poets against his teacher's accusations, asserting that the more one imitates the better the person becomes, and that the poet does not merely imitate things in nature, but presents them as they should be, coming nearer the ideal. By his famous distinction between poetry and history – in that "poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" – Aristotle emphasises that poetry deals with the universal, having universal characters and plots. Also, unlike Plato, who conceives art and literature in relation to the socio-political sphere and their effects on audiences in Athens, claiming that art should be judged by political and ethical standards, Aristotle separates art and literature from politics, ideology and ethics. According to Andrea Nightingale, Aristotle

> introduces a powerful new idea, one that has had a major impact on Western thinking. As he suggests, we should not judge literature in ethical or political terms; rather, literature occupies a sphere that is separate from that of ethics and politics. Good literature is a matter of technique and form, and should not be assessed in terms of political correctness. Literature inhabits an aesthetic sphere that has its own rules and standards.[8]

Apart from founding the main critical precepts for the theorising of drama, Aristotle and Plato provide antecedents to the contemporary narrative approach. Plato (*Republic*, Book 3) and Aristotle (*Poetics*, chapters 5, 24, and 26) trace the opposition between dramatic poetry and narrative poetry, or dramatic mode (*mimesis*) and narrative mode (*diegesis*), these modes standing for the manner of telling a story, or *lexis* for Plato, as opposed to

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[8] Andrea Nightingale. "Mimesis: ancient Greek literary theory" in Patricia Waugh, ed. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 40.

logos, representing everything that is to be told. The difference between the two scholars is that Plato distinguishes three modes of poetic discourse: *mimesis* (the drama, that is the construction of the dramatic representation within stage conditions), pure *diegesis* or narrative form (represented by the dithyramb, a Greek choric hymn describing the adventures of Dionysius), and the mixed mode (the epic, where the author tells the story in his own name, that is, the pure narrative form of the story, combined with the imitative principle of drama, that is the direct rendering of events by the poet who assumes the role of the character and speaks in his name, as in Homer's dialogues, for example), whereas Aristotle hypothesizes about the existence of only two, ignoring the pure form. Both of them, however, have a common point in showing the opposition between the dramatic (more imitative) and narrative mode of the literary discourse as story.

The general differences between Plato's and Aristotle's opinions on art and literature have given the dichotomy 'Platonic' versus 'Aristotelian' in naming two types of literary criticism, the former being extrinsic, idealistic, moralistic, concerned with the usefulness of the work for non-artistic purposes, and the latter intrinsic, judicial, formal, text-centred, and ignoring the social and moral context.

Different from Plato and Aristotle is Longinus, the first important critic of the Christian era, who, in the critical essay *On the Sublime* (probably third century AD or earlier), acclaims imagination, passion, high concepts, eloquent style and elevated diction, and finds them as the major sources of the sublime in literature. According to David H. Richter, unlike Plato,

> who concerned himself with common features of artistic works in general, Longinus is interested in a special quality, sublimity or elevation, which is possessed by some works but not others. Unlike Aristotle, whose poetics dealt with the particular characteristics of different literary forms, Longinus's sublimity is a quality that transcends generic boundaries. It can be found in drama or epic or lyric – or even in rhetoric or history or theology.[9]

Conversant in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, Longinus quotes from Genesis, introducing in the critical discussion a new and different literary tradition. Longinus is also the first critic to define a literary classic and attach importance to a single element in the text. He is not interested in tragedy, epic, or natural history of literature, but in a single element, a phrase, or a passage in the text, which gives pleasure and is the source of the sublime. As defined by Longinus, the sublime consists of "a certain distinction and excellence in expression, and that it is from no other source

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[9] David H. Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989, p. 78.

than this that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown".

Longinus gives the impression that he 'preaches' the sublime, which he considers in relation to the expression of strong feelings as well as a matter of reader response, his theory being thus both expressive and affective. Longinus has been considered by many as the first Romantic critic and the first comparative critic, as Vernon Hall does in emphasising Longinus' assessment of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew literature, and in summarising Longinus' five sources of the true excellence in literature as "a firm grasp of ideas"; "vehement and inspired emotion"; "the proper construction of figures"; "notable language"; and "general effects of dignity and elevation"[10].

In the Latin world, the most important and influential critic was Horace (65-8 BCE), or Quintus Horatius Flaccus, with his celebrated *Ars Poetica* ('Art of Poetry'), also referred to as *De Arte Poetica* and *Epistle to the Pisos*. Written as an epistle in verse, as a letter of advice to two young men having poetic ambitions, Horace's text is traditionally divided, as by David H. Richter, into three parts: "lines 1-41 are on poesis or subject matter; lines 42-294 on poema or technique; and lines 295-476 on poeta or the poet"; but "in fact, Horace's wildfire ideas always outrace any system or organization that can be devised, and the reader should be prepared for rapid and unexpected transitions from one topic to another".[11]

Horace's critical treatise acclaims the Greek models and prescribes ways of writing to the poet. But, unlike Plato and Aristotle, who were primarily theoreticians and educationalists, Horace, according to Richard Dutton, is "less subtle, less concerned with philosophic niceties, more practical and, in many ways, more directly influential"[12], and more normative and prescriptive, one could add. Unlike Plato dealing with literature as imitation and its value, and Aristotle discussing tragedy and literature in their constituent parts and function as *catharsis*, Horace is rather concerned with nature and art in literary composition, in relation to the latter aspect the primary concept being that of literary 'decorum', meaning the suitability of the form, style, tone, metre, subject-matter, character in relation to the nature and content of the literary work as a whole. The concepts of decorum, *dues ex machina*, craftsmanship, as well as the respect to the genre, order, plausibility, common sense, moral value, and other principles postulated by Horace, are actually rules laid down for the poets, as Horace himself, as a rhetorical or pragmatic critic, declares:

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[10] Vernon Hall. *A Short History of Literary Criticism*. London: The Merlin Press, 1964, pp. 16-19.

[11] David H. Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989, p. 66.

[12] Richard Dutton. *An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1984, p. 24.

I will teach the poet his duties and obligations; I will tell him where to find his resources, what will nourish and mould his poetic gift, what he may, and may not, do with propriety, where the right course will take him, and where the wrong.

Horace agrees with Aristotle that a particular genre should have its proper themes, techniques, and effects, but for him the genre does not come into existence by the laws of nature and from natural human impulses, as for Aristotle, it just exists as predefined by tradition and rules that every author must obey. Horace is, unlike Plato and Aristotle, a worldlier philosopher, for whom the author's reward is not material, but spiritual, namely fame and praise, since Horace regards the poet not as a private man but as a public figure with a definite social status and as subject to rules and conventions.

Horace's concepts and rules prescribed to the poets became guiding principles and normative prescriptions for the literary practice of the later Renaissance period and, especially, of the Classicism and Neoclassicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Apart from decorum, mention should be made of Horace's emphasis on the importance of tradition, which, if followed, gives credibility and consistency to the poet's work. Thus, where imitation for Plato and Aristotle means the imitation of nature, for Horace it also means imitation of the writers who have established literary patterns and traditions. According to Richard Harland,

Horace's importance to the history of literary theory lies not in any profoundly original ideas, but in the new twist that he gave to the ideas of Aristotle. When the concepts of Classical criticism were taken up again in the Renaissance and Neoclassical periods, it was through Horace that the *Poetics* was viewed; and Horace's reinterpretation of Aristotle then came to be carried even further in the same direction.[13]

Apart from emphasising the importance of decorum in poetic composition and that of tradition, Horace's work also discusses the nature and function of poetry, examines the types of poetry as well as of character, and, while discussing art and poetry primarily in terms of their effects on the audience, it introduces the idea of instruction and entertainment, where phrases like *utile et dulce* ('useful and sweet') and *aut prodesse aut delectare* ('either to profit or to please') have definitely entered the language of literary criticism, or language in general as proverbs and catch phrases.

The Middle Ages saw a theological interpretation of imaginative writing, which contributed to the decline of the critical interest in literature and even to the distrust of literature. The poetry and literature on the whole were attacked by the ecclesiastical theologians, among whom St. Augustine

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[13] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 18.

(354-430), on moral and religious grounds, and in general were regarded as subdued to theology and philosophy, as by Isidore of Seville (sixth and seventh centuries) who discussed types of literature based on biblical forms. Rejecting the classical literary tradition as the product of a pagan culture, the ecclesiastical critics gave rise to hermeneutics by assuming the task to achieve the proper interpretation of the Holly Bible, which they saw together with nature – the 'Great Book of God' – and allegory as the main ways to know and understand God. The allegory, in particular, applied as a reading technique and a method of literary interpretation in order to find the symbolic meanings of the holly texts, is important for being the earliest manifestation of the hermeneutical approach. Richard Harland attributes the development of allegorical criticism to Alexandrian theologians, mainly Orige, and later to St. Augustine, and sees the allegorical interpretation as a system

> established for reading the Bible on three, then four, separate levels of meaning. But on any level above that of literal meaning, several different readings could be equally valid. The only criterion limiting possible interpretations was Augustine's 'principle of charity', according to which all interpretations had to be consistent with Christian teaching. (…) such wide allowance made perfect sense in terms of the natural Christian assumption that Holy Scripture had been written down under direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit. The intentions and knowledges of a particular human writer were irrelevant when the writer was merely the channel for a higher authority.[14]

However, it is not to be forgotten the fact that the attempts made by the medieval scholars to develop true interpretations of the Scriptures resulted in original ideas, as to mention just St. Augustine's speculation on the basic elements of signification, or his advancement of a theory of signs to a theory of language in interpreting the Holly Books, offering, in *On Christian Doctrine*, the famous distinction between things and signs, where a sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression that the thing itself makes upon the senses.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), another important medieval cleric and scholar, revived some of the abandoned Aristotelian ideas and combined them with the contemporary Christian principles. Concerning literary criticism, he is known for having developed the so-called notion of 'fourfold typology', which is summarized as the 'first literal' (what happens at the level of the words themselves), 'second allegorical' (the correspondence between scripture and the physical world), 'third moral' (the moral message of scripture) and the 'fourth anagogic' (the interpretation of scripture which points to the end of this world and the eternal glory which lies beyond it).

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[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 24-28.

Also, in the context of the general concern with literature-related religious issues, there were strong concerns with rhetoric and grammar, in relation to which the medieval critical discussion included also the problems of dialects and vernacular literature, and developed specific concerns related to the structural level of poetry, namely the organization of versification in Latin, the verse structure, and different technical aspects, including beginning, amplification, condensation, ending, and others. Of a special critical interest were also the problems of figurative language, diction, style and its adaptation to a particular type of literary work.

Among the critics dealing with such structural matters of poetic composition were the major poets of the late medieval period, in particular the fourteenth century Italian writers Petrarch, Dante (in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, c. 1305), and Boccaccio (in *Genealogia Decorum Gentilium*, c. 1366). They discussed not only the problems of language appropriate to poetry, the structure of poetry and the nature of versification, but also the nature of the poet, and poetry as a form of philosophy. Against theological teachings, these writers-critics defended the value of poetry as an independent art, argued that the moral-religious and literary attitude should be separated and that the ancient models should be followed, in this way reflecting the interest in classical ideas of imitation and decorum, and actuating Renaissance criticism.

It has been pointed, however, that many of the medieval critics might have known little or nothing of classical ideas, as is the case of Dante (1265-1321) who employed scholastic modes of thought and its terminology to discuss his own work (in a letter to Can Grande Della Scala, which was meant as an introduction to *Paradiso*) and the frequently examined in medieval period problem of whether the native, vernacular language, rather than Latin, is suitable for producing literature of value (in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*). In the same manner, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), the father of Italian prose, is original in his ideas on poetry, which for him is independent art, not an imitation, but the creation of worlds otherwise unknown, as he states in *The Definition of Poetry*:

> [poetry] proceeds from the bosom of God, and few, I find, are the souls in whom this gift is born; indeed so wonderful a gift it is that true poets have always been the rarest of men. This fervour of poesy is sublime in its effects: it implies the soul to a longing for utterance; it brings forth strange and unheard-of creations of the mind.

Still, one may argue, as Vernon Hall does, there are vivid connections between Dante's views of literature and ancient criticism, as to mention just the simplification of the distinction between tragedy and comedy when Dante calls his work a comedy because it begins horribly with Hell and ends pleasingly with Heaven; also, in claiming that the purpose of

his poem is to "remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity", Dante fulfils, according to Hall,

> the Horatian prescription to teach and delight as the Middle Ages understood it. The teaching is ethical or Christian; the delight comes from the adornment of words and from the fact that goodness in itself is delightful.[15]

In England, criticism was of little note in medieval period, except some attempts at literary theory belonging to Bede (673-735), the most important of early English scholars, and to John of Salisbury (c.1115-1180), one of the most important Latin scholars of the period. Related to literary criticism are Bede's *De Orthographia* (a Latin glossary), *De Arte Metrica* (examines versification, rhythm, metre, and types of poetry), and O*n Figures and Tropes of Holy Writ* (discusses different devices and figures of speech). According to Harry Blamires, Bede's ideas have

> no great intrinsic significance. But in building as he does on predecessors such as Donatus, and in drawing his illustrations from Latin poetry (especially Christian poets), he inaugurated a branch of study in England and he made a notable development in applying critical theory to the books of the Bible.[16]

John of Salisbury played an important part in the medieval revival of Latin scholarship, his works *Policraticus* and *Metalogicon* showing a medieval scholar conversant in classics, influenced by Aristotle and Horace, and openly declaring his love for the classics. John of Salisbury wrote about the allegorical and literal interpretation of the Scriptures, but also about the interpretation of the classical literature that he acclaimed as a source of pleasure and moral instruction, which shows the traces of a new critical tradition, that of Renaissance, whose glories were just over the horizon.

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[15] Vernon Hall. *A Short History of Literary Criticism*. London: The Merlin Press, 1964, p. 22-23.
[16] Harry Blamires. *A History of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 36.

Renaissance and Philip Sidney

The medieval period is rejected and replaced by the age of Renaissance, which is considered either as the first part of the modern period that lasted until the middle of the twentieth century, or as a period of transition from Middle Ages to modern period, now conceived as lasting from the seventeenth century Enlightenment to the middle of the twentieth century. The art and literature of Renaissance already reveal the two contradictory but co-existing aspects of 'innovation' (for instance, sonnet in poetry) and 'tradition' (the revival of ancient models, as, for example, in Renaissance tragedy).

The emergence of the innovative spirit in literature continues after Renaissance as Baroque art (metaphysical poetry in English literature, also considered by some critics as the last manifestation of British Renaissance), but this cultural extravaganza is rejected and suppressed by the much stronger and dominant traditional element that, based on the revival of ancient classical artistic doctrine and practice, becomes itself a period and dominates as Enlightenment and Classicism (or Neoclassicism in England) the entire social as well as cultural and literary background of Europe for more than one hundred years starting with the middle of the seventeenth century to the last decades of the eighteenth century that witnessed the rise of a new, Romantic literary sensibility.

Concerning the general development of literary practice and critical thought, the component of 'innovation' in literary history has its origins in Renaissance, continues in Baroque, is suppressed by classical tradition, but is revived by Romanticism, then developed by late nineteenth century avant-garde trends and diversified by the twentieth century Modernism and Post-Modernism. The component of 'tradition' in literary history has its origins in ancient period, is revived in Renaissance, then changed, developed and institutionalised in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Enlightenment and Neoclassicism, rejected and replaced by Romanticism, but present again on the literary scene as the nineteenth century Realism, and continued and diversified by the twentieth century writers of social and realistic concern.

Based on the humanistic views, the Renaissance period revived the ancient classical tradition attempting to develop theories and doctrines reminiscent of classical ideals, and to judge literature by literary, not religious, values. There was the theory of epic poem, as in Torquato Tasso's *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (1594), which asserts the four major elements in epic poetry (the story or fable, the morality of the characters, the purpose behind the story, and the language), and the purpose of epic poetry to delight the reader and as a source of intellectual and moral improvement, since for Tasso "delight is the cause why no one fails to obtain benefit, because delight induces him to read more gladly".

At odds with ancient principles of epic writing tradition were romances as proto-novel inventions of the period, such as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) or Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596), and the literary criticism of the period that focused on such texts attempted to justify their literary validity. For instance, as Ariosto introduces fantastic and marvellous elements in his romance, so Giovambattista Giraldi (1504-1573, better known as Cinthio), in *On the Composition of Romances* (1554), explains and defends the use of the supernatural beings and action in romances, as well as a great variety of characters and events, as to prove that romance is a totally different from both epic and tragedy genre and should be judged as such.

The most discussed genre in Renaissance literary criticism was drama, where, according to Gilbert Highet,

> modern standards of dramatic criticism were being built up through the Renaissance, partly by experiments in new forms, and partly by study and discussion of Greco-Roman literary theory – represented chiefly by Aristotle's *Poetics*, Horace's *Art of Poetry*, and, much less influentially, by Longinus's essay *On the Sublime*. Much of Renaissance drama was created by the lofty standards of Renaissance critics, who, in spite of their frequent pedantry, would not tolerate slovenly work.[17]

The most discussed issues in relation to drama were the nature of tragedy and the concept of the tragic hero, as well as the doctrine of the 'three unities' in the dramatic structure involving the principles of time, place, and action. The theory of the 'unity of action' in the play was developed by Aristotle, and Gilbert Highet shows that the unities of time and place (the former just mentioned by Aristotle and the latter not mentioned at all) were largely the creation of the Renaissance scholars Cinthio, Robortelli, Segni, Castelvetro, and others in sixteenth century, all three unities being very useful in the period as

> an attempt to strengthen and discipline the haphazard and amateurish methods of contemporary dramatists – not simply in order to copy the ancients, but in order to make drama more intense, more realistic, and more truly dramatic. [18]

In Renaissance criticism, there was also much debate on poetry as philosophy and imitation, the doctrine of verisimilitude in poetry, the poetic diction and decorum, and the twofold purpose of poetry to please and instruct.

There was also the debate on the language of poetry, in particular, and of literature, in general: as Renaissance was the period of the revival of

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[17] Gilbert Highet. *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 142.
[18] *Ibid.*

ancient classical tradition, there was no question about imitating the classical models, but about the language used in writing, whether it should be Latin, the language of the classics, or the vernacular one, the use of the latter being earlier defended by Dante (in the unfinished *De Vulgari Eloquentia*) and in Renaissance by, among others, Du Bellay (in *Defence and Illustration of the French Language*, 1549). The question of language emerged by the side of the growing national consciousness corresponding to the rise of new European nation-states, for which a common national language, among other factors, would provide grounds for a national identity.

During Renaissance the major European critical voices were Italian (Vida, Robortelli, Daniello, Minturno, Scaliger, Castelvetro), whereas the mid-sixteenth century throughout the seventeenth century saw the dominance of the French critical works, which, like those of late medieval and Renaissance periods, were first rhetorical and metrical, guiding the growth of classicism already supported by Humanism, Aristotelianism, and Rationalism. Minturno in *De Poetica* (1559), Scaliger in *Poetices libri septem* (1561), and Castelvetro in *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta* (1570) are accredited for having rediscovered and revived in Renaissance the *Poetics* of Aristotle, which became very influential after being translated into Italian in 1549.

Richard Harland calls them 'the Italian Aristotelians' and praises them for having developed the theory of the 'unity of time' (Minturno and Scaliger) and that of the 'unity of place' (Castelvetro), and for having developed the principle of verisimilitude, deriving it from Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*. With the principle of verisimilitude, the Italian Aristotelians pointed to the achieving of likeness to reality in literature and, unlike Aristotle, "gave more weight to believability, less to emotional effect", thus prefiguring the later, "modern notions of realism and the realistic"[19].

Concerning French Renaissance criticism, mention should be made of *Art of Poetry* (1548) by Sibilet, and the writings of Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim Du Bellay as representatives of the group called 'Pleiade', which attempted to refine French literature, as well as language, by following the classical models. Pierre de Ronsard, in particular, attempts in this respect to combine classical poetics with Christian beliefs, invention with imitation, and to adjudicate the claims of competing languages and dialects.

In English Renaissance, criticism was first concerned with rhetoric and diction (Caxton, Leonard Cox, and Thomas Wilson), and then moved to issues concerning the development of a national literature in native language (for instance, Sir Thomas Elyot in *Book Named the Governour*, 1531), which received a strong opposition from the humanists and inkhornists who

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[19] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, pp. 36-39.

searched to adopt Latin words instead of developing a native lexicon. The use of English in writing required the building up of the English vocabulary and the development of different technical devices in versification, such as rhyme and meter, the first work on versification in English being Gascoigne's *Certain Notes of Instruction* (1575).

The development of the verse devices that would urge the use of English in poetic composition followed two directions: one theoretical, insisting on the imitation of the classical forms, such as the unrhymed hexameter, and on decorum and imitation, and often condemning the rhyme (as in Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, 1602, promptly answered by Samuel Daniel in *A Defence of Rime*); and, another, practical direction, perfecting English versification by means of the creative activity of the poets, where the same Campion and other poets, like Pierre Corneille some decades later in relation to drama, would often attempt at originality against the prevailing insistence on classical forms.

Perhaps the main advocate of the classical tradition was Ben Jonson who turned a critic in *Timber: Or Discoveries*, representing together with Dryden some twenty years later the promoters of Neoclassicism in English literature and criticism. Some noteworthy critical ideas are also to be found in Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605), but the master critic of English Renaissance is Philip Sidney (1554-1586).

Owing it to Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, Renaissance marks the actual beginnings of literary criticism in Britain. Sidney's critical text is to be considered in relation to the co-existing in the period innovative element in literature, represented, among others, by Sidney himself as the writer of sonnets and pastoral poetry, and the traditional element in literature, standing for the revival of the ancient classical tradition. The text is also to be considered in relation to the fact that the poetry of the period, both pastoral and sonnet writing tradition, and the imaginative writing on the whole, where often attacked on moral grounds by the rising Puritanism.

Scholar, poet, courtier, and soldier, Sidney is the author of the most significant critical treatise of the period, the essay *Defence of Poesie* (also entitled *Apologie for Poetrie*), which was published in 1595, but was written much earlier as an answer to the Puritan minister Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse* (1579), a Puritan moralistic attack on imaginative writing of the period, dedicated to Sidney himself.

Philip Sidney was one of the most prominent authors of the Elizabethan Age as a part of English Renaissance, famous not only for his critical treatise but also for his pastoral poetry and sonnets. *Astrophel and Stella* (published in an authorised edition in 1598, but composed probably in the early 1580s and circulating in manuscript for many years) is the first important of English sonnet sequences, containing 108 sonnets and 11 songs. Attempted as English versions of the Italian model Petrarch, the poems deal with emotion and love, the relationship between lovers, some philosophical

speculation and reflections on the act of poetic creation, while, on the structural level, succeeding in freeing the English sonnet from the strict rules of the Italian form. *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, or simply *Arcadia*, is Sidney's most ambitious work, representing a romance in which the Greek model of Heliodorus combined with pastoral elements support the Renaissance idealisation of a shepherd's life, to which Sidney adds, following the Hellenistic model, narratives of kidnap, battle, rape, political treachery, and other stories which are interweaved in the whole of the narrative sequence.

There were these literary genres of the period that were attacked by the rising Puritanism, including Stephen Gosson (1554-1624), a Puritan who was earlier a poet, a playwright, and probably also a player, and who later took Holy Orders and became Rector of the Church of St. Botolph's in Bishopsgate, London.

Concerning the form of Sidney's critical treatise, according to David H. Richter,

> in constructing his *apologia* – Greek for a legal defence – Sidney addressed himself less to Gosson than to Plato, whose *Republic* provides most of the ammunition the Puritan divine expended against poetry. Sidney's *Apology* is structured according to the principles of medieval rhetoric like a good legal brief, with an introduction that draws the reader into the case while offering reassurance of the ethical rightness of the speaker, a central argumentative section, a set of answers to objections, and a glowing peroration.[20]

By answering the objections and attacks on ethical grounds against poetry and drama of the period, which were regarded by Stephen Gosson and other Puritans as vehicles for moral degradation, Sidney was successful not only in achieving his purpose to defend literature in the face of Puritanism, but also assigned much praise to poets and the poetic art, arguing about the superiority of poetry over history, philosophy and other disciplines, and about the prophetic and moral function of poetry, while examining its typology and imaginative essence. Among the historian, excessively concerned with particular facts, and the obscure and too abstract philosopher, Sidney claims that

> is our poet the Monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it (…). He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness: but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he

[20] David H. Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989, p. 131.

cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner; and pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.

Because of the religious condemnation voiced by Puritans in England in the second half of the sixteenth century, Sidney's defence and evaluation of poetry are done on moral grounds, the central concept being virtue, where, unlike philosopher's or theologian's writings that can teach virtue only in abstract terms, poetry both teaches virtue and 'moves' reader to it, that is, makes the reader virtuous by means of moral instruction based on *catharsis* and *mimesis*, here imitation of the ethical manner, that is, on creating examples of ideal characters and conduct, and thus poetry being superior to other disciplines.

Like many Renaissance theorists, Sidney relies on the ideas of the ancients, appealing to Plato's metaphysics, Aristotle's *mimesis* – for instance, at the beginning, when defining poetry, Sidney calls it "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*" – and Horace's aesthetic principles, for instance, Sidney concluding his essay with the famous Horatian statement on the purpose of poetry, which for Sidney is the same: "with this end, to teach and delight", or, rather, given the moralistic perspective, to delight in order to teach.

Sidney's critical treatise shows that the purpose of defending the value of poetry against the accusations made by a Puritan mind is remarkably completed by the expression of Sidney's own observations and ideas on poetry, thus developing a critical tradition based on the works of ancient as well as modern writers.

Sidney's defence of poetry makes Renaissance the period of the rise of a critical tradition in English and Philip Sidney the first important English literary critic, acclaimed for his "intellectual energy and stylistic vitality", to use Harry Blamires' words, who continues:

> Ideas flow from his pen. Apt illustrations, imaginative turns of thought and neat dialectical thrusts crowd his pages. And the prose, largely free of arid modish turgidities and superfluous contrivances, carriers the reader eagerly forward.[21]

Philip Sidney's critical text clearly shows the influence of Horace's *The Art of Poetry*, which, according to Gilbert Highet, "was a very important formative factor in Renaissance literary theory", being translated for the first time into Italian by Dolce in 1535, then "into French by Grandichan in 1541 and by Peletier du Mans in 1544; into Spanish in 1592 by Luis Zapata; and into English, along with the other *Letters* and the *Satires*, by T. Drant in

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[21] Harry Blamires. *A History of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 55.

1567."[22] The rise of the literary criticism in England reveals through Sidney's text obvious moral and defensive features, where, as an answer to Puritanism, Sidney defends poetry as a discourse that makes man a virtuous being, while giving a famous definition of poetry in clearly neo-Horatian terms as an art of imitation that teaches and delights:

> Poesie therefore, is an Art of Imitation: for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak Metaphorically, a speaking Picture, with this end to teach and delight.

[22] Gilbert Highet. *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 142.

Restoration and John Dryden

The seventeenth century further extended the direction of classicism in European criticism, owing it to the major French critics of the period, among whom Francois de Malherbe and Michel de Montaigne seeking to achieve the purification of native language for clear communication, and Chapelain, Corneille, d'Aubignac, Rapin, and Boileau, the last two, especially, as the real founders of the classical, also referred to as 'Neoclassical', theory. In general, the European culture has become centralised in France, and with French contribution and France as its main source, in particular with the foundation of the French Academy in 1635 and the courses taught at the Academy, the classical ideas are dominant and classicism is now an institutionalised cultural doctrine throughout Europe.

However, it is to be remembered that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw classicism being attacked by the 'moderns', who challenged the view that writers should admire and imitate the great ancient Greek and Latin models because civilization had not produced anything better or more excellent to surpass the great classical tradition. The main arguments of the moderns against the rule of the classics, as set forth and explained by Gilbert Highet, were (1) "the ancients were pagan; we are Christians. Therefore our poetry is inspired by nobler emotions and deals with nobler subjects. Therefore it is better poetry"; (2) "Human knowledge is constantly advancing. We live in a later age (…) therefore we are wiser. Therefore anything we write, or make, is better than the things written and made by the ancient Greeks and Romans"; (3) "Nature does not change (…) therefore the works of men are as good to-day as they were in classical times"; and (4) the works of the classics "were badly written and fundamentally illogical".[23]

The attacks on art and literature of the classical writers agitated the spirits of the literary world and initiated the conflict between the defenders of the classics (Dacier, Racine, Boileau), who created a deeper understanding of ancient literature and expanded the literary traditions of the Renaissance, and the 'moderns' (Tassoni, de Saint-Sorlin, Perrault), who argued that modern literature possesses aesthetic values as high as those of the classical Greece and Rome.

The conflict is remembered as 'the battle of the books' and 'la querelle des anciens et des modernes', and it is only one battle in the war between innovation and tradition, between originality and authority, between classicism and modernism; the war started in Antiquity, was reinforced in Renaissance, raged at highest in France and then throughout Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century and is still going on.

The outcome of the conflict in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was first beneficial for the development of literary criticism, whose

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[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 261-288.

standards improved, and ideas, though sharpened, became more refined. Concerning literary practice, the real benefit of the battle for both sides was, according to Gilbert Highet, "that it discouraged slavish respect for tradition, and made it more difficult for future writers to produce 'Chinese copies' of classical masterpieces, in which exact imitation should be a virtue and original invention a sin."[24]

Concerning English critical thought of the period, after Sidney there were, unfortunately, no important critical voices to assess the great literary achievements of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and it was only with John Dryden that English literary criticism stood firmly again on its path. Meanwhile, the history of criticism mentions John Milton (1608-1674) defending poetry and theatre against Puritan attacks, during Commonwealth period, and earlier Ben Jonson (1573-1637) emphasising rules and decorum in the prologues written to his many plays and in the book *Timber, or Discoveries*.

The most important seventeenth century English critic was John Dryden (1631-1700), of whose many literary and non-literary works the most famous one being the critical treatise *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), written in dialogue form and derived from Dryden's own practical experience as a playwright in many areas of drama.

In English literary history, the last period of the seventeenth century was the 'Restoration Age' between 1660 and 1700, which followed the Puritan rule ('Commonwealth Interregnum') between 1649 and 1660, and which started from the restoration of the Stuarts (with Charles II) to the throne of England in 1660. This political event gave its name to a period that lasted for about forty years, during which there was a gradual restoration of arts and literature as well, a 'second Renaissance' in British culture following the 'Dark Ages' of Puritanism, as some critics prefer to call it.

In literature and thought, the main representative of the Restoration period was John Dryden, the poet, the playwright and the theoretician of early Neoclassicism, but the period had also Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1658), and John Locke's *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* (1690). The period also saw the foundation of the Royal Society in 1662, the re-opening of the theatres with the accession of Charles II, and the rebirth of arts and literature in general.

On the general literary level, there are two main aspects usually brought into discussion: first, concerning the literary doctrine, Restoration was the period of the revival and institutionalization of the classical principles, which make Restoration represent the beginnings of Neoclassicism in Britain; second, concerning the literary practice, and due to the reaction against the rigid Puritan rules, the Restoration literature was characterized by pleasure-seeking and valiant heroism, a kind of hedonistic

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 288.

atmosphere that manifested itself mainly in dramatic comedy, and became the stylized version of sophisticated upper class ethics in which elegance, abstractness, and wit represented the ideal of the Restoration literature. Wit, in particular, which followed the refinement and sophistication of the court, became the reflection of a new respect for reason and clarity, and the criteria of judgement of the aesthetic value of the literary text, being defined by John Dryden, in the preface to his poem *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), as "the faculty of imagination in the writer".

The main genre of Restoration literature was drama, which, written now by both men and women, was concerned with general human and social interests, and was represented mainly by comedies – plays generally designated as 'comedy of manners' – most of which being French and Spanish adaptations, and some ridiculing the Puritans or provincialism. The Restoration theatre was a cultural phenomenon of quick rise and decline, its major representative being John Dryden (1637-1700), out of whose twenty-eight dramatic works the play entitled *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1672) is considered to be the most important and subtle in its social satire, revealing at best the Restoration attitudes towards youth and age, love and marriage, vanity and affection.

Among other representatives of the Restoration drama, mention should be made of Sir George Etherege (1634-1691) who, in *The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub* (1664), *She Would if She Could* (1668), and *The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), attempted to reveal the Restoration character with its conflicting ways of life, torn between wit and virtue, surrender to passion and desire for freedom; William Wycherley (1640-1716), who in *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Plain Dealer* revealed a critical spirit not entirely compatible with the Restoration ethos, but reacting against tricksters and bullies, dishonesty, selfishness, cruelty, lust, and obsessive compulsion; William Congreve (1670-1729), whose *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700) granted him the status of the true master of the 'comedy of manners' concerning both the character representation strategies and the sophistication of the plot construction in the dramatic expression of some of the dominant in Restoration thematic perspectives, such as the contrast between private behaviour and public reputation, strong emotion and artificial loyalty.

The Restoration comedy of manners is a type of realistic comedy that displays a witty, satiric atmosphere, laying emphasis on social comment rather than characterization. The plot of the comedy of manners, elaborate, artificial, and often concerned with an illicit love affair, or some other scandal, is generally less important than the satire and the witty, epigrammatic, and often bawdy dialogue.

Apart from the comedy of manners, another type of play popular in Restoration, though it lasted only a short period during the 1670s, was the 'heroic drama', also called 'heroic tragedy', developed by Dryden and

followed by other writers, such as Sir George Etherege and Sir Robert Howard. Distinguished by both verse structure and subject matter from the comedy of manners, the heroic drama is composed in heroic verse (closed couplets in iambic pentameter) and focuses on subjects related to national history, mythological events, or other important matters, and the hero is of epic significance, powerful and decisive, and often torn between passion and honour. This type of tragedy is characterised by bombastic dialogue, excessive spectacle, elaborate scenery, and grand action, usually the conquest of a country. The term 'heroic drama' was invented by John Dryden for his play entitled *The Conquest of Granada* (1670), in whose Preface to the printed version Dryden developed a series of rules for this type of drama, arguing that the drama was a species of epic poetry for the stage, and that the heroic drama was to other plays as the epic was to other poetry. The attempt to produce a dramatic entertainment about the serious subjects of national history and the failure of the dramatists to create credible powerful and military dominating heroes were the reasons of the attacks on the heroic drama by, among others, George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham, whose satire *The Rehearsal* was successful enough to make the heroic drama largely disappear from English literary scene.

Although the Restoration drama aimed at reviving and imitating the Elizabethan dramatic tradition, it actually manifested a violent break with Elizabethan drama in matters of both thematic context and theatrical representation, and even concerning the size of the theatre.

Unlike drama, the poetry of the Restoration period did not manifest such a violent break with Elizabethan tradition, and the metaphysical style that dominated the poetic production of the first half of the seventeenth century, being largely a continuation of certain conflicts that began to disturb the Elizabethan *status quo*, continued to influence the poetry of the Restoration period, which relied on concentration and straightforwardness, paradox and antithesis. There was the search for the 'golden mean' that starting with the Restoration period would juxtapose the internal conflicts of the metaphysical poets upon the philosophical certainties and satirical comments in the poetry of some Neoclassical writers of the late seventeenth century and the next eighteenth century.

On the other hand, the rising in Restoration Neoclassical spirit manifested a strong reaction against the cultural extravagances of the Baroque and metaphysical poetry, along with the revival and institutionalization of the classical principles, which make Restoration, the last part of the seventeenth century, to be the first part of the Neoclassical period in British literature. As part of British Neoclassicism, the Restoration period was followed by the 'Augustan Age' (also referred to as the 'Age of Reason') in the first half of the eighteenth century, and by the 'Age of Johnson' that between 1750s and 1780s represented the decline of Neoclassicism. The eighteenth century in Europe in general is commonly

referred to as the 'Age of Enlightenment', and in this respect the term 'Enlightenment' is often used to name the period covering most of the eighteenth century Britain as well, namely both the 'Augustan Age' and the 'Age of Johnson' preceding the rise of Romanticism in 1780s.

The beginnings of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism in British cultural background, which took place during the Restoration period as the result of some major Continental influences, were also the direct consequences of some major changes in the native literary taste which occurred in that period, and the Neoclassical doctrine itself should be regarded primarily as a new literary attitude that came to influence the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century and to dominate the poetic production for over a hundred years during the late seventeenth century (represented at best by John Dryden) and most of the eighteenth century (dominated by the work of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson).

John Dryden, born in 1631 in Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England, received a classical education at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, and then moved to London in 1657 to begin his career as a professional writer. His first play, *The Wild Gallant* (1663), was a failure when first presented, but Dryden soon found more success with *The Indian Queen* (1664), which he co-authored with Sir Robert Howard and which served as his initial attempt at founding a new theatrical genre, the so-called 'heroic tragedy' or 'heroic drama'. The term 'heroic drama' was actually invented by Dryden himself for his later play entitled *The Conquest of Granada* (1670). As if sensing the failure of his short-lived genre, Dryden turned his creativity to comedy and produced in 1672 the famous play entitled *Marriage A-la-Mode*. However, another of Dryden's heroic plays, *All for Love*, is nowadays one of the best-known and most performed of all Dryden's plays. In his later years, Dryden turned to poetry and solidified his reputation as the leading writer of the day with such masterpieces as *Absalom and Achitophel: A Poem* and *Religio Laici*. Two months before his death, Dryden produced *Fables Ancient and Modern*, prefaced by one of his greatest critical essays. John Dryden was made Poet Laureate and Historiographer, and as a sign of supreme recognition, when he died in London on May 12, 1700, Dryden was buried in Westminster Abbey in the Poets' Corner, next to Chaucer.

The literary activity of John Dryden includes poetry as well as drama of which almost thirty plays for the stage. Dryden is also one of the founders of British literary criticism, highly acclaimed for the critical study entitled *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). Dryden also produced a number of translations, including the works of Virgil. He actually wrote in all the important contemporary literary forms – comedy, tragedy, heroic play, ode, satire, translation, and critical essay – and every important aspect of the social life in his time (political, artistic, philosophical, and religious) finds expression somewhere in his writings.

John Dryden as a poet and dramatist would dominate the literary efforts of the Restoration period and of English Neoclassicism at its beginnings. His importance as comic dramatist is rather small compared to that of a man of letters and poet, and much of the importance of Dryden's poetry lies in his occasional pieces. As a poet, Dryden is totally impersonal; he is not concerned with personal feelings but achieves a poetic comment on matters of public concern, writing at best in the tradition of verse compliment, in addressing particular people on particular occasions. And it was not in drama but in poetry and, especially, in literary criticism that Dryden established a pattern of writing and a number of theoretical principles that determined the character of the Neoclassical doctrine and literature in the next century, as he established a new style in prose and poetry that influenced, among others, Alexander Pope, the most brilliant writer among the Augustans.

One of the major proponents of the classical ideas into England during the Restoration period, John Dryden was the most prolific English writer of the second half of the seventeenth century, but he was chiefly acclaimed for being a prominent literary critic, as Samuel Johnson did in *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*:

> Dryden may be properly considered as the father of English criticism, as the writer who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of composition. Of our former poets, the greatest dramatist wrote without rules, conducted through life and nature by a genius that rarely misled, and rarely deserted him. Of the rest; those who knew the laws of propriety had neglected to teach them. (…) Two *Arts of English Poetry* were written in the days of Elizabeth by Webb and Puttenham, from which something might be learned, and a few hints had been given by Jonson and Cowley; but Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* was the first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing.

This passage shows that Dryden was probably the first to write a treatise, that is, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), on the art of writing in a systematised way. Dryden's critical masterpiece, which was written to prescribe the ways authors should follow in writing after recovering themselves from Puritanism, also defended and compared English literature in relation to the general European one, and, in particular, to the recent French drama, and in some respects proved the excellence of English literature in the general literary background of Europe.

Imitating Plato in its form, Dryden's critical text is written as a fictitious dialogue, a formal debate on drama among four characters placed in a boat on the Thames and hearing the noise of a naval battle, probably an English victory over Dutch army in 1665, which offers a sense of patriotic pride to the context. Also, in the course of critical debate, the character called Neander ('the new man') – the voice of Dryden himself and as such

the defender of English drama – argues in favour of a national, English literary tradition: for instance, when asked by Eugenius, Neander states, at the beginning of his discussion on English playwrights Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Jonson, that in doing so "I shall draw a little envy upon my self", and, after arguing in favour of their value, he claims that "we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us".

Apart from Neander, representing English literature and defending the native dramatic practice of the recent past, in particular English tragicomedy, as well as the rhymed heroic drama, which Dryden considers to be the greatest achievement of English drama, there are other three characters as speakers in the essay. Of course, such debates could not actually take place, but each speaker can be identified with a contemporary person, and certainly each has his own topical concern to discuss and defend in front of the others.

Crites, whose name suggests a critical mind, and who might have been modelled after Dryden's collaborator and brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard, defends ancient dramatic tradition and clarifies the rules of the unities of time, place, and action. Eugenius, whose name means 'well-born', referring probably to the famous Cavalier poet Lord Charles Sackville, defends the moderns against the ancients on the grounds of scientific progress that might make poetry attain greater excellence. Lisideus, whose name is a Latinised anagram of 'Sedley', is Sir Charles Sedley, and defends the recent French dramatic practice, which, due to Richelieu's protection of arts, has reached almost perfection by keeping the rules, measure, and order, and by using rhyme instead of blank verse. For Lisideius, and for Dryden himself, ancient theories are no less viable. For instance, Lisideius defines a play as "a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject; for the delight and instruction of mankind". The first part of the definition clearly derives from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and the last clause derives from Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

The perspective of binary oppositions – moderns against ancients (Eugenius versus Crites) and English against French (Neander versus Lisideius) – is congenial for embarking on a critical debate about drama in general, types of drama, and thematic and structural particularities of drama from four different perspectives.

However, Neander turns from a general discussion and defence of English drama to a critical, and, at certain moments, comparative appreciation of Renaissance playwrights, in particular Shakespeare and Jonson. For Dryden, Shakespeare has the "the largest and most comprehensive soul", and he is naturally gifted, combining in his works both the innovative spirit of Renaissance and the revival of ancient classical models. When compared to Shakespeare, Jonson is "the most learned and

judicious writer" which any theatre ever had, and, being "deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latin", Jonson borrowed boldly from the ancient writers. Finally, when comparing the two playwrights, Dryden concludes that Jonson is "the more correct Poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare".

In Restoration period, following the Puritan Commonwealth, Dryden defined drama as "a just and lively image of human nature" and assumed in his critical text the task to defend and revive English drama, and, in this respect, to prescribe the future ways of literary development based on the great predecessors, on the best dramatic tradition of the Renaissance playwrights. Also, as Restoration marked the beginnings of Neoclassicism in English literature, Dryden's contribution to that was immense, and he is commonly approached as the first of English Neoclassicists.

One may notice it also in Dryden's admiration for Jonson and his thorough critical appreciation of Jonson, as compared to the more general and superficial one on Shakespeare, which shows that for Dryden Jonson is a kind of prototype found in Renaissance of a complete Neoclassical man, whose plays should be taken as models of dramatic writing.

Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, with its dramatic structure and critical focus on particular writers and literary works – the treatise also revealing the major aspects of the ancient Greek and Latin, and the 'modern' English and French drama – appears to be less theoretical than practical in a period (Restoration) of consolidation of the Neoclassical principles that were to dominate English art and criticism for over a century preceding the rise of Romanticism in 1780s. Apart from being theoretical, Dryden's literary criticism reveals a relative fidelity to classics of a critic who might be considered, as Richard Dutton does, a pragmatic or liberal Neoclassical critic, because his

> discussions are naturally cast in terms of Aristotelian 'rules' and Horatian doctrine, but common sense and experience teach him that there are exceptions, some of them dictated by the irrefutable will of the audience: classical precedent is all very well as a starting-point, but the moderns must be free to improve upon it when the situation demands.[25]

Concerning the main aspects of the Restoration literature and thought, there was, according to Andrew Sanders, the necessity of a tradition

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[25] Richard Dutton. *An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1984, p. 36.

"to be re-established which was both responsive to the recent past and a reflection of new tastes and fashions".[26]

In this respect, it was John Dryden who, in his celebrated *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, combining dramatic expression and practical criticism, and pleading for European recognition of his native literature and for the synchronization of British with the general European literature, clearly prescribed to his fellow writers the classical and contemporary, in particular French, doctrines to be followed in thought and the Elizabethan drama of Shakespeare and Jonson to be revived and the contemporary European models to be imitated in literature.

The growth of British literature in the next eighteenth century reveals that the first aspect was a triumphant accomplishment, since it successfully came to dominate as Neoclassicism the English cultural background for a long period that ended around 1780s. Concerning the second aspect, though the writers of Restoration attempted to recapture the status of drama as a major literary tradition, and produced a huge amount of dramatic works, they never succeeded in reviving it, the eighteenth century British literature consisting mainly in Neoclassical and later Pre-Romantic poetry, and at the same time witnessing the rise of the English novel.

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[26] Andrew Sanders. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 266.

Neoclassicism and Alexander Pope

The British cultural background of the last decades of the seventeenth century and most of the eighteenth century, or, more precisely, the period from 1660s to 1780s (that is, from Restoration to the rise Romanticism), was dominated by the classical doctrine that continued and institutionalised the revival of ancient classical tradition that had started in Renaissance, and which prescribed styles and rules of writing to writers and ways of critical thinking to the literary scholars of the period, thus promoting the dependence of literature upon the ancient models. The leading country in Europe, both politically and culturally, France became the source of spreading the classical ideas in other countries, including Britain, pleading for what is natural and reasonable, and for rules, order, clarity, measure, sense of proportion, and good taste.

The condition of English literature in the eighteenth century reveals three directions in literary history: (1) Neoclassicism, (2) Pre-Romanticism, and (3) the rise of the English novel. Each of these is of particular significance in the future development of English literature: Neoclassicism, the dominant theory of the period whose corresponding literary practice includes satirical and philosophical poetry, would influence not only the consolidation of the novel writing tradition in the eighteenth century, but also the later, in particular of Victorian Realism, novels of the socially concerned, realistic, traditional, normative, and moral type; Pre-Romanticism would mark the transition of literature from Neoclassical to Romantic period; and the rise of the novel (with its realistic element, moral didacticism, and comic features) would signify the consolidation of an almost entirely new genre in English literature, that of imaginative prose, as well as the later flourishing of fiction, both novel and short story, in Victorian and later periods.

In general cultural terms, the beginning of the eighteenth century was marked by the principles of Neoclassicism, including the emphasis on reason, rules, and ancient classical models; the periods of Queen Anne and of George I and George II were marked by a deeper search for rules because of the conviction that there must be some order in the universe; the latter part of the century proved to be of increasing subjectivism and individualism which reflected the decline and end of Neoclassicism, the decline co-existing with the emerging Romantic forces.

The most important literary forms of the eighteenth century British literature were poetry (Neoclassical and Pre-Romantic) and novel. More precisely, English literature consisted mainly of Neoclassical satirical and philosophical poetry, and, with the weakening of Neoclassicism by the 1750s, the Pre-Romantic poetry, at the same time throughout the century witnessing the rise and consolidation of the British novel writing tradition,

which, though influenced by the Neoclassical theory, marked its own process of development.

Drama, following its decline under the attacks of the Puritans and the Restoration attempts to bring it to a considerable revival, was a marginal literary discourse. Paradoxically, with a few remarkable exceptions, such as Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Richard Sheridan's *The School of Scandal* (1777), the dramatic genre, the crown of literary practice in ancient period, could not be revived by the Neoclassicism, which is in its essence based on ancient classical values.

In the field of literary ideas, the first half of the eighteenth century was dominated by the Neoclassical ideas expressed by Alexander Pope in *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man*; the second half of the century was governed by the personality of Dr Samuel Johnson and his influential *Lives of the Poets* and *Dictionary of the English Language*.

The eighteenth century is called 'Neoclassical Age', 'Reactionary Age', 'Augustan Age', 'Age of Enlightenment', 'Age of Reason', 'Age of Scepticism', 'Age of Novel', and 'Age of Sensibility', all these labelling the period before Romanticism that sought to emulate and revive the refinement and taste of the classical era of Caesar Augustus and as such it was pervaded by the Neoclassical spirit. In the present state of terminology, the term 'Neoclassicism', which is used to name a long period in the history of British literature from 1660s to 1780s, is considered synonymous to the terms 'Classicism' and 'Enlightenment' that are used to name the same period in Europe in general. The many terms used to name much of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century in Europe and England – 'Neoclassical Age', 'Age of Enlightenment', 'Classical Age', 'Age of Reason', 'Augustan Age', etc. – remain a topic of debate and a source of confusion. The more common term is 'Enlightenment' (from the German word *Aufklärung*), which is applied to a short period, namely the eighteenth century, or used to refer to a longer period including both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe between Baroque and Romanticism.

It is generally accepted that in England the classical ideas emerge as Neoclassicism during Restoration in the second half of the seventeenth century owing it to John Dryden's contribution as a literary critic, but also Ben Jonson should not be forgotten as an earlier precursor. Except Dryden, important Neoclassical writers of the period critically dealing with literary issues were Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, and Samuel Johnson, all three as major representatives of the eighteenth century British criticism.

The Restoration period gave the beginnings of Neoclassicism in English literature, or, in other terms, the beginnings of Enlightenment that is to be considered as reifying a major literary change which occurred during Restoration and which resumed an earlier Renaissance element of tradition – at best represented by Ben Jonson – reflecting the revival of and reliance on ancient classical values that emphasized order, reason, and good sense.

That is why Neoclassicism is considered as a period of British literary history dating from 1660s to 1780s and as consisting of three parts – the 'Restoration Age' (1660-1700), or the 'Age of Dryden', followed by the 'Augustan Age' (1700-1750s), or the 'Age of Pope', and by the 'Age of Johnson' (1750s-1780s) reflecting the decline of the Neoclassical period – and, as such, coinciding with the general European 'Age of Enlightenment'.

The eighteenth century in Europe in general is commonly referred to as the 'Age of Enlightenment', and in this respect the term 'Enlightenment' is often used to name the period covering most of the eighteenth century Britain as well, namely both the 'Augustan Age' and the 'Age of Johnson' preceding the rise of Romanticism in 1780s.

The 'Age of Reason' refers to Neoclassicism in general, though others use it to name only the seventeenth century preceding Enlightenment (if thought of as a short period, which is much of the eighteenth century before Romanticism). The confusion is furthermore increased by those who term only the first half of the eighteenth century the 'Age of Reason', a period which is also referred to as the 'Augustan Age'.

Given the fact that the Enlightenment advocated reason as a means of establishing an authoritative system in the major fields of human life (ethics, aesthetics, government, etc.) and of allowing philosophers to obtain objective truth about the world, it is normal to assume that the Enlightenment covers a longer period, including the second half of the seventeenth century and most of the eighteenth century, being followed by Romanticism.

The Enlightenment thinkers were inspired by the revolution in physics initiated by Newtonian kinematics and argued that the same kind of systematic thinking could be applied to all forms of human activity. Hence Enlightenment is closely linked to the Scientific Revolution, but also to the moral and philosophical issues in the exploration of the individual, society, and the state. The Enlightenment thinkers believed they would lead the world into progress from a long period of superstition, tradition, and tyranny, and that their works on ethics, natural philosophy, and political theory prepared the intellectual framework for the French and American Revolutions, and for the rise of democracy, liberalism and capitalism. The Enlightenment also focused on religion, of which Deism is the most prominent religious movement and philosophy that occurred in England, France, and the United States. Deists rejected the supernatural events of prophecy and miracles, as well as the divine revelation and the holy books, and asserted that religious beliefs must be founded on reason and the observed features of the natural world, which are also the sources of revelation for the existence of God.

The Enlightenment as a movement occurred in Germany, France, Britain, Spain, Poland, and other countries, but spread beyond Europe and reached America as well, where many of the 'Founding Fathers' of the

United States were influenced by Enlightenment ideas. In Germany the most prominent Enlightenment philosophers were the mathematician and writer Thomas Abbot (1738-1766); the philosopher, theologian and linguist Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), whose ideas on nationalism and studies in philology influenced Goethe and the romantics; the political philosopher, critic, and dramatis Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), the promoter of the middle-class values and attacker of the classical dramatic models, namely the unities and other mechanical rules imported into Germany from French classicism by Gottsched; and the philosopher and physicist Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

The main French representatives of Enlightenment were the literary critic Pierre Bayle (1647-1706); the philosopher and writer Denis Diderot (1713-1784), the founder of the famous *Encyclopédie*; the philosopher and composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who contributed much to education and political studies, and whose political ideas influenced the French Revolution, the development of the socialist theory and nationalism; the political thinker and social commentator Montesquieu (1689-1755); and the writer, essayist, satirical polemicist, deist and philosopher Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet, 1694-1778). As a philosopher and polemicist, Voltaire became known for his wit displayed in the defence of civil liberties, including the freedom of religion and the right to a fair trial. As a writer, Voltaire was very prolific and produced works in almost every literary genre, including drama, poetry, novels, essays, historical writings, scientific works, pamphlets, and over 20000 letters. Among his novels, the most famous one is *Candide or Optimism* (1759) and among his more than fifty plays the most acclaimed are *Oedipe* (1718) and *Zaire* (1732).

The major British representatives of Enlightenment were the English historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), best known for *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788), and the empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632-1704); the Scottish judge, philosopher, and scholar of language evolution James Burnett (1714-1799), considered the founder of the modern comparative historical linguistics, and the historian, economist, and philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), the promoter of empiricism, scientific scepticism, and of doctrines of naturalism and material causes; and the Irish philosopher and political theorist Edmund Burke (1729-1797), the promoter of pragmatism.

In America the most important Enlightenment thinkers were the statesman, scientist, inventor, diplomat, pragmatic deist, and political philosopher Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, advocating American independence and involved in the writing of the *Declaration of Independence* of 1776 and the Constitution of 1787; the political philosopher and the third President of the United States Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), the main author of the *Declaration of Independence* and one of the leading Founding Fathers for his promotion of

Republicanism in the United States; and the British and American deist and polemicist Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a radical intellectual who advocated the independence of the American colonies from Great Britain, and who participated in both American Revolution and French Revolution.

The Age of Enlightenment owes much of its theoretical input to the ideas of Newton, Pascal, Leibniz, Galileo, to both empiricists and rationalists, both John Locke's and Rene Descartes' philosophical works.

As part of the general eighteenth century European cultural movement termed 'Enlightenment', the British 'Age of Reason' (the 'Augustan Age'), representing the eighteenth century Neoclassicism, started in the second half of the seventeenth century in the Restoration emphasis on the power of reason, empiricism, science, rationality, clarity, regularity, normative restraint, elegance, decorum, stylized poetic diction, urbanity, and, like in the rest of Europe, owing much of its theoretical effort to both empiricists and rationalists, namely John Locke's and Rene Descartes' philosophical works. *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* (1690) by John Locke (1632-1704), with its concern with the foundation of human knowledge and understanding, and the theory of the mind as *tabula rasa* ('blank slate') filled later through experience, represented one of the main sources of the empiricist school of thought in modern philosophy, and influenced many British Enlightenment philosophers, such as David Hume and Bishop Berkeley, and many writers and theoreticians of Neoclassicism, such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, and of later periods, such as William Wordsworth in his poetry dealing with the development of the poet's mind, until its twentieth century rejection by Carl Jung and other philosophers.

Opposed by Empiricism, but of equal value, was the influence of the philosophical work of René Descartes (1596-1650), also known as Renatus Cartesius (the Latinized form of his name), a highly influential French philosopher, scientist and mathematician, representing together with Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) the seventeenth century European Rationalism. Descartes' most important philosophical writings are *Discourse on Method* (1637), *Meditations on First Philosophy* (also known as *Metaphysical Meditations*, 1641), and *Principles of Philosophy* (1644). In his philosophical work, in particular in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes aimed at developing a fundamental set of principles that one can know as true without any doubt. The method employed is the so-called 'methodological scepticism', by which he rejects any idea that can be doubted in order to acquire a firm foundation for genuine knowledge. The only unshakable knowledge is that man is a 'thinking thing'; thinking is the essence of the human being, as it is the only aspect about him that cannot be doubted, and the only activity of which he is immediately conscious of, and Descartes defines *cogitatio* ('thought') as "what happens in me such that I am immediately conscious of it, insofar as I

am conscious of it". By what is known as the 'wax argument', Descartes shows the limitations of the senses and proves that one should use his mind to properly grasp the nature of an object or phenomenon, concluding that "what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind". In his system of knowledge, Descartes rejects the sensory perception as unreliable and admits only deduction and reason as the only reliable methods of attaining knowledge that takes the form of ideas, and the philosophical investigation is the contemplation of these ideas. The first item of undoubtable knowledge that Descartes argues for is thus the *cogito*, or thinking thing, and the first principle Descartes arrives at is one of his most famous statements, which is *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'). Other famous statements by Descartes are *ex nihilo nihil fit* ('nothing comes out of nothing') and *dubium sapientiae initium* ('doubt is the origin of wisdom').

English Neoclassicism was mainly influenced by French ideas of the period, France being actually the country that institutionalized classicism in the second half of the seventeenth century and became the most important cultural influence in Europe. Thus, apart from the theoretical input from both empiricists and rationalists, both John Locke's and Rene Descartes' philosophical works, of equal importance to the consolidation of the Neoclassical doctrine in Britain were the leading French ideas from, among others, *L'Art Poetique* (1674) by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711), commonly called Boileau, and *Réflexions sur la poétique d'Aristote et sur les ouvrages des poétes anciens et modernes* (1676) by Rene Rapin (1621-1687). The classical views of Boileau and Rapin were anything but original, largely an extension of Horace and Renaissance critics, but they managed to express better than anyone in the period an attitude of common sense, reverence for rules, the concepts of 'human nature' and 'decorum', imitation of the ancient poets, and worship of reason, as Boileau states in his *Art of Poetry*:

> Whatever you write of pleasant or sublime,
> Always let sense accompany your rime;
> Falsely they seem each other to oppose, -
> Rime must be made with reason's laws to close;
> And when to conquer her you bend your force,
> The mind will triumph in the noble course; (…)
> Love reason then, and let whatever you write
> Borrow from her its beauty, force and light.

On the more general level, the British social and cultural conditions of the eighteenth century, in particular between 1700 and 1780s, reflected new qualitative changes in the human beings' attitudes towards themselves, the world, and society, expressing a general growing self-consciousness of an age pleased with its achievements. The historical destiny of Europe was

actually reshaped by two major social experiences that occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century. The first was the Industrial Revolution that began in Britain and soon spread all over the world, and the second was the French Revolution of 1789 and its subsequent events. Among the many causes for occurrence of the Industrial Revolution – the social and institutional changes brought by the seventeenth century English Civil War; the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century; the British colonial expansion of the seventeenth century and the subsequent development of international trade, creation of financial markets, and accumulation of capital; the scientific discovery and technological innovation protected by patents; the printing press, steam engine, and other important inventions; the presence of a large domestic market; and the Enclosure Movement and the British Agricultural Revolution that made food production more efficient and less labour-needed, forcing a part of population, that could no longer find employment in agriculture, to migrate to cities and work in the newly developed factories – which were complex and remain a topic of debate, one should not ignore the great intellectual input of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism.

There were Enlightenment and Neoclassicism that provided an intellectual framework of practically applying the huge body of scientific knowledge, which is evident, for instance, in the systematic development, guided by scientific analysis, of the steam engine, and in the development of the political and sociological analyses. In this respect, one would claim that Neoclassicism is a major source of the modern industrialised society, because of the rational and empirical development of knowledge and its subsequent application in practice. However, Neoclassicism being highly philosophical and theoretical, it was this materialization in practice of the huge amount of theory by the more pragmatic British mind, which, starting with the middle of the eighteenth century, determined the decline and end of Neoclassicism as a distinct period. It is as if Neoclassicism became extinct by its own spreading out of the cultural and artistic boundaries and involvement in the larger social life, the new scientific and economic factors of the second half of the eighteenth century proving the uselessness of the Neoclassical highly abstract theory and philosophy as confronted by the rising industrial and materialistic realities, whose one of the most important causes was Neoclassicism itself.

Rationalization, standardization and the search for fundamental unities occupied much of the Enlightenment and its arguments over proper methodology and nature of understanding. Among the culminating efforts of the Enlightenment, mention should be made of the economics of Adam Smith, the physical chemistry of Antoine Lavoisier, the idea of evolution pursued by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, the declaration of the inalienable human rights by Thomas Jefferson.

Although the philosophical idea of the Enlightenment, concerning a completely rational and comprehensible universe, was overthrown by, among others, the metaphysics of Hegel and the conceptions of the Romantics, the Enlightenment has received much attention in the next nineteenth and twentieth centuries, being one of the central models for many movements in the modern and contemporary periods.

The Enlightenment is an equivalent of the Neoclassical period in arts and literature, both emphasising science, reason, rationality, and empiricism. Indeed, as part of the general seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European cultural movement termed 'The Enlightenment', the British 'Augustan Age' (also referred to as the 'Age of Reason'), in the first half of the eighteenth century, together with the 'Age of Johnson' between 1750s and 1780s, both representing the eighteenth century Neoclassicism, started in the second half of the seventeenth century in the Restoration emphasis on the power of reason, empiricism, science, rationality, clarity, regularity, normative restraint, elegance, decorum, stylized poetic diction, and urbanity, owing much of its theoretical input to both ancient and contemporary developments in thought, or rather the contemporary trends that, like empiricists and rationalists, rely on ancient tradition. This rising in Restoration Neoclassical spirit – which revived and institutionalized the classical principles, while manifesting a strong reaction against the cultural extravagances of the Baroque and metaphysical poetry – conferred to Restoration, the last part of the seventeenth century, the status of the first of the three parts of the Neoclassical period in British literature.

The beginnings of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism in British culture, which took place during the Restoration period as the result of some major Continental, especially French, influences, represented also the direct outcome of some major changes in the native literary taste, which occurred in that period. The Neoclassical doctrine was first of all a new literary attitude that came to influence the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century and to dominate English poetry, or rather to be expressed in poetry, for over a hundred years during the late seventeenth century, dominated by John Dryden, and most of the eighteenth century, represented at best by the works of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson.

The term 'Neoclassicism' applied to British culture, arts and literature from the second half of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century (1660s to 1780s) should be differentiated from the more philosophical and socially (political and economic) concerned Enlightenment, as well as from the French mid to late seventeenth century Classicism in art, and from the German 'Weimar Classicism' representing a cultural and literary movement founded by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller between 1788 and 1832. Unlike in France and Germany, where the rules of artistic creation based on ancient tradition were more authoritarian and strictly pursued, in English literature

the Neoclassical poet followed these rules in a casual way, or even avoided some of them, or created new ones, hence the use of the prefix 'neo-' in the term 'Neoclassicism', meaning not a strict imitation of the ancient classical models but a 'new classicism'. Also, compared to French or German Classicism, the English Neoclassicism is more flexible and less normative and prescriptive, more concerned with practice than theory, more pragmatic and empirical, applying the classical doctrine to reality and materialising the concept in social, urban environment, which represented actually one of the main reasons why the beginnings of industrialization firstly occurred in England.

The British literature in the eighteenth century should be regarded as continuing the mid to late seventeenth century Restoration rebirth of arts and literature in general, and, as part of British Neoclassicism, the Restoration period was followed by the 'Augustan Age' in the first half of the eighteenth century, dominated by Pope, and by the 'Age of Johnson' that between 1750s and 1780s represented the decline of Neoclassicism and in literature the rise of a new poetic sensibility, that of Pre-Romanticism leading to the rise of Romanticism.

The eighteenth century on the whole expressed a feeling of cultural stability reached after the successful reaction against the literary extravaganza of Renaissance and Baroque. The optimistic thinking of the Neoclassical period was based on the confidence in the validity of the ancient classical doctrine, the belief in the power of reason and experimental science, the emergence of Deism that sought to solve the question of man's relationship to divinity, and the feeling of gratitude for what civilization had achieved. Mention also should be made of the development of printing, the preoccupations with improving the English language, the development of journalism, and other important cultural manifestations.

The British literary Neoclassicism (also referred to as the 'Age of Reason' or the 'Augustan Age') has its origins in the ancient classical period, but started as a regular literary period and movement during Restoration, representing the continuation of the Renaissance revival and re-evaluation of the ancient classical tradition. What in Renaissance was just one cultural aspect, though a very important one, became a dominant movement towards the end of the seventeenth century and as such it lasted until the end of the eighteenth century. As part of the general European cultural manifestation of the Enlightenment, and like many other doctrines and trends of the British literary background, English Neoclassicism was based on ideas and terms (for instance those of 'reason' and 'good sense') borrowed from France, which was at that time the most important cultural influence in Europe.

English literary Neoclassicism manifested itself both in the creation of a strongly prescriptive cultural doctrine and in the production of literary texts, in particular poetry. The major representatives were John Dryden, in

the seventeenth century, and Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century. Pope, Johnson, and other Neoclassical authors wrote a type of philosophical, didactic and satirical poetry, approaching general aspects concerning the human nature in relation to man's place in the universe and in relation to the social background.

The complete Neoclassical writer would combine in his work – as Alexander Pope does in *Essay on Man* – both these two sides: that of a theoretician of the doctrine and that of a poet. Alexander Pope was one of the few English Neoclassical writers that managed to state in one literary discourse the Neoclassical ideas in the form of a highly philosophical poetic expression. There were, however, separate from poems, theoretical writings containing the Neoclassical ideas and concepts, such as the form of essay, article, or letter.

In the present state of terminology, the standard definition considers Neoclassicism synonymous to the Enlightenment, and refers to it mainly as the revival of the ancient classical tradition (norms, rules, ideas, and models) that was re-shaped according to the new cultural and historical realities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the main characteristics of Neoclassicism, scholars usually make mention of (1) the emphasis on the dominance of reason and rationalism in the treatment of different subjects, themes, and concerns, while rejecting subjectivism and imagination; (2) the importance given to rules and norms in the act of creation, while rejecting the freedom of artistic expression; (3) the focus on the reading public in the framework of the abstract meditation and the didactical purpose of the Neoclassical writing, especially concerning moral issues and ethical values transmitted through the relationship between the text and the reader; (4) the concern with the real, actual, social, public issues, and the involvement in the matters of community and the problems of social existence, while rejecting the representation of the personal individual experience; (5) the development of a metropolitan type or culture, art and literature being regarded as the product of a conventional urban society.

Neoclassicism was first of all a highly philosophical doctrine, providing abstract speculation with universal consideration of certain topics of general concern, of which the primary one was 'human nature' and other philosophically approachable issues. The main sources of the doctrine were the contemporary Rationalism, Empiricism, and Deism, as well as the works of the great ancient philosophers and theoreticians of art.

As literary theory, the main concerns of the Neoclassical thought included the literary genres, the nature and role of the poet, and the language and purpose of poetry. In matters of artistic production, the Neoclassical thinkers emphasised order, measure, common sense, simplicity, clarity, respect to genre, and the importance of rules (in poetry 'poetic diction' and 'decorum'), the normative aspect reflecting also the reader-oriented quality of the Neoclassical literature, in particular poetry, concerning the didactic

and moral purpose of literature. However talented or intellectually gifted, the poet had to write according to rules and become an active member of society by assuming moral duties and spreading moral values.

Since lyricism and subjectivity were rejected as sources of imaginative writing, the main types of the Neoclassical poetry included philosophical and satirical poetry, focusing thematically on some general aspects concerning human nature, man's place in the universe, and man's relation to the social background. In the production of poetry, a special attention was given to the relationship between the text and the reader, and, following the ancient standards, the main purpose of literature was to please (the aesthetic function) and to instruct (didactic-moral function). The poet was considered in his double hypostases as genius and maker (craftsman), and as such he needed training and discipline, and had to follow certain rules of writing. In French literature, these rules were strictly pursued, whereas in English literature the poet followed them more freely, because the English Neoclassical writers believed that the rules might determine the poet to lose both the spirit and the grace of poetry. However, the English Neoclassical writers revealed admiration for Shakespeare, Jonson, and other earlier artists who followed the rules and respected the ancient models.

The writers of the Neoclassical period, apart from being regarded as subject to rules, training, and discipline, were also required to avoid solitude, become functional parts of the community, and assume social responsibilities. Hence the fact that, in matters of the thematic organization, the favourite genre was satire, which the Neoclassical poets preferred in order to teach moral lessons by attacking the wrong social manifestations.

The main source of inspiration, as well as the most frequently discussed topic for the Neoclassical writers, was 'human nature', which they regarded as universal and permanent. In discussing this subject matter, the purpose of the poet was to express in particular literary texts the universal and permanent features of the human nature. The Neoclassical interest, or rather admiration for the ancient Greek and Latin philosophers and writers, was justified by the fact that the ancient artists truthfully represented the nature of the human being in all its complexity.

Being normative and prescriptive in matters of both thematic perspective and poetic techniques, Neoclassicism emphasised the importance to follow two main rules of writing, two main concepts central to the Neoclassical doctrine, which are 'decorum' and 'poetic diction'. Decorum is the art of ornamentation of the verse following certain standards and norms similar to those of the rhetorical discourse; poetic diction is a means of creating decorum, requiring a special use of language in poetry, which is characterised by stylised expression, metaphorical abundance, artificial arrangement, all of these in order to achieve elegance, relevance, and the personification of some abstract notions.

In short, the Neoclassical spirit in poetry is characterised by the reverence for the classics and tradition, the distrust of innovation, the consideration of literature as an artificial art, made by craft – hence the importance given to rules and tradition – and the interest in the social reality and the concern with human nature and the nature of things or the ways in which things are and should be. Neoclassicism represented a very important cultural period, a literary movement, and a particular type of poetry, which appeared as a reaction against the cultural extravaganza of the Baroque and metaphysical poetry, while returning to the revival of the ancient classical tradition, emphasising the power of reason and the experimental, empirical acquiring of knowledge. Neoclassicism is also to be regarded as a product of an urban society, normative and didactic, and its essence, in general, can be defined by some two or three main principles – 'follow nature', 'learn the ancient rules', 'imitate the classics' – put forward and advocated by, among others, Alexander Pope, the mastermind of all British Neoclassicists.

In eighteenth century the theoretical principles of Neoclassicism were at the highest set forth by Alexander Pope in prefaces, *Essay on Criticism* (1711), and *Essay on Man* (1734), by Joseph Addison in a series of critical studies entitled *Pleasures of the Imagination* and delivered to *The Spectator* in 1711 and 1712, and by Samuel Johnson in essays, prefaces (for instance, in the Preface to his edition of *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, 1765), and the celebrated *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1781).

Among these Augustans and many others, the dominant figure was Alexander Pope (1688-1744). He was born in London as son of a Roman Catholic linen merchant at a time when Catholics suffered from repressive legislation, as, for instance, they were not allowed to enter any universities or held public employment. Although Pope himself had an uneven education, which was often interrupted, he was largely educated at home by priests and in Catholic seminaries, and by his own readings, also learning Latin, Greek, French, and Italian, as to become the most learned person of the first half of the eighteenth century, giving his name to an epoch, the 'Age of Pope'. Pope's major works include, among others, *Pastorals* (1709), *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, 1714), *The Temple of Fame* (1713), translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1715-1720, in 6 volumes) and *Odyssey* (1726, in 6 volumes, with William Broome and Elijah Fenton), *Miscellanies* (1727, with Jonathan Swift), *The Dunciad* (1728), *Epistles to Various Persons* (1731-1735), *Imitations of Horace* (1733-1739), *Essay on Man* (1733-1734), *Moral Essays* (1733), *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735), and *The New Dunciad* (1742).

It is difficult to settle the exact chronology of Pope's works, but they can be considered as falling into two main groups: the first is the group of poems in which the predominant elements are imagination and feeling; the second group includes intellectual, satirical and didactic poems. Pope's so-called 'Poetry of Feeling and Imagination' includes, among others, *Windsor*

Forest (1713), *The Ode on St. Cecilia's Day* (1713), *Ode on Solitude* (1717), *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* (1717), and his most accomplished work as an imaginative poet, *The Rape of the Lock*, except which the rest of the poems represents a kind of descriptive and meditative poetry with little structural unity and proper balance of mood and tone. The so-called 'Satirical, Philosophical, and Didactic Poetry' of Alexander Pope owes its importance to the satirical poem *The Dunciad*, the didactic poem *Essay on Criticism*, and the philosophical poem *Essay on Man*.

The Augustans developed an aesthetic theory and a type of textual criticism which became more scientific, criticism as 'Nature methodized', in Pope's terms, criticism bound to the normative principles of decorum and poetic diction, and those of imitating nature and the ancients. 'Follow nature and imitate the classics' is what Pope proclaimed, along with the emphasis on the power of reason, rule, common sense, measure, order, imitation, respect to genre and the unities, emphasis on the 'sublime', while rejecting emotion and imagination.

Joseph Addison, in his magazine articles, also emphasises the need to conform to the classical ideals, and discusses the nature of poetic imagination, the psychological origins of taste, and the practice of reading.

Likewise, Samuel Johnson advocates the classical principles to be followed and the attention to be given to rules rather than inspiration, although he is acclaimed for the critical approach to nearly all British writers and their works, as in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, rather than for developing reliable theoretical principles. Johnson's critical method makes use of biography and his interest in the writers' lives, according to David Daiches, is "quite apart from any critical principles" in that Johnson "wrote biographies of each of his subjects before proceeding to criticise their works, keeping the life and the works of a writer separate". Thus, continues Daiches, Johnson was not the founder of the 'bio-critical' approach – which was established later in the nineteenth century – and which "mingles a study of the man with an interpretation of his works", keeps the life and the works of a writer not separate, but uses "each as a help in interpreting the other", or rather interprets the works "with references to the life and which draws from the psychology of the author clues for the interpretation and appreciation of what he has written".[27]

In the normative spirit of Augustan conception on literature, Johnson views literary criticism as an endeavour to assess from a moralising perspective the extent to which some basic qualities of literature are present in a particular text that is representative of a particular genre. In spite of this, according to Richard Dutton, the characteristic tone of Johnson's criticism is "magisterial yet often in a liberal cause; authoritative yet sometimes

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[27] David Daiches. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. London: Longman, 1981, p. 250.

idiosyncratically personal; sweepingly confident in his generalizations but sometimes omitting to pursue his insights with real intellectual curiosity."[28]

The first half of the eighteenth century in English literature, known as the Augustan Age, illustrates the classical views on art and literature at the highest point of their dominance, where, especially for poetry, having been developed – based on models of Greece and Rome – a rational approach and points of view involving absolute rules and principles to be followed in the critical judgement of literature.

As in earlier criticism, poetry receives a complex theory involving the rules of poetic composition, the principles of poetic structure, and the object of poetry as pleasurable instruction. In this respect, the most revelatory would be Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, representing a discussion in verse form, based on Neoclassical doctrines, in which the emphasis is placed on rules, order, and good taste, which should govern poetic composition and lead it to affirm or rather re-affirm absolute truths which have already been expressed by ancient classical poets. The task of the literary criticism would be, then, to defend, sustain, and strengthen the classical values and to follow the critical tradition as established by the ancients. The essay is addressed to critics rather than to the poets, but Pope prescribes rules to both critics and poets, of which the highly emphasised ones include decorum and poetic diction, personification of abstractions, and consolidation of the heroic couplet as the main principle for versification. A recurrent image in Pope's treatise is the conflict between the critic, whom Pope apparently sides with, and the poet: the former imposes rules on poets and judges them according to some strict regulations, whereas the latter attempts to flee from the normative prescription.

Written by Pope in his earliest years, the essay does not provide an original contribution to literary theory, or to the philosophical background of his period, as his later *Essay on Man* would do, except that it is addressed to critics rather than the poets, and, even so, the text often shifts its concern from criticism to poetry and vice versa. However, having nothing original in point of the Neoclassical doctrine, one should consider at least the fact that the poem attempts to argue about the validity of this doctrine by combining in one poetic discourse the exposition of the theoretical principles and the creation of a literary text based on such principles.

A young person in his twenties, Pope longs to display his learning and be didactic and moralising, his *Essay on Criticism* suggesting a kind of "critical ethic", as Geoffrey G. Harpham calls it. In this respect, based on the negation of subjective impulses, the true criticism, according to Pope, is natural, modest, moderate, and just, resulting, as Harpham puts it, not only

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[28] Richard Dutton. *An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1984, p. 44.

"from cognitive superiority or acquired learning, but first and foremost from a certain kind of virtue."[29]

Pope's criticism is also called 'ethical humanism', a common feature of the most of the eighteenth century critical thought, in that it explores not only the mind of the poet, but also his conditions and environment, as Pope himself declares that the critic should learn the writer's "Fable, Subject, scope in every page; / Religion, Country, genius of his Age".

The poem, clearly inspired from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, discusses the principles of poetic art, didactically prescribes the rules of writing and criticising, states the authority to be attributed to the ancient writers, and gives a famous definition of the Neoclassical 'wit':

> True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but never so well expressed;
> Something whose truth convinced as sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind.

In short, the rules for criticism and literary practice, as prescribed by Pope, can be summed up as 'follow Nature and imitate the Classics'.

> First follow Nature, and your judgement frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same;
> Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
> One clear, unchanged, and universal light,

the meaning of 'Nature' referring here to order and common sense. The ancients are to be followed because they based their ideas on Nature, whom they 'methodized' and whose laws they discovered and defended:

> Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
> Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;
> Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
> By the same laws which first herself ordained.

In this respect, Charles E. Bressler asserts that,

> by affirming the imitation of the classical writers and through them of nature itself and by establishing the acceptable or standard criteria of poetic language, Pope grounds his criticism in both the **mimetic** (imitation) and **rhetoric** (patterns of structure) literary theories.[30]

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[29] Geoffrey G. Harpham in Knellwolf, C. and Norris, C., eds. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 9: Twentieth century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 373.

[30] Charles E. Bressler. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 2007, pp. 34-35.

Indeed, in Renaissance and afterwards for nearly until the second half of the eighteenth century, the major critical voices revived, reinforced and reshaped the classical tradition along with a strong emphasis on following the classical rules and imitating the laws of nature, as in Ben Jonson's *Timber: Or Discoveries* (1640), Pierre Corneille's *Discours* (1660), Boileau's *L'Art Poetique* (1673), and Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Like Sidney and Boileau, Pope requires from the poet to be natural genius, possess knowledge of the artistic rules, acquire an education based on the classics, and imitate the classic models.

However, there were some attempts at critical originality, as in Vida's *Poetica* (1527), Du Bellay's *Defence and Illustration of the French Language* (1549), Lope de Vega's *New Art of Making Comedies* (1609), and John Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668).

There was also the conflict between critical theory, which advocates the classical principles, and literary practice, which would often deviate from the prescribed classical rules. Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), for example, stimulated with his play *Le Cid* an interesting critical debate known as the 'quarrel of *The Cid*', which involved the literate membership of the Academy and the illiterate common public. The former blamed the play's deviation from the rules of the classical drama, whereas the latter adored the play. The playwright himself entered the discussion, by writing *Three Discourses on Dramatic Poetry* (1660), and thus turning a literary critic who defended his own dramatic style and personal responses to the canons of the classical theatre.

A more radical departure from the classical prescriptions found its expression in the historical approach to literature, which had its origins in the eighteenth century critical method proposed by the Italian critic and philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) in his *Scienza Nuova* (1725). The founder of the scientific study of culture, Vico considers the earliest stage of the human society to possess what he calls mythological or 'poetic' thinking. According to Richard Harland, in hypothesising an earlier in human history developed relation of poetry to myth, Vico rejects the Neoclassical view of poetry as "something merely added on top of ordinary rational thinking", claiming, instead, that poetry "is not entertainment or amusement but a mode of thinking – and even the necessary original mode of thinking"; in other words, poetic thinking "is the very base from which rational thinking has evolved"[31]. With his ideas, Vico foreshadows the Romantic literary theory, as well as Historicism – which continues to be influential in the nineteenth century, and of which the major representatives would be the French Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) and

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[31] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 56.

Hyppolyte Adolphe Taine (1829-1893) – and the twentieth century anthropological studies.

Apart from Vico, a strong rejection of the classical or Neoclassical perspective came in the second half of the eighteenth century from those who, like Denis Diderot and Gotthold Lessing, promoted sentiment and emotion in a period that is referred to as the 'Age on Sensibility', and whose sensory and emotional perspective would change in Romanticism into a more abstract and idealist perspective.

The strongest opposition, however, to Humanism, Aristotelianism, Enlightenment, Classicism, Neoclassicism, Empiricism, and Rationalism – these advocating the imitation of the classics since Renaissance – was the rising Romanticism caused by Platonism, medievalism, idealism, sentimentalism, and nationalism, and which emerged to dominate as a forceful, dynamic, and influential literary movement the artistic and critical mind of the period which came to be called 'Romantic', and which covered the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The Rise of the English Novel and Henry Fielding

The dominant cultural doctrine in British eighteenth century was Neoclassicism that may be defined by the two main principles put forward by Alexander Pope: imitate the classics and follow the nature. Neoclassicism represented a distinct cultural period, literary movement, and poetic trend, which appeared as a reaction against the late Renaissance cultural extravaganza of Baroque and metaphysical poetry, and expressed a revival of the ancient classical models, the belief in the power of reason and experimental science, the tendency to regard art as a product of the urban society, the development of normative and didactical basis for the literary production. In eighteenth century, the literary theory expressive of Neoclassicism was embodied by Alexander Pope in his prefaces and the famous *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *Essay on Man* (1734), by Joseph Addison in a series of critical studies delivered to *The Spectator*, and by Samuel Johnson in his essays, prefaces, and the celebrated *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1781).

Apart from the Neoclassical theory and satirical and philosophical poetry, other two important forms of the eighteenth century British literature were Pre-Romantic poetry, which emerged with the weakening of Neoclassicism by the 1750s, and novel, whose rise and consolidation throughout the century was influenced by the Neoclassical theory, yet represented an independent, distinct process of development.

The rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century makes this period, among other things, the 'Age of the Novel', and this rise of the English novel is another literary aspect of the eighteenth century that, next to Neoclassicism, provided an impressive amount of literary criticism, in particular on the part of those authors who were conscious of being the founders of a new literary genre.

The novel, together with novella and short story, is a literary species of the narrative genre, a type of text of fiction, a variety of imaginative prose. The standard definition regards novel as a long, extended narrative consisting of many characters involved in a complex range of events that are organized by chronotope in narrative sequences. The realistic element is considered to represent the most important matter of reference to a text in prose as novel; it is actually the essence of the existence of novel as a literary fact. The realistic element is often considered in two perspectives: the concern with individual experience and social background, and the textual representation of the concern with individual experience and social background, and to be considered a novel both perspectives should be achieved in the text. The individual experience in the novel is expressed through the literary characters, either highly individualised or presented in relation to the social background. The expression of the social background is twofold in a physical perspective, reflected by social types (institutions,

classes, professional groups, etc.), and a non-physical perspective, reflected in moral typology (including social values, customs, standards, rules, etc.), both made possible again through character representation strategies.

The English novel in the eighteenth century passed through a process of rise and consolidation in which realistic, thematic, and structural elements occurred to survive, be developed, or disappear in accordance with the tacit requirements of the novel writing tradition. However, in the context of the epoch, the novel emerged more like a plebeian genre, a minor form, with no classical models and no established codes and systems of norms. No doubt, because the novel form was in its incipient state, and there were few rules to be followed, the diversity of the eighteenth century imaginative prose was remarkable.

The eighteenth century British novel is regarded as the consequence of a long process of development that has its origins in ancient Greek and Latin epic, and ancient Latin novel, and continues in the medieval romance and the Renaissance picaresque fiction. Some elements of the literary system of the ancient epic appear in the system of the medieval romance, although the latter is not a direct development of the former. The literary system of the medieval romance changes in Renaissance into the system termed by the noun 'roman' ('novel') preserving such elements as extended narration, setting, plot, themes, character representation, point of view, narrator, and others, which are extended, diversified, and acquire a different typology, whereas others are replaced and become extinct. The main changes that occurred in the medieval romance making possible the rise in Spanish Renaissance of the novel writing tradition – of which the first type was picaresque – were the verse form replaced by the prose form, and the fantastic element replaced by the realistic element.

English novel, intruding upon such established genres as romance or epic or picaresque novel, and gradually replacing them, enjoyed a steady flourishing and an extraordinary success in a relatively short period of time.

A similar distinction between novel and romance (as the novel's most diachronically related text) was drawn by Clara Reeve in 1785:

> The romance is a heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons or things. The novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the time in which it is written. The romance, in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. The novel gives a familiar relation to such things as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it is to represent every scene in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story as if they were our own.

The definition may be useful to any attempts to trace the realistic element as the common feature of apparently such different works as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Joseph Andrews*, or *Tom Jones*. The realistic element – or verisimilitude, meaning similar to reality factual experience and the concern with the real, familiar world around, with characters who share their condition with the reader's, and the turn of attention from the general and the abstract to the concrete and the particular – was a result of the whole spiritual context of an age built around the principles of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism.

The century began with an emphasis on reason and a literature of intelligence, which celebrated the joy of thinking, understanding, and of making others understand, and which was governed by an empirical method, founded by great philosophers of the previous century, in the investigation of the world: all knowledge we can possibly get comes from our senses and perceptions, which are the basis of reflection for the human intellect; truth can be discovered by the individual also through his senses, and the individual experience is then a major test of truth.

The rise of the English novel was a late phenomenon that occurred almost two-hundred years later than in the rest of Europe, and the picaresque mode would be one of the major influences on the rise of the English novel, although weakened in the eighteenth century because of the dominance of the principles of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism in literature. One should also consider the influence of the Enlightenment and the Neoclassical principles on the rise of the novel, in particular with regards to the interest of the writers in immediate reality, actual social conditions, and the moral development of the human being.

From a strictly historical perspective, the beginnings of the English novel are regarded in relation to the contemporary background and the antecedents in previous literary periods.

Concerning the former, the novel developed in a particular context of complex social and cultural manifestations – such as the growing interest in the issues of everyday life, the scientific and technological developments, the dominance of reason along with the rise of sentimentalism, the new geographical discoveries and colonial expansion, and others – which constituted some of the major reasons for the diversity of fictional forms and thematic concerns in the eighteenth century novel.

Concerning the latter, the novel's ancestry is multiple and extremely diverse, going as far as back as Ancient period, in particular in relation to epic writing tradition (whose pattern consists of long extended narratives, comprising a great number of events and characters, but also containing the supernatural element and the verse form, which are alien to the fictional system) and to a number of novels of low esteem in Antiquity because of their prose form and thematic frivolity (Heliodorus' *Ethiopian History*, Petronius' *Satyricon*, Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, and Longus' *Daphnis and*

Chloe), but which were imitated during the Italian and Spanish Renaissance, and inspired Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe during the English Renaissance. Other sources would be the medieval romances, the Spanish picaresque tales, the Renaissance conduct books, and the list could also include other works in which one may find character delineation and an amount of realism in the observation of human behaviour and social background (like in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* or John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*).

With all these antecedents, English novel still emerged as a new type of literary text, a new literary expression as imaginative prose, a new genre of fiction lacking definite models and norms of writing, which represented a major reason for the huge diversity of fictional forms and thematic concerns in the eighteenth century novel, as well as for its openness to different influences. Highly influential works continued to be the Spanish picaresque novels over the literary activity of Alain-Rene Lesage in France, Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett in England, and Wieland and Goethe in Germany, these writers assimilating the picaresque elements and, at the same time, developing and diversifying the fictional pattern of the picaresque tradition.

The first novels also tried to assume some other identities ('memoirs', travel books, 'true histories', collections of letters, found manuscripts, etc.), that is, any form compatible with the revealing of a particular view of life. Actually, there was a lack of recognisable form – in that the 'newness' in form is paralleled with the 'newness' of concern, as the individual experience is always unique and therefore new – because one may often find the same novel under several headings: *Gulliver's Travels*, for instance, is an imaginary travel book and a satire written in prose; *Moll Flanders* is a pseudo-autobiographical novel, but also a picaresque novel; *Joseph Andrews* is a comic novel, a parody, and a picaresque novel; *Pamela* is a sentimental novel, epistolary novel, and a novel of confession; Fielding's *Tom Jones* is a novel of manners, but an important part of it follows the picaresque mode.

A major reason for this diversity is the lack of rigid rules and traditions of novel writing; picaresque would be one, but its influence diminished significantly in the eighteenth century given the dominance of the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism over the literary production.

The beginning of the English novel is almost symbolical for the new ways of literature: the new prose style is plain, simple, devoid of all ornaments, clear and direct, and serves a clear thinking and an interested eye cast upon the surrounding world. This aspect is also to be noticed in the rendering of the character, which is governed by reason and efficient action (for instance, Robinson Crusoe's experience on a deserted part of the world).

Ian P. Watt remarks that the method of the eighteenth century realism in novel is "the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigation", having as its primary criterion the "truthfulness to

individual experience"[32]. If the novel sets out to deal with individual experience, its language has to serve the purpose: to be a source of interest in its own right and to establish a closer correspondence between words and their objects. The double dependence of the fiction on language and on reality represents another reason that makes difficult to classify morphologically the eighteenth century novels.

The novelist of the eighteenth century was interested in the individual life as he was concerned with different aspects of the social existence in general, and the interested look the novelist cast upon the aspects of everyday life was both realistic and critical, and linked to a kind of universal criticism exercised in all fields (literature, ethics, politics, and philosophy).

This is a common aspect of the eighteenth century English novel, as well as of the European novel in general, along with the continuation of the picaresque form, which gave at that time the thematic and narrative perspectives most congenial to the fictional expression of the concern with the personal and the social. The picaresque novel represents a dynamic narrative movement that goes over different social mediums, with characters whose main features are clearly and definitely rendered, even if the author fails over psychological aspects.

The protagonist of the picaresque novel narrates his own life, colouring it with the presentation of the other characters' lives, as well as with many personal reflections and points of view on events, people and things he meets in his both physical and spiritual pilgrimage. Born in a provincial town in a family of lower-class parents, or sometimes an orphan educated by relatives, *el picaro* passes through different adventures consisting in an extraordinary experience of life: trap, abduction, escape, pursuit, penal servitude, servant of several masters, coming into money, collapse, and final triumph, the hero also showing the development of his personality from childhood to manhood.

The experience of life of the picaresque hero is important so far as it changes the inner existence of the protagonist, together with his condition, destiny and social position. The changes in *el picaro*'s inner life, that is, of his personality, are based on his understanding of moral values, on his sense of right and wrong, and the ability to reconcile the outward and the inward, revealing how a high social position and money can also contribute to the character's true enrichment of spirit.

As a continuation of the seventeenth century fiction, the eighteenth century also saw an increase in autobiographical writing, which might be related to the rise of the interest in self-analysis and individual experience. It

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[32] Ian P. Watt in the Introduction to *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

was a form of self-expression open to both men and women, later leading on to experiments with fictional first-person narratives.

Apart from being novels of character and social realism, the eighteenth century English fiction is in some respects the equivalent of the Renaissance conduct book, tracing the process of the making of a gentleman; a picaresque story of adventure, tracing the story of a personal experience of life along with the representation of social background; and, as a continuation of the seventeenth century fiction, less a psychological study than a representation of the character's development in the same time with the influences of the milieu, most of the characters in the eighteenth century fiction being flat, but dynamic characters.

On the other hand, given this diversity and the openness to influences of different kind, having no models to be determined by, and feeling free with respect to any traditions and norms, the eighteenth century English novelists started to create new literary conventions, which came to represent the elements of the fictional pattern of the novel writing tradition. The primary aim of these new conventions was to achieve verisimilitude – illusion of reality – and to organize the fictional material in a manner of writing mostly accessible to the reading audience, because of the moralizing and critical concern of the authors.

The particular way of linguistic representation of the story – what Ian P. Watt calls 'the distinctive narrative mode' – has to do with the sum of literary techniques, "whereby the novel's imitation of human life follows the procedures adopted by the philosophical realism in its attempt to ascertain and report the truth", and is conventionally called 'formal realism', that is,

> the narrative embodiment of the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as to the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.[33]

Realism became the unifying principle of the novels written in the eighteenth century; in other words, the first English novelists were pioneers of realism by assuming the task to give the impression of fidelity to human experience, which is always treated in relation to the milieu and in relation to the morals, the manners, and the different aspects of life of the contemporary to the writer society. Moreover, the writer's concern with the everyday life was critical, that is, the presentation of different aspects of the social and the personal without exaggeration had to convey certain elements of opposition to those aspects that appear incompatible with the personal or social accomplishment.

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

In the eighteenth century novels, realism represented an important element in the process of consolidation of the novel writing tradition, whereas in the nineteenth century, after the decline of Romanticism, Realism established itself as a trend which continued and strengthened the eighteenth century concern with the actual social and the actual personal, and opened new perspectives of literary representation of the relationship between individual experience and social background.

There were, however, particular manifestations in the eighteenth century fiction that depart to a certain extent from the realism-forming fictional discourse of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. In this respect, mention should be made of Laurence Sterne and his 'anti-novel' *Tristram Shandy*, of Jane Austen and her domestic realism presented through a unique blend of the Neoclassical rationalism and the sentimentalism of the Romance (although, in the eighteenth century, sentimentalism as such has already pervaded the prose writings of Richardson, Sterne, and Goldsmith, not to mention the Pre-Romantic poetry), and of the Gothic novel.

Concerning the novel-related literary theory and criticism in the eighteenth century, and to be taken separately from the Neoclassical critics, such as Pope, Addison, and Johnson, also important representatives of the critical thought in the period were the founders of the novel writing tradition in English literature, among whom mention should be made of Daniel Defoe (1661-1731), Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), and Henry Fielding.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) was born at Sharpham Park in Somerset, his father being a nephew of the 3rd Earl of Denbigh, and his mother from a famous family of lawyers. Fielding received his education first at home and then at Eton, where he became well-schooled in ancient Greek and Roman literature. Fielding started his career as a writer in London, writing in 1728 two plays, of which *Love in Several Masques* was successful. He, then, resumed his education in classical literature at the University of Leyden in the Netherlands.

Between 1729 and 1737, Fielding wrote some twenty-five plays, of which the most successful being *Tom Thumb* (1730), which is to the present his most famous and popular drama. Most of Fielding's plays were comedies, largely satirical, in particular the burlesques satirizing the government, which 'ended' Fielding's dramatic career, but provided many of the thematic aspects for his later novels, in particular their comic elements. Meanwhile, searching for an alternative career, Fielding edited four periodicals, namely *The Champion*, *The Covent Garden Journal*, *The True Patriot*, and *Jacobite's Journal*.

Fielding's major achievement in English literature is neither that of playwright nor editor, but that of a novelist. In 1740, Richardson produced *Pamela*, a novel that has been attacked ever since it was published on the ground of its strong moralizing substratum. It also inspired Fielding to write *Shamela*, a parody, which was published in 1741 and which was developed

into the theme of *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), now a comic and original novel. In 1743, Fielding published *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great*, and the same year saw the appearance of *A Journey from This World to the Next*. Fielding's greatest work, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, was published in 1749, and *Amelia*, his last novel, in 1751. Fielding's travel book *A Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* appeared posthumously in 1755.

Joseph Andrews (the full title being *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of His Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams, Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote*) is not the first English novel and also not Fielding's first novel, but in English literary history is the first comic novel.

The novel is also important for the history of literary criticism, as it contains a celebrated Preface in which Fielding provides one of the first critical theories of the novel in English. In his attempts to define and explain fiction as a literary genre, Fielding considers his novel to be a sort of "comic epic poem written in prose" or a "comic romance", but apart from the intertextual relations to epic and romance, *Joseph Andrews* owns much of its narrative material to the 'manner of Cervantes', the picaresque tales in general, and, to a lesser extent, to Richardson's *Pamela*.

Fielding, who, like Richardson, came into novel writing almost accidentally, was conscious of being the author of a new genre, that of novel, and understood the great opening of its thematic perspectives. Thus, *Joseph Andrews* starts as another parody on Richardson's novel, this time the source of the comic being a virtuous male counterpart to Pamela, her brother, Joseph Andrews, but along the novel Fielding seems 'to forget' about *Pamela* and presents the reader with a genuine text containing its own moral tenets. The plot is constructed in a double perspective: picaresque narrative (the chronotope of road involving the characters in a great variety of adventures in various places, and thus offering a complex picture of English life) and the burlesque of romances (with its startling turns of events, revelations of identity, stolen babies, and foundlings restored to their position and heritage in the last chapters).

Joseph Andrews is, however, less an ethical or a picaresque book than a comic one: Joseph has to go through a similar to Pamela ordeal – he is the object of desire of Lady Booby and struggles hard to preserve his virtue – but the literary treatment of male chastity with the same seriousness with which Richardson treated female chastity could only result in comic effect, and indeed *Joseph Andrews* is the first great comic novel in English.

The comic mode applies firstly to the character representation strategies, and the comic characters are usually 'flat', common, and representative of a human or social typology. "I describe not men, but manners, not an individual, but a species", says Fielding, yet his characters retain an individualism that makes them unforgettable, the most remarkable

example of that being Parson Adams, a counterpart to Cervantes' Don Quixote. However, strictly on the narrative level, the novel clearly reveals the two narrative lines resulting from the two main thematic perspectives: 'parody on *Pamela*' and 'manner of Cervantes'.

The former determines the story of Joseph Andrews, Mrs Booby, and Fanny; the latter gives the story of Abraham Adams, the eighteenth century Don Quixote; both narrative lines containing the comic and moral elements and being linked by the chronotope of road.

The novel displays an interesting typology out of its relationship with Richardson's and Cervantes' novels. The perspective of 'parody on *Pamela*' attributes to *Joseph Andrews* the status of a comic novel and a moral novel; the perspective of the 'manner of Cervantes' makes *Joseph Andrews* a moral novel (as to mention just the morally perfect Abraham Adams as a quixotic character), but also a picaresque novel (as to mention only the picaresque narrative containing the adventures of an *el picaro* and the chronotope of road).

Both perspectives also indicate, by the author's use of imitation and contrast, the burlesque of romance as another typological feature of this novel. The burlesque of the romance, together with the use of parody, satire, humour, irony, and ridiculous, represents the reason for the general consideration of *Joseph Andrews* as the first English comic novel, in which the realistic element is achieved through the concern with individual experience and social background, and the textual representation of this concern, which, unlike in *Pamela*, is extended and made more complex.

It was with *Tom Jones* (1749), however, that the realistic element, with its concern with individual experience and social background, and the textual representation of this concern, has become panoramic, signifying that the process of development of the eighteenth century English novel has come to its end and has established itself as a definite literary tradition.

In this novel, Fielding developed further his moral doctrine, stating in the dedicatory Preface that

> goodness and innocence hath been my sincere endeavour in this history. (…) I have employed all the wit and humour of which I am master in the following history; wherein I have endeavoured to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices.

With this book, Fielding indeed wrote another moral novel, teaching other moral lessons, and enlarging his moral doctrine by adding a great variety of characters. The moral doctrine is expressed through individual experience of Tom (moral), Blifil (immoral), Allworthy (like Adams representing the Quixotic, moral ideal), and other characters who are moral as well as social types. Also, with *Tom Jones*, Fielding wrote another picaresque novel, adding more picaresque characters, including a female *el picaro*, and the chronotope of city to that of road.

But *Tom Jones* does not simply continue the picaresque tradition and the moral didacticism of *Joseph Andrews*; rather, they are extended to a panoramic mode by the chronotope of road, expanding the character typology and enlarging the range of events and setting. On both thematic and structural levels, the novel is highly multifaceted, reader-oriented, and expresses a panoramic social concern, revealing a complex picture of the contemporary to writer English life, its values, customs, manners, and forms of behaviour. In relation to the adjective 'panoramic', the term 'novel of manners' is applied to *Tom Jones*. In the novel, the representation of the eighteenth century British society and people is panoramic, meaning that Fielding attempted to depict the contemporary to him England in all its diversity and detail, a successful endeavour, since *Tom Jones* is acclaimed as the second after *Canterbury Tales* literary work that has given such a complex picture of English society.

'Cleaning' itself from alien to the fictional discourse thematic and narrative elements, the development of the English novel in the eighteenth century, starting with *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe* and culminating with Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, gave rise, according to Watt and other critics, to a social consciousness of the British novelist, meaning the concern with the representation of the complexity of social and personal life as to achieve the semblance of real world, and to an idea of social reformation, meaning the ethical didacticism in matters of spiritual betterment, reforming the manners, beliefs, moral values, and the whole of the society.

The eighteenth century English novelists, like their Victorian successors, saw themselves responsive for society's moral edification, and both social consciousness and social reformation represent interdependent parts of the element of realism that forms the basic component in the literary pattern of fiction writing, and whose beginnings found their textual expression in the eighteenth century novels.

Some of the eighteenth century novelists were entirely conscious that what they were writing was something completely different from the romance and totally new in English literature, for example the ideas expressed by Richardson, Smollett, and Fielding in the Prefaces to their novels, when compared to Johnson or Goldsmith, who failed to see any difference between the novel and the romance, and who were not conscious of the appearance of novel as a new type of literary text, and also compared to others who, like Daniel Defoe, refused to consider their writings to be of imaginative prose.

However, there were among the founders of the novel in English literature those writers who, like Richardson and Fielding, were also important representatives of the eighteenth century critical thought, namely the novel-related literary theory and criticism, which is to be taken separately from the Neoclassical criticism of Pope, Addison, and Johnson.

Although the classical doctrine had no direct impact on the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century, and the literary genre of Neoclassicism being poetry not fiction, it was the Neoclassical precept of 'respect to the genre' that made Swift write his *Gulliver's Travels*, and it was the Neoclassical emphasis on verisimilitude and faithfulness to fact that made Defoe declare in his Prefaces to *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* that the novels are true stories, authentic records of actual events.

And it was a Neoclassical convention to align and compare an original work to some ancient literary precedents, or to argue about writing in well-established and honourable literary tradition, that made Fielding in his Preface to *Joseph Andrews* trace the theoretical foundation of the novel in general, as a new literary genre, and of the comic novel, in particular, as a sub-species of the genre of novel. In this respect, Fielding's contribution to literary criticism, according to Harry Blamires, is that he

> brought a blast of fresh air into the world of criticism, not only because he so cheerfully exposed pretentiousness, but because he came representing a new genre of literature which was eventually to transform the arena of critical studies.[34]

Among the eighteenth century founders of the English novel, who also turned literary critics (namely Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson), Fielding is perhaps the only novelist who, in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, by comparing his work to epic, comedy, and 'serious romance', not just assigned a respectable tradition to his new literary form, but also attempted to develop a theory of the novel and a proper terminology, and, defending the literary value of his novel in theoretical terms, succeeded in tracing the characteristics of the novel, in general, and those of a comic novel, in particular, and in a way that most of them are considered as true to this day. For Fielding, a novel is a new genre, whose action is "more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters", including "persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners".

In the same way, Fielding's contemporary writer Tobias Smollett formulates in the Preface to his *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) the distinction between romance and the new type of fiction of his day, that is, the novel, which, according to him, is "a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes for the purpose of an uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient".

As novel was a new genre in English literature, Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, and other eighteenth century novelists, who founded

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[34] Harry Blamires. *A History of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 167.

the new genre, produced literary criticism by attempting to provide a solid theoretical basis for their novels, explain them, and defend their literary validity in order to make the contemporary reader accept such a new literary tradition, and therefore be implemented in the cultural background of the period.

Similarly, the following Romantic period in English literature expanded this type of literary criticism, which, against the Neoclassical principles, assumed the task to explain and defend the value of the Romantic poetry as a new literary tradition, and to secure its place and development in the conservative and conventional British culture.

The Romantic Criticism: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley

Romanticism was a wide-ranging European movement having its origins in Germany, the German Romantic literature being at the forefront of literary innovation and closely followed by Romantic literature in Britain, and other countries, whereas French Romanticism came late on scene since in France the influence of classicism lasted longer than in the rest of Europe.

Romanticism was a great period of new developments in thought, including literary theory and criticism, and of artistic experimentation in music and poetry, and to a lesser extent in drama and fiction, spreading out initially from Germany, and co-existing with a political revolution in France and an industrial revolution in Britain, as well as with some reactionary political attitudes of the period.

However, Romanticism is first of all a cultural revolution and it is inappropriate to attribute some definite political and social grounds to the new artistic sensibility of Romanticism, or to view Romanticism as a social or political movement. It is necessary, on the other hand, to consider the great theoretical input of Romanticism, where Germany was again the major source of the most important conceptions in philosophy and literary theory. According to Richard Harland, the literary theory was produced

> by poets like Goethe and Schiller, by journal-critics like Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel (especially in their journal, the Athenaeum), and by academic philosophers like Kant, Schelling, Schopenhauer and Hegel. The last group was especially significant, in that the advent of German Idealist philosophy impacted very directly upon Romantic literary theory.[35]

Also, according to Harland, in Germany, more than in the rest of Europe, the "intellectual scene exhibits an unusual degree of interaction between academics and creative writers throughout this period, often involving close circles of friendship and personal acquaintance"[36].

The critical doctrine of Romanticism was at first a reaction against Classicism, Neoclassicism and Enlightenment, expressing in turn a newly discovered interest in national literatures rather than in those of ancient Rome and Greece, and, in case of literary criticism, developing a greater variety of opinions on literature and poetry, the poem's thematic content and language, and broadening the critical concerns, namely regarding the processes, sensibility, imagination, and emotions of the writer.

Against the Neoclassical critical view that the poet is a craftsman, observing and reproducing nature with the help of the classics and rules, the

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[35] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 61.
[36] *Ibid.*

Romantic critics regard the poet as a man apart, possessing a special sensibility and a stronger imaginative power than the ordinary man.

In this respect, against the view of literature as simply the representation of nature, Romantic writers and philosophers developed the expressive theory of literature and authorship, the fundamental idea being that the literary work is expressive of the author, the poet's own interior, subjectivity, and sense of the self, where confession, according to Andrew Bennett, as "the revelation of an authentic authorial voice, identity, or experience", becomes "one of the dominant models of literary production"[37].

In Romanticism, the confession, or confessional manner in poetry, evokes the author's own subjectivity, and in the way it was declared by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) by the opening words of his *Confessions* (1770): "I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself". Although a philosopher of Enlightenment, Rousseau developed new approaches to subjectivity, influenced the rise of nationalism and Romantic Movement, and, with *Confessions*, founded the modern autobiography in which an individual is no longer reluctant to express personal emotional experience. Concerning the audience of the Romantic author, to whom he addresses his confession, it is human society, as for Shelley, or humanity in general, as for Friedrich Schlegel, who declares in his *Critical Fragments* (1797) that "every honest author writes for nobody or everybody" and that the author who writes only for a particular group "does not deserve to be read".

In this respect, regarding the role of the critic, the Romantic literary theory changes the perspective from the concern with the audience and the effects of literature on audience to the concern with the author and his relation to the creative act. The relationship between the poet and text came thus to replace the relationship of the text to reader, and the critic was required to live in the spirit of the author, to become his servant and friend, to better disclose the literary values, as for Herder. For Friedrich Schlegel, the critic is supposed to evaluate the literary text not by a general ideal, but by finding the individual ideal in every work. Also, as it was believed that the origins reveal the real nature of the object, the critic should begin with what might have been the author's intention and to continue with judging the development of the intention in the whole of the literary work. As Friedrich Schlegel puts it, the critical act, in order to achieve the complete understanding of a literary work, implies a movement from the intuition of the author's intention to the intuition of the whole of the work.

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[37] Andrew Bennett. "Expressivity: the Romantic theory of authorship" in Patricia Waugh, ed. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 50.

This Romantic critical perspective of tracing the literary work back to its origins in the poet, as part of the expressive theory of authorship, influenced much of the nineteenth century criticism and theory on poetry, as, for instance, the method of Sainte-Beuve, which is the biographical approach involving discussion on both the work and life of the author:

> Literature, literary production, as I see it, is not distinct or separable from the rest of mankind's character and activity. I may enjoy a work, but it is hard for me to judge it independently of my knowledge of the man who produced it, and I am inclined to say, *tel arbre, tel fruit* – the fruit is like the tree.[38]

Dominant in nineteenth century, the expressive theory of authorship has been rejected by the textuality of the twentieth century critics, in particular Roland Barthes who, in his famous essay *The Death of the Author* (1967), declares that the literary text is "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture", that the text's author is 'dead', absent, the text being produced by a 'writer' or 'scriptor', who originates nothing and expresses not himself but imitates "a gesture that is always anterior".

However, the importance of Romanticism in the development of literary criticism results from the fact that the Romantic aesthetic doctrine conferred to criticism a more scientific and theoretical nature, developed new critical concerns, searched and established methodology.

Although many Romantic critical ideas have been rejected by the next generations of critics, the Romantic Movement in Europe has been the primary source for many twentieth century critical concepts and principles. To mention just Coleridge's view of the organic form of poetry, which becomes an important concept in New Criticism, and his speculations about the poetic form consisting of the whole and the parts, which prefigure the formalist approach.

The Romantic critical ideas flourished within the context of the new philosophical trends having their origin this time not in Italy or France, but Germany. Among those who paved the way to Romantic aesthetic doctrine and literary practice, mention should be made of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and his student Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), the two most important representatives of the 'Sturm und Drang' ('storm and stress') movement, and of Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805) and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829).

As the French Romantic Victor Hugo's phrase 'liberalism in literature' denotes one of the main traits of the new literary movement, which came to emphasise the freedom of artistic expression and individualism, so the German 'Sturm und Drang' movement of Herder and

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[38] Sainte-Beuve cited in Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 78.

Goethe propounded a new literary sensibility by revolting against the conventions of French classicism, emphasising, instead, personal sensory experience and subjectivity, exalting emotion, passion, fragmentariness, rebelliousness, mysticism, and nationalism, and reviving the interest in native folk literature.

In relation to some of these aspects, and against the classical style dominant in that period, were Herder's views advancing the interest in folk literature and rural life, as was his special form of the 'fragment', that is, deliberately incomplete writing (like in Coleridge), which rejected the Neoclassical systematised writing.

The folk literary production, in particular, constituted a means of supporting Herder's own ideas on literature and language as the main criterion for distinguishing the particular traits of a given society and period. Starting from the premise that each period and society have some distinctive qualities, building up their own unique character, which Herder calls 'the collective individuality of a society' (later in the twentieth century termed by Michel Foucault as 'episteme'), language is one of the main decisive factors in differentiating among the different cultures and periods. "The language is its [nation's] collective treasure, the source of its social wisdom and communal self-respect", says Herder in his study *The Origin of Language*. Language, according to Herder, is a living organism with its own rules and growth, but also the collective treasure of a society, a part of culture, and, as language belongs to a culture and cannot be separated from it, literature produced in that language cannot be separated from a particular language and culture. Literature is thus an expression not only of an individual creative mind, but also an expression of a given period, society and culture, where folk literature is most revelatory in this respect.

Like Herder, Goethe is at first a part of the Pre-Romantic movement 'Sturm und Drang', in, among other things, the creation of a new type of character, the young genius and his hopeless love (as in the sentimental novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774), but later turns a classicist declaring that "Klassisch ist das Gesunde, Romantish das Kranke" ('Classicism is health, Romanticism is sickness') and arguing that with its emphasis on feelings and personal experience Romanticism failed to express the whole of the human nature and to achieve, as classical writers would do, the perfect balance between mind and heart, reason and emotion.

Goethe together with Friedrich von Schiller (for a time, like Goethe, also a notable exponent of 'Sturm und Drang') propounded during 1788-1832 the main ideas of the cultural and literary movement called 'Weimar Classicism', or German Classicism, which coincided and was in opposition to the contemporary literary movement of German Romanticism, against which they promoted the concepts of harmony and wholeness, elaborated on aesthetic form, and acclaimed the ancients for having achieved the balance between mind and feeling by adopting a great number of approaches to

reality. In *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1796), Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805) distinguishes between the 'naïve' poetry of the ancients and 'sentimental' poetry of his contemporary Romantic writers. His ideas are indebted to the new theories developed by Kant, but also suggest the later Idealism of Schelling and Hegel.

The distinction made by Schiller is, according to Richard Harland, a contrast "between integration and separation" in that

> 'naïve' poets are at one with Nature; 'sentimental' poets admire Nature precisely because they see it as something apart, something lost. 'Naïve' poets present the object impersonally in concrete description; 'sentimental' poets present the object always through themselves, subjectively and self-consciously.[39]

The sentimental poet presents the impression made by the object upon him, and, dominated by mind and emotion, the sentimental, that is, Romantic poet aspires towards idea and ideal in a state of perpetual unfulfilled desire, in this revealing the condition of the modern artist breaking the linearity of literary development dominated for centuries by the rules of the classics.

Later, in 1819, Arthur Schopenhauer asserts in *The World as Will and Idea* that human existence is a movement between the extremes of boredom and want, especially the latter, given the competition among human wills. Much later, in 1872, in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, Nietzsche hypothesized that to be in a state of longing is to be alive, though what is desired is beyond human grasp, existence being, in its essence and from the modern insights into human soul, primarily tragic. Similarly, the poets of the Romantic period, like Byron and Shelley, displayed through the character of Childe Harold or Manfred, or the lyrical voice in *Ode to the West Wind*, a hunger of human soul for rebelliousness or escapism that is never attained, but a source of alienation and frustration as aspects of the tragic existence revealed in modern literature.

Romanticism has been acclaimed since its rise and by its own representatives, as for instance by Victor Hugo (1802-1885), as modern art. Hugo himself attacks the rules of decorum and the unities of time and place, claiming that

> it would be strange, if in this age, liberty, like the light, should penetrate everywhere except to the one place where freedom is most natural – the domain of thought. Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. (…) There are neither rules nor models.

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[39] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 63.

Hugo's Preface to his drama *Cromwell* (1827) is considered the most spectacular of the French Romantic treatises, which were in general more polemical though produced rather later in time than those of the rest of Europe, even English.

In France, classicism lasted longer than in the rest of Europe, and there were Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), who were in fact the real founders of Romanticism as a literary movement and the critical leaders of German and European Romantic school of poetry. August Wilhelm Schlegel is acclaimed for his organic model applied to literary form, the organic principle in literature, language and culture being actually a major concern in Romantic literary theory, as in the works of Goethe, Schelling and Coleridge. In *On Dramatic Art and Literature*, August Wilhelm Schlegel distinguishes between mechanical and organic form, the latter being "innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination contemporaneously with the perfect development of the germ". In other words, the organic form, the vehicle of organically developing literature, is produced when the essence of an idea or theme is allowed to unfold according to its own nature.

Friedrich Schlegel's conceptions on literature consider first of all the nature of the poetic genius, the author's 'self' and subjectivity as the paramount vehicles for poetic production and the supreme function of the individual inner experience in the pursuit of ultimate truths. Actually, Friedrich Schlegel was the first to coin the term 'Romantic' as a derivation from the German word 'roman', naming "a potpourri kind of novel which skips over and between all other genres"[40].

Friedrich Schlegel was a major source of influence on his contemporary Romantic writers and critics of Europe, as well as on some later scholars, as to mention just the name of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), for whom Schlegel's 'subjective mind' turns into the concept of 'the unconscious', which Carlyle elaborates on in his *Characteristics* (1831). As summarised by Harry Blamires, Carlyle's ideas, influenced by those of Schlegel, point to the fact that

> for Carlyle it is not the conscious mind, 'the mind as acquainted with its strength' that is the spring of health and vitality, for its concern is with the mechanical and the overt. The unconscious is the source of dynamism, for it is in touch with the region of meditation, those mysterious depths that lie below the level of conscious argument and discourse.[41]

A major source of Romanticism in Europe is also considered to be the German idealist philosophy asserted by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

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[40] *Ibid*., p. 70.
[41] Harry Blamires. *A History of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 261.

(1770-1831), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854). Also leading to the consolidation of the Romantic principles in literature were the ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Kant's philosophy, idealist philosophy, and the Romantic Movement reveal essential similarities in their pursuit of a modern philosophy and view of art, but there are also certain differences that should be taken into account. Andrew Bowie considers that both the German idealist and early Romantic conceptions originate in "the attempt to overcome the problems Kant encountered in grounding knowledge in subjectivity", but the main difference between them is that "Idealism pursues the 'metaphysical' project of grounding in a systematic manner, whereas early Romanticism renounces this foundational project and seeks to come to terms with the finite nature of human reason". Also, Hegel "talks of the 'end of art', because art's capacity for revealing the truth is being suppressed by the sciences", whereas the Romantic thinkers, like Novalis and Schlegel, "see the inexhaustibility of meaning in art as revealing the essence of modernity".[42]

Although, in general, a follower of Kant's idealism, according to David H. Richter, Hegel

> rejected Kant's aesthetic with its basis in natural beauty and its insistence on the purposelessness of the beautiful object. For Hegel, Nature is beautiful only by analogy with art, and art is supremely useful to man, not as mere pleasure but for "its ability to represent in *sensuous form* the highest ideas, bringing them thus nearer to … the senses and to feeling".[43]

There are also differences among the representatives of German idealism. As said by Robert H. Holub, Hegel rejects the subjective idealism of Fichte's view that subject is "absolute, logically prior to the world or nonsubject, and the active agent in asserting a material world opposed to it", as well as Schelling's philosophy of nature, postulating instead

> an identity of being and thought. He retains the model of reflection, therefore, and by including everything in the movement of self-consciousness from the very beginning, he tries (…) to eliminate the contradiction in the reflection hypothesis that had plagued it since Descartes.[44]

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[42] Andrew Bowie in Knellwolf, C. and Norris, C., eds. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 9: Twentieth century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 125.
[43] David H. Richter. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989, p. 343.
[44] Robert H. Holub. *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, p. 90.

In relation to Romantic literary theory, Hegel is important for his influential philosophical speculation on art, in which – based on his own assumption, developed in his revolutionary *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), that art is the sensuous semblance of the Idea and that art evolves through the history of its forms and through the history of the spirit itself – Hegel builds the so-called 'dialectal historical sequence for art', which consists of three phases. The first is the 'symbolic' phase of Oriental and Egyptian art, but Hegel draws mainly upon the contrast between the second and the third phases: the second is the 'classical' phase of art, which has achieved the perfect balance, or rather fusion, between idea and sensuous embodiment in what Hegel calls "the concrete spiritual"; the third is the 'romantic' phase, which moved art into imbalance, since what is now predominant is the spiritual level.

However different, both the German idealist philosophy (of Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel) and the philosophy of Kant are the main sources of the new artistic sensibility, which is that of Romanticism. Especially influential were Immanuel Kant's theory of knowledge (epistemology) and his theory of perception expressed in *The Critique of Judgement* (1790) and other works, in which he advances imagination in literature and argues that the judgements of the world are determined by the subjectivity, and that the comprehension of the beauty in a work of art promotes its disinterested contemplation. In other words, as David H. Richter puts it,

> just as the sensual world is the product of our subjective mental processes rather than of objective features, so our judgements of beauty are also subjective. The beauty of a work of art or a natural landscape exists nowhere but in the eye of the beholder. Yet because of their special qualities, aesthetics judgements seem to have an objective character and to reflect universal rather than individual concerns.[45]

In this respect, Kant's aesthetic doctrine is developed within the context of his analysis of the mental experience, which is done in a highly systematic way in relation to the categories of quality, quantity, relation, and modality, as to finally disclose the psychological qualities involved in the reception of beauty. Concerning the creation of beauty, Kant influenced the Romantic literary doctrine, as for instance Coleridge's, by his ideas on imagination as the main mental faculty, which is intuitive and creative rather than cognitive and rational. Imagination breaks the rules imposed by reason and creates out of the material provided by actual nature a new product, "another nature", or an "aesthetical idea". Concerning the reception of art, the reader or viewer must also escape the rational constraints and employ

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[45] David H. Richter. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989, p. 244.

imagination as a creative rather than cognitive faculty, and become, in turn, a producer of aesthetical ideas.

Concerning both the creation of beauty and the reception of beauty, Kant influenced not only the Romantics, but also the later nineteenth century promoters of Aestheticism and 'art for art's sake' doctrine.

Kant, the last of the great Enlightenment philosophers, also acclaimed as a bridge between the empiricist and rationalist traditions of the eighteenth century, and as one of the most influential philosophers on the rise of Romanticism, develops his moral philosophy in three works – *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) – his aesthetic philosophy concerned with the subjective nature of aesthetic qualities and experiences in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) and develops an aesthetic theory in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790); also, his political philosophy, namely a version of the democratic peace theory regarding the condition of constitutional republics necessary for creating a lasting peace, is developed in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). Another major contribution is his theory of perception developed in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), in which Kant argues that the human understanding of the external world has its foundations not merely in experience, but in both experience and a priori knowledge, thus offering a non-empiricist critique of rationalist philosophy. This work is claimed to be the most significant volume of metaphysics and epistemology in modern philosophy, and his writings on the whole influenced the Romantic and German idealist philosophers of the nineteenth century, and had a strong impact on many of the twentieth century philosophers.

Kant's psychological rather than metaphysical view of the role of the audience in literature was contrary to another eighteenth century approach, namely the historical one, which argues about the importance of the context for understanding the meaning of the text. Against this view, Kant promotes and investigates the role of the mind in shaping the knowledge of the world and the perception of the work of art. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan summarise Kant's ideas, declaring that the philosopher emphasises that

> knowledge is shaped by inner mental categories that operate prior to any sense experience. They determine how we know the world. Knowledge that was made up of sensory experience alone would have no unity or coherence. Such ideational unity could be provided only by logical operations that the mind could produce. One implication of this argument was to shift attention toward the work of the observer in constructing knowledge both of the world and of art. [46]

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[46] Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 129

Kant's ideas influenced not only nineteenth century, but also twentieth century writers and philosophers, among whom Edmund Husserl and his works on phenomenology of knowledge, whereas others, like Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "worked out a compromise between the historicist position and the Kantian one", arguing that knowledge occurs in time, and it is interpretation, that is, "a transfer of meaning from one moment of history into another that always inflects what is known with the categories and assumptions of the later moment".[47]

In Britain, among the main expounders of the Romantic ideas – William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats – only Coleridge seems to have fully adopted the German perspective. For example, influenced by the German philosophical ideas of Kant, Hegel, and Schelling, Coleridge develops in *Biographia Literaria* the conception of a dynamic imagination as a creative and unifying principle in poetic practice, and the pleasure educed from poetry, unlike in the other genres, emerges from the whole of the poem as well as from each component part. Moreover, as Wilfred L. Guerin declares,

> this interrelationship between the whole and the parts was manifested in a consistently recurring image among the Romantics – the image of growth, particularly of vegetation. Perhaps because of the Romantics' infatuation with nature, the analogy usually likened the internal life of a painting or poem to the quintessential unity of parts within a tree, flower, or plant: as the seed determines, so the organism develops and lives.[48]

Also, starting from Schelling's view of imagination as unconsciously creating the real world and consciously creating the ideal world of art, and his distinction between primary and secondary imagination, Coleridge creates his own theory of poetic imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), showing its importance as a vital human faculty and arguing about its usefulness of operation not only in poetry but also in philosophy and even science.

In Britain, like in the rest of Europe, by the mid-eighteenth century the Neoclassical tenets came to be attacked by the rising Romantic spirit in both literary practice – as in the Pre-Romantic mournfully-reflective poetry of Thomas Gray and other representatives of the 'Graveyard School of Poetry' – and literary criticism, which rejected reason and acclaimed the imaginative and subjective qualities of the poet, and rejected the imitation of the classics by arguing about the importance of the native literary heritage and justifying the gothic form in prose fiction. Among these proto-Romantic

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[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Wilfred L. Guerin in Wilfred L. Guerin *et al. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 98.

critics and writers, mention should be made of Thomas Warton with *Observations on The Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1754), Thomas Young with *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), and Richard Hurd with *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762). Thomas Young, in particular, according to Richard Harland, proclaims originality as an absolute virtue and

> attacks the Neoclassical writers' acceptance of secondarity and subservience to authority. Foreshadowing the Romantics, he envisages creative power in organic terms (…) He also foreshadows the Romantics in describing the creative power as 'the stranger within thee', which may be unknown to the consciousness of its possessor.[49]

Romantic criticism developed into a literary doctrine consisting of a complex range of theoretical and practical ideas and principles reifying the concerns, especially, with status and role of the poet, as well as the definition and origin of poetry, subject matter of poetry, relationship of poetry to nature and mind, language of poetry, imagination and inspiration, and the purpose and function of poetry. The major exponents of Romantic criticism in England were William Wordsworth with his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Samuel Taylor Coleridge with *Biographia Literaria* (1817), and Percy Bysshe Shelley with *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

The English Romantic Movement, like its general European counterpart, is primarily a cultural, artistic and literary manifestation, which, in relation to literature, is to be considered in a twofold perspective as a new type of literary discourse, consisting mainly of lyrical and narrative poetry, as well as lyrical drama and imaginative prose (historical fiction and gothic narratives), and as an important literary doctrine, both emerging as rejecting the Neoclassical principles on art.

As Romanticism represents a strong reaction against Neoclassicism, the characteristics of this movement's literary practice emerge clearer in opposition to those of the previous period:

Characteristics of Neoclassicism	Characteristics of Romanticism
The revival of ancient classical models, traditions, ideas, or rather the continuation of the Renaissance revival of ancient classical tradition.	The so-called 'Romantic Revival', meaning the revival of the national cultural heritage, the new interest in the Anglo-Saxon and medieval historical past, popular and folk literary tradition, of which major examples would be ballad, gothic tales, and historical novel.
The emphasis on reason, rationalism, calculative thought, empiricism, order, and common sense in the treatment of	The importance given to feelings, inspiration, and especially imagination, which is regarded as the most important

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[49] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 51.

different subjects, themes, and concerns, while rejecting poet's subjectivity and imagination.	human faculty (creative, cognitive, innovative, unifying, etc.).
The importance given to normative prescriptions (decorum, poetic diction) concerning artistic content and form, while rejecting the freedom of artistic expression.	The freedom of artistic expression.
The importance given to the relationship between text and reader, given the social, moral and didactical purpose of the Neoclassical art, especially concerning moral topics and ethical values transmitted by the focus on the audience and social issues or issues of general human interest, and the involvement in the matters of community and the problems of social existence.	The importance given to the relationship between author and text, as literature has become the expression of the author's own sensibility, emotional states, and states of the mind.
The abstract meditation, philosophising, and theory, while rejecting the representation of the personal, private, and individual experience.	The 'Rise of Individualism' expressed by the concern with individual experience, both subjective and psychological.
In the context of the abstract reasoning the main concern being with human nature in relation to the general human condition, as well as social, real, actual, and public issues.	The concern with the non-real, imaginary, fantastic, instinctual, demonic, and mysterious elements of nature and human inner world.
The development of a metropolitan type or culture, the view of art as the expression and product of a conventional urban society.	The concern with nature and countryside, the former being not just a matter of poetic contemplation and description, but rather a mirror of the human life, a spiritual healer, a major source of feelings and inspiration, and even ranked to divinity (Pantheism).

Each of these characteristics displays in its turn a remarkable complexity of thematic perspectives. For instance, concerning the emphasis on individual experience, the English Romantic authors created a special type of character, or 'lyrical I', which is a solitary, an alienated being, at odds with society and human kind, rejecting and being rejected by the community, often above human condition by possessing outstanding intellectual skills and imaginative flight, which allows him to transcend common human existence and reality. These and many other thematic perspectives involve the Romantic persona that finds himself trapped in the so-called 'dualism of existence' (Blake's chimney sweeper, Shelley's lyrical persona in *Ode to the West Wind*, and many others), expressing either

'Romantic rebelliousness' (Byron's Cain) or 'Romantic escapism' (Byron's Childe Harold). Nature, another major concern in Romantic poetry, also receives a complex thematic expression, where just in one poem, as in Shelley's *To a Skylark*, for example, one may find nature to be divine, an expression of supreme art, standing for spiritual existence, having no equivalent in reality and existing only in the poet's mind and as textual representation. Nature is also a source of feelings, source of knowledge, and source of inspiration. Nature is here, as in Romantic poetry in general, opposed to human condition in the dualism of existence, to which Shelley adds in *Ode to the West Wind* the idea of nature as a source of escapism and the Romantic claim of immortality possible by entering the natural cycle of death and rebirth.

Likewise, the Romantic aesthetic doctrine, exhibited in the great documents of Romanticism (among which William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, and John Keats' letters), displays a complex range of ideas and principles of literary theory and criticism, whose common focus is on the definition and origin of poetry, the subject matter of poetry, the relationship of poetry to nature and mind, the language of poetry, the theory of imagination and inspiration, the role of the poet, and the purpose and function of poetry.

William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, although by far the most important critical endeavour undertaken by an English Romantic writer, is the earliest English attempt to build up a Romantic aesthetic doctrine, representing the first manifesto sustaining the rise of a new and national school of poetry as part of the general English Romantic Movement. Added to the second, that of 1800, edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, published by Wordsworth in his own name, the Preface explains the poems from the volume in matters of their origin, subject matter, and language, as to embark on a more general critical speculation on the status and mission of the poet, the importance of imagination in the act of poetic creation, the origin and definition of poetry, and the purpose of poetry. Except, perhaps, the last issue, Wordsworth's literary conception emerges as a reaction against the Neoclassical principles of decorum, poetic diction, personification, concern with human nature, and in general against what Wordsworth referred to as the artificial poetic practice of the earlier periods, in particular the Neoclassical one, which "depraved" the public taste and made it grow accustomed to "gross and violent stimulants".

Thus, as a rejection of the Neoclassical poetic concerns with the general human and the urban, Wordsworth claims the subject of poetry, in general, and of the poems in the volume, in particular, to be "incidents and situations from common life", the humble and rustic existence, for "in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint and speak a plainer and

more emphatic language". As it was set forth by Wordsworth, an important role in the task of writing poetry is played by nature, because the "passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature".

Furthermore, the chosen as subject matter "incidents and situations from common life" will be transfigured by "a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect", and in which it will be traced "the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement". The subject matter of poetry, according to Wordsworth, is threefold, consisting of common, rural life and the beautiful forms of nature, which are symbiotically united, and the individual subjective experience, and it appears, as it is also revealed by Wordsworth's own poetic practice, that of the three components, feelings represent the primary, or the actual, subject matter, whereas countryside and nature are important so far as they become the source and embodiment of those "elementary feelings", that is, the source of inspiration for the poet. The materialization of these aspects of life in poetic form is possible only by the use of poetic imagination, in that what is usual, common, and elementary becomes unusual, sophisticated, and universal.

Also, in matters of writing poetry, in general, and the poems in the volume, in particular, and again against the Neoclassical ideas on the language of poetry and on decorum and poetic diction, Wordsworth, like other Romantic writers, emphasized the simplicity of the poetic utterance, which would eventually remove the "falsehood of description" in Augustan poetry. Wordsworth proposes the poems in the volume to be written "in a selection of language really used by men" in order not to deviate from the ordinary language. Moreover, against the Neoclassical artificial distinction made between the language of prose and that of poetry, the poetic language must not be opposed to that of prose, but to the unemotional language of science, or "Matter of Fact", because "some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written". One may notice here a number of contradictory ideas expressed by Wordsworth on language of poetry, in that the language "really used by men" is not actually the common language of the people, but "a plainer and a more emphatic language", as well as a "philosophical language", and "if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures".

The most interesting and, at the same time, original part of the Preface contains Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry and his speculations about the origin and nature of the creative act:

I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.

According to Wordsworth, the revival of some originally painful feelings will remove the pain, and the poet's mind during poetic creation will be in a state of enjoyment. A similar effect should be in the reader: "those passions, if the reader's mind be sound and vigorous should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure". The emotion is thus extremely important to the poem: it gives significance to the action and setting, and, if powerful enough, it would reveal with religious force the workings of the human heart. Again, one may notice here the contradictory exposition of his critical ideas, in that the sudden overflow of powerful feelings is not enough for poetic composition, since emotions, experienced earlier, must be later recollected in a state of tranquillity and pass into the mind as "elevated thoughts", which is remarkably expressed in *Tintern Abbey* and other Wordsworth's poems.

Concerning the purpose of poetry, Wordsworth's opinion seems to rely on Horace's concept of poetry as *utile et dulce*, and on the classical doctrine in general, for he considers the purpose to be divided in three types of action upon the reader: first is that poetry is a source of pleasure, second is that poetry gives knowledge, where "the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened", and finally poetry improves morally the reader, whose "affections [are] strengthened and purified".

In relation to the purpose of poetry, Wordsworth discusses the status and mission of the poet. In the manner of classicists, Wordsworth insists that the true mission of the poet is to spread humanitarian attitudes among mankind; the poet is "the rock of defence for human nature" and he must not only treat and reflect faithfully the human feelings, but also rectify them, make them more pure and permanent, carrying with him relationship and love. That is to say, the poet should not separate himself from humanity; he must be "a man speaking to men", but differing from the common man by his imaginative power, by having "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present", and by possessing "more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul". The knowledge acquired by the poet is based on the principle of pleasure; knowledge cannot exist without pleasure, which has its roots in a "spirit of love" and an "acknowledgment of the beauty of the universe". In this respect, the poet can be compared to the man of science, whose knowledge is also based on the same principle of pleasure, and both of them having as their object truth, but, while the scientific truth is individual and local, the

poetic truth, sought by the poet, is general and universal, immortal as the heart of man, and "the first and the last of all knowledge".

Most of Wordsworth's critical ideas emerge as a reaction against Neoclassicism, namely the Augustan emphasis on reason, rules, imitation, and decorum. Among them, the object to "choose incidents and situations from common life", written in a "selection of language really used by men", where there is "no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition", the poet being a "man speaking to men" and poetry "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" originating in "emotion recollected in tranquillity". However, the rejection of the Neoclassical ideas based on the ancient ones sometimes turns into a compromise with those Neoclassical principles that correspond to his own views of poetry or give validity to his own ideas, as, for example Aristotle's idea that poetry is the most philosophic of all disciplines, and the arguments about the usefulness of poetry, its main function being to give aesthetic pleasure and knowledge, and thereby to cultivate the sensibility of the reader. Apart from rejecting or accepting classical theory, Wordsworth develops some ideas that are original and innovative for the contemporary to him critical discourse (as to mention just his ideas about the origin of poetry), and attempts to offer a theoretical alternative of his own, although, in some of its parts, his Preface gives the impression of ambiguity and contradiction in the critical statement.

A much better organized, as well as a more theoretical and methodological critical discourse is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (*Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 1815-1817), perhaps the most important and impressive monument of philosophical criticism in English language.

Revelatory for Coleridge's complex personality as a poet, philosopher, critic, and theologian, *Biographia Literaria* consists of some of his lectures and a series of articles contributed to Bristol journals, in which he discusses his own poems and poetry in general, the thematic and structural features of poetry, its origin and purpose, but focuses primarily on the status of the poet and, in relation to it, on poetic imagination.

Coleridge's aesthetic doctrine, remarkable for its precision of philosophical speculation and sharpness of psychological insight into the nature of the poet, is both plagiaristic and original, drawn from his fruitful friendship with Wordsworth, but mostly indebted to the conceptions of German philosophers like Kant, Schelling and Fichte, whose influence had a decisive role in the formulation of Coleridge's own doctrine and is responsible for the difficulty in understanding some of his concepts.

According to Coleridge, the essence of poetry is the truth itself revealed to man at the moment of illumination. In terms of Coleridge's epistemology, man gets initiated into the mysteries of universe on the level of senses, on the level of emotions, on the level of intellect, which is an analytical faculty, on the level of reason, which forms man's rational

generalizations, and on the level of intuition, which enables the poet to grasp universal truths.

Unlike William Wordsworth, Coleridge submits his own critical credo not as rejecting or accepting some Neoclassical principles, but as finding its sources in the literature and, especially, philosophy of German Romanticism. Also, unlike Wordsworth who, as Coleridge explains, proposed "to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the (…) loveliness and the wonders of the world before us", Coleridge's preference is for a kind of poetry that

> should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.

And, unlike other English Romantic writers, Coleridge uses the supernatural element in his poems, as he made clear in *Biographia Literaria*, as a technique of psychological revelation, allowing the poet to bring into play the hidden forces of the mind.

The common to all English Romantic writers' critical concern is poetic imagination, the most important for Romantics human faculty and the only valuable creative principle for a Romantic writer, but only Coleridge formulates a theory of imagination, which is considered to be his most important contribution to English literary theory and criticism. Earlier, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schelling distinguished between two forms of imagination, one unconsciously creating the real world and another consciously creating the ideal world of art. In the same manner, Coleridge distinguishes two forms of imagination, which he calls 'Primary Imagination' and 'Secondary Imagination'. In Coleridge's opinion, primary imagination is an ordering principle which enables man to separate and synthesize, to divide and order, with the aim of making perception possible and intuitively grasp the wholeness of an object. As expressed in *Biographia Literaria*, the primary imagination is a common human faculty, "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am", which acts independently of human will, making possible only the unconscious perception of objects, and representing the basic agency of man's awareness of himself and the external world.

What Coleridge sees as secondary imagination is actually the poetic imagination, the most important faculty of poetic genius, the creative gift possessed by a poet, whose genius employs it to perform the act of poetic creation. The secondary imagination acts dependently of human will, and represents the conscious use of man's power leading to the realization of things and their completeness. It is, in this respect, a more superior intuitive

power, for it helps conceiving the oneness of universals, such as good, morality, deity, truth, justice. The secondary imagination would be always vital for poetic activity, "even if all objects were essentially fixed and dead", because it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate". Possessing the secondary imagination, the poetic mind perceives, selects, and creatively shapes the immediate manifestations into a new wholeness, which is of artistic essence, is the poem itself. As Coleridge puts it, secondary imagination is the 'soul', the most important faculty of poetic genius, motion being its life, and good sense its body.

Secondary, that is, poetic imagination differs from primary imagination in degree and mode of operation, as it differs from 'Fancy', the distinction between imagination and fancy being carefully drawn by Coleridge in the thirteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*. Fancy is merely mechanical and imitative, having "no other counters to play with but fixities and definities", and assembles and juxtaposes images and impressions without fusing them, constructing surface decorations out of new combinations of perceptions and memories. In artistic terms, fancy is allied to talent and the process of understanding, whereas secondary imagination to genius and the power of reason. Unlike fancy and primary imagination, the secondary imagination is symbolic and emblematic, for it "generates and produces a form of its own", transforming and bringing into unity the nature of what it perceives. In the act of poetic creation, the action of the poetic, or secondary, imagination would be to achieve

> the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

Apart from his speculations on the nature of poetic imagination, and also under German influence, rejecting the prescriptive critical tradition of the previous Neoclassical age, Coleridge is acclaimed for his conception of the 'organicity' of the poetic work, which is based on the distinction between the modes of operation of secondary imagination and fancy involved in poetic activity. According to Coleridge's theory of the organic form, the mode of operation of imagination – whose "shaping and modifying power" is different from the associative power of fancy – is compared to the biological (organic) growth, and a poem expresses its organic form which results from the immediate employment of secondary imagination, and which is illustrated by the poetic techniques involving, in particular, special

use of language. In Coleridge's literary practice, an example would be the introduction of the ample cadence of the anapaest among the iambs in *Christabel*. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge also discusses the importance and role of meter and rhyme in a poem, mentioning that nothing "can permanently please which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise".

A poem is a source of pleasure by the virtue of its elements and characteristics which are not superadded, as in Wordsworth, but which form a unity and are perceived by secondary imagination as wholeness, in relation to which these elements and characteristics grow out naturally, while being integral parts of this wholeness. Here Coleridge is a Romantic rejecting the Augustan emphasis on rules and conventions, and the consideration of the work of art as an object consciously contrived, having as its goal the mere gratification of an established taste of the public. In turn, by his theory of the organic form, Coleridge renders the work of art as a living and autonomous entity, growing, developing and coming into existence as a natural being does, which is by the laws of its own nature.

Like other Romantics, Coleridge discusses in *Biographia Literaria* the function of poetry, which is to mediate between man and nature by means of secondary imagination. There is a fundamental reciprocity between mind and nature, where the mind, by the action of secondary imagination, infuses beauty and animation into the inanimate cold world perceived by the ordinary vision of primary imagination. The world thus animated and alive would confirm, in its turn, the nature of imagination in its pleasurable and joyous activity, making poetry a major source of pleasure to man.

For Coleridge, the purpose of poetry is not didactic or moral, but solely aesthetic pleasure: a poem, insists Coleridge, is opposed to the work of science by "proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth". Other literary genres are also sources of pleasure, having this object in common with poetry, but, unlike the rest, poetry proposes to itself "such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part". A poem, unlike other literary works, is a source of pleasure from the way it is written, from the special arrangement of its component parts by rhyme and meter, where "the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement", that is, the communication of pleasure.

A wider purpose, with pregnant social implications, is attributed to poetry by another important English Romantic critic, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* is a critical essay written in the early part of 1821, but posthumously published in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, edited by Mary Shelley in 1840. This essay was conceived as a reply to his friend Thomas Love Peacock's magazine article *The Four Ages of Poetry*, which appeared in 1820 and which

promoted the idea that the revival of imagination in Romantic poetry was a futile return to the habits of the past, and that the best minds of the future must turn to economic and social sciences, rather than poetry. In turn, Shelley assumed the role of a defender of the poetic productions in contemporary to him society, and, in more general terms, the defender of the whole notion of imaginative literature as part of an industrial culture.

Against a background of classical and European literature, Shelley came to write his own poetic credo with passionate force and conviction, concerning the place of poetry and its importance to the well-being of humanity. Shelley also discusses in detail the nature of poetic thought and inspiration, the value of lyrical poetry, the connection between poetry and politics, and other issues, among which Shelley's most important concept is that of the nature of poetic imagination.

Poetry, the way Shelley conceived of it, is the expression of imagination. Poetry has a transfiguring power, turning everything to love. It makes familiarity disappear from the external world and discloses the beauty, which is embodied in the poetic form. Poetry is the record "of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds"; it recreates the universe in the human mind, bringing with it freshness and novelty of perception. Poetry is not possible without love and imagination, which are the secret of creation, discovery and goodness.

In Shelley's opinion, the nature of imagination is essentially moral: "the great instrument of moral good is the imagination" and the great secret of moral is love. Imagination is the poetical faculty of the human mind, "an imperial faculty", a qualitative principle associated with the concept of sentence, and opposed to reason which is a quantitative principle of analysis. Imagination is viewed as "mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity". The function of the poetic imagination consists in the creation of new materials of power, pleasure and knowledge, and the creation in the mind of a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order, which would be the expression of the beautiful and the good in things.

Throughout his essay, Shelley also associates poetry with social freedom, arguing that the "poetry of life" provides the best retort to the destructive, isolating, "accumulating and calculating processes" of modern times. In its social implications, poetry "acts to produce the moral improvement of man", but poetry is also something divine, for it "redeems from decay the visitation of divinity in man".

Like for other Romantic critics, for Shelley poetry is superior to other disciplines, including science, because it brings light and fire from those external regions, where "the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not even soar". Poetry's faculty is imagination; science's faculty is reason. Poetry is more comprehensive than science, for it is the centre and

circumference of the knowledge coming from the inside and outside levels of human existence, whereas science enlarges the empire of man over the external world and circumscribes the internal world.

Both imagination and reason are associated with the principle of utility, and, in both cases, utility implies the pursuit of pleasure. Shelley distinguishes two kinds of pleasure: first, given by poetry, is general, universal, permanent, and consists in adding spirit to the senses and in strengthening the affections; second, given by science, is particular and transitory, refers mainly to the gratification of animal needs, and is made for the security of life, serving some personal advantages.

Like other Romantic critics, Shelley discusses the language of poetry. For Shelley, language is the material of poetry, and as such is superior to other artistic materials (colour, or sound, for instance), because it gives a more direct representation of the actions and passions of the human inner life. Working with this material, the poet composes poems having many arrangements of language, in particular the metrical language created by imagination. The presence of meter in language, as a harmonious recurrence of sound, is the expression of the coincidence in the human perception of the order of relation between sounds and human perception, and between thoughts, and it is this coincidence that makes translation impossible. Also, Shelley made no difference between verse and prose, but he made the distinction between the measured and unmeasured language.

In Shelley's opinion, language has a direct relation to thought alone, and there is nothing that interposes between concept and its textual expression. In modern terms of 'concept', 'signifier', and 'referent in reality' of the linguistic sign, as Shelley puts it, the thematic material of a poem has no referent in the real world, and the artistic sign is purely a creation of the poet's mind, having its referent only in the thought of the poet. This remarkably modern theory is materialised by Shelley in his own poems, as in the famous *To a Skylark*, in which the skylark is "blithe Spirit / Bird though never wert".

Shelley's literary practice reifies, actually, many of his other critical ideas expressed in *A Defence of Poetry*, such as the consideration of the poet as an inspired bard in *To a Skylark* and *Ode to the West Wind*, where a major source of inspiration is nature. Shelley emphasises the idea of the necessity of inspiration as a state prior to the poetic composition, and of the poet as a mechanical agent, an unconscious agency, the voice of the spirit of his age.

According to Shelley, the poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world", who, like Court's legislators, discover the words according to which present things are to be ordered. Poets are also prophets, able to behold the future in the present, and philosophers, able to perceive and teach the truth of things; they are the best, the happiest and the most illustrious of the human beings. Shelley admits the existence of errors in poets' writings, because they experience everything to a more intense degree, but, whatever

mistakes, they will be "washed in the blood of the mediator and redeemer Time".

In the history of English literary criticism, a relatively late discovery was John Keats, whose letters, after a more careful examination in the 1930s, revealed a Romantic literary critic whose ideas, ranking with those of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, have been acclaimed as 'really intuitively contemplative', direct, detailed, and sincere, and as belonging to a poet of true genius, a writer of great intellectual and moral strength. The modern readers are impressed by Keats' clear reasoning on issues of art and existence, the relation of art to sensation, thought and ethics, as well as on literary issues, namely poetry, poet, and imagination.

An original approach to imagination is represented by Keats' view of the stages of imagination – childhood, youth, and maturity – which are, actually, the main stages in the development of human personality. During the progress from childhood to maturity, as experienced by Keats himself, one may pass through moments of confusion, a sense of misdirection, or, at least, uneasy melancholy. In a letter from April 1818, Keats states that "the imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted". A month later, in a famous letter to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds, dated May 3, 1818, Keats further extends the discussion on existence and the states of the human mind, and develops the metaphor of life as a many-chambered mansion:

> I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me – The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think – We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle – within us – we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man – of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression – whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open – but all dark – all leading to dark passages – We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a Mist – We are now in that state – We feel the 'burden of the Mystery'. To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote *Tintern Abbey* and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those

dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them.

In a letter dated November 22, 1817 (to Benjamin Bailey), Keats calls imagination the "old wine of heaven, which I call the redigestion of our most ethereal musings on earth". Here he distinguishes between the "simple imaginative Mind", which is delighted by the "repetition of its own silent working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness", and the "complex Mind", which is "imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits – who would exist partly on sensation, partly on thought – to whom it is necessary that the years should bring the Philosophic Mind". In the same letter, Keats states that

> I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of Imagination. What Imagination seizes as Beauty must be the Truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love – they are all in their sublime creative of essential beauty.

In the letter of December 21, 1817 (to George and Tom Keats), Keats exploits further the relationship between imagination, beauty and truth: "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth". This letter contains the famous theory of 'negative capability', which, Keats claims, has occurred to him in the company of one Dilke, about whom he writes: "Dilke was a man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about everything. (…) He will never come at a truth as long as he lives, because he is always trying at it". Keats calls this human quality 'Negative Capability', which is very important for the artist, since it forms "a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously".

According to Keats, negative capability

> is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. (…) With a great poet, the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

Another famous idea refers to what Keats calls the 'Poetical Character'. In the letter of October 27, 1818 (to Richard Woodhouse), Keats defines the poetical character as having

> no self – it is everything and nothing – It has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor,

mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving a Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation [not in action].

The poet, then, according to Keats,

is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity – he is continually informing – and filling some other body – the sun, the moon, the sea; and men and women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures.

Keats declared about himself to possess all these features of the 'poetical character', opposed to the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime", and that he has acquired his own personal identity through the experience of pain, the "crowning" achievement of human life, as he claims in the letter dated February-May, 1819 (to George and Georgiana Keats):

Call the world if you please 'The vale of soul-making'. (…) Soul is distinguished from an Intelligence. There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions – but they are not souls until they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself;

and, to his own question "How are then souls to be made?", Keats answers with another one: "Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?"

In the history of literature, the importance of Romanticism emerges from breaking the linearity of literary development dominated by classical principles, and from reviving the spirit of originality in literature, which resulted in the co-existence of both innovative and traditional trends in Victorian Age and twentieth century.

In the history of literary theory and criticism, Romantic doctrine has played a similar notable role, providing alternative to classical views of literature ways of understanding and influencing the literary practice. With Romanticism, literary criticism was not just important, but became necessary, for it had assumed the purpose to assist the implementation in the cultural background, dominated by classical principles, of a new type of literary discourse, which is Romanticism, and which had to survive against the authority of tradition and rules.

Although determined by the literary practice, of which it remains a faithful exponent, the criticism of the Romantic period shows serious attempts to innovate the critical judgement on literature, and provides an important step towards the scientific critical discourse by means of developing new critical concerns (the most important one being the concern

with author) and new theories (to mention just Coleridge's theory of poetic imagination), and establishing a critical methodology and terminology by combining tradition and originality.

However, like the criticism of the previous periods, the Romantic aesthetic doctrine is dependent on and expresses the characteristics of the type of literature it belongs to, being determined by and determining in its turn the literary activity. The Romantic criticism is also subjective, because the critics are writers who tend to overrate the value of their own literary works and promote them as models of imaginative writing; it is also normative and prescriptive, because it attempts to impose certain rules of poetic composition; and, finally, it is defensive, because it argues about the value of its literature in the determent of other types.

After the Romantic revival of innovation and originality in arts and literature, it is the philosophical, scientific, artistic, and literary diversity of the next period in the history of English literature and criticism, that is, Victorian Age, which would confer a typology to literary criticism, provide more serious changes in the nature and status of criticism, reveal the acquiring by criticism of a more theoretical, scientific, and systematic spirit, and, the last but not the least, the acquiring of independence from the determinism of the literary practice and throwing away the dependent, subjective, defensive, and prescriptive characteristics.

The Victorian Criticism: Arnold, Ruskin, Pater

In England, like in the rest of Europe, Romantic conceptions on art remain strong and in some respects dominant in the later nineteenth century, as in the critical essays of Matthew Arnold, but the expansion of different literary movements and trends helped the diversification of literary criticism. After Romanticism proclaimed the freedom of artistic expression, by the second half of the nineteenth century there were fewer rules to be followed, hence the more artistic experimentation and the diversity of trends and movements (Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Aestheticism, the doctrine of 'art for art's sake', Hedonism, Decadence, Symbolism), along with a greater variety of critical approaches to literature.

Contrary to Romanticism is the literary trend called Realism, but there was no violent contestation between them, as, for instance, the deep gap between Romanticism and Neoclassicism. Rather, Realism co-existed with the flourishing from within the Romantic literary tradition Aestheticism, Symbolism, and other avant-garde trends of the second half of the nineteenth century. One may also argue that Realism, though a continuation of the Neoclassical model, is less rational and normative, and that its concerns with psychological issues continue the individualised and personalised by the Romantics human character. Another example would the historical concern in literature, but what in Romanticism was a historical romance dealing with medieval and other earlier settings, in realistic novels both history and psychology received a 'true-to-life' perspective under the representation of the contemporary society.

The shift from Romanticism to Realism is thus the shift from the subjective to the social, from the individual as master of his destiny to a multitude of character types as social units, from the narrow circle of personal existence to the wide social panorama containing many social sectors and character types presented in social interaction. But Realism is not regarded as a wholly unified trend, being often divided into a low-mimetic perspective (Thackeray, Dickens) and high-mimetic (George Eliot), or one may speak about, as Richard Harland does, "the less realistic generation of Dickens, Gogol and Balzac leading on to the more realistic generation of Eliot, Tolstoy and Flaubert, in turn leading on to the hyper-realistic generation of the Naturalists". Concerning literary criticism, Harland argues that it was not until "the advent of Naturalism that the claims of Realism were articulated in a theoretically confrontational manner"[50].

In this respect, paralleling the shift of the literary concern from subjectivity to society, literary theory moved from the expressive theory of authorship to social theories of literature.

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[50] Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 81.

However, the critical scene was much more complex than that: in the field of literary theory and criticism, apart from the Romantic theory, which remained influential after Romanticism seized its existence as a regular movement from about 1830 onwards, the rest of the nineteenth century saw realistic, naturalistic, impressionistic, aesthetic, historical, biographical, sociological, and humanistic criticism, offering an impressive typology that became more diversified in the twentieth century.

Also, a major change took place about the status of the critic: it was on the way of becoming professional, since literary criticism started to be less produced by writers than by academics (usually from university chairs for study of literature, doing editing of texts and providing scholarly, historical and biographical research) and journalist-critics (of different periodicals, producing informative essays and reviews).

In nineteenth century, criticism became a general European practice of literary evaluation, where different critics from all over the Continent and representing different literary groups or philosophical theories contributed to the development of literary criticism which became more scientific and theoretical, receiving its methical and methodological input from the rising in that period different scientific, philosophical, social and literary movements. In philosophy, politics, society, and studies on art, the nineteenth century brought in astonishing innovation and change: the principles of democracy, feminism, unionization of workers, socialism, Darwin's evolution, Comte's view of society, Marx's view of history, Taine's view of literature, Ruskin's and Pater's views of art, and Freud's view of human psyche.

Among the most influential nineteenth century philosophers is Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose work, though not systematic, covers a great number of concerns ranging from the function of language to theories on myth. His anti-dogmatic and anti-Christian views, and most of his ideas – such as those on subjectivism in human perception and search for truth, the cognitive role of language, art as human most effective means of dealing with existence which is essentially tragic, the rejection of conformity and dogmas, and the support for the one who has the capacity to create, to be "free spirit" or "new philosopher", and whom Nietzsche calls "Übermensch", the 'superman' – challenged the Victorian belief in progress and influenced the literary activity of many contemporary and twentieth century writers, and became important points of reference in later philosophy and literary criticism, as in Freud, Existentialism, and the poststructuralist writings of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. For instance,

> deconstructionist criticism, as in Derrida, Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and J. Hillis Miller, has found his

theothanatology especially virtuous for the propagation of autogeneal, autotelic, 'grammarless' reflection.[51]

Concerning literary criticism, Nietzsche rejects the opinions and interpretations made according to the values imposed by culture and religion, and assigns to criticism the task to unmask all the pre-determined values governing the human estimation and understanding of the text. Alexander Nehamas explains Nietzsche's belief that

> as there is not a single mode of life, good for all people, so it is not clear that there can ever be a single, overarching interpretation of a particular text that everyone will have to accept. "The" world and "the" text are equally indeterminate. The problem with this approach, in morality as well as in literature, is that every unmasking must itself proceed from a particular point of view, which it must take for granted while it is depending upon it. Thus, every revelation of the partiality of a previous point of view will contain within it an unquestioned commitment to some further point of view. The genealogical enterprise therefore cannot ever be fully completed. Even the claim that there is no truth, that the world and the text are equally indeterminate, in being claimed, is claimed to be true.[52]

In the literary field, reacting against the Romantic paradigm was Realism, one of the most important nineteenth century literary trends, which was shaped by the ideas of Comte, Taine, Feuerbach, Darwin, Hegel, and Marx. Realism manifested itself predominantly in fiction, requiring faithfulness to actuality in its representation, the concentration of the novelist on everyday events, the environment, the social and political realities, and ordinary people. These ideas were largely suggested by Champfleury in *Le Realisme* (1857), the work which actually became the manifesto of the new literary doctrine, though the author himself disapproved of the term, and in many respects regarded the newly emerging movement as undesirable.

Among those who contributed to the consolidation of Realism as a literary tradition and critical approach mention should be also made of the Russian critic and writer Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky (1811-1848), whose ideas influenced the Marxist school of literary theory and the literary practice of Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, and Gogol. For Belinsky, literature is a reflection of life, above all the contemporary life, with emphasis on national and historical features, where, as he claims in *On the Russian Story and the Stories of Gogol*, not the ideal life is to be expressed, but "life as it is. Be it good or bad, we do not wish to adorn it".

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[51] I. R. Makaryk, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000, p. 435.
[52] Alexander Nehamas in Groden, M. and Kreiswirth, M., eds. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 547.

The critical realistic view on literature and the realistic novel of the nineteenth century owe much to the positivist philosophy of the period, in particular to the ideas of Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), who considers literature to be the product of "la race, le milieu et le moment", and Auguste Comte (1789-1857), whose studies on society and science influenced the realistic writings of the period and, together with Marx's theories of society and Taine's opinions on literature, shaped a new model of literary criticism combining historical with sociological approach to literary production.

Where for Arnold criticism would consider the effects of literature on society, for Taine, Marx and the entire sociological criticism of the period the main interest is in society as the cause of literature and literature as the product of a society.

According to Taine, the study of literary works should consider the "forces arising from racial inheritance", "social and political environment", and "the moment of time in which the literature or the historical figure emerged". In other words, concerning the estimation of a literary work, Taine asserts three important factors that are the main sources for the elementary moral state of the human being, and which are to be taken into consideration in the study of past literature: race (disclosing that the writers of the same nation share similar emotions and ideas expressed in the work), environment or surroundings (helping the critic to understand the intellectual and cultural issues expressed in the work), and epoch (offering through the information on the period's values, customs, outlooks, culture, and science the true understanding of the meaning expressed in the work).

When their influence is revealed, the three factors of race, milieu, and moment provide the understanding of any literary period, and, when the focus is on individual literary works, these factors are also to be taken into consideration, since the work is determined by the author's psychology and the psychology is determined by race, environment, and moment of time. For instance, in his *History of English Literature* (1864), Taine speaks about the role of the climate as important circumstance acting upon race and its psychological traits, where, in the case of the British, "rain, wind, and surge leave room for naught but gloomy and melancholy thoughts".

By subordinating literature to sociology, Taine is the founder of the sociology of literature, recommending the study of literature in the direction to disclose its representation of individual as a social being, and to construct from literary texts, which are also literary documents, the moral and social history of mankind. In this, literature is superior to history, because "a great poem, a fine novel, the confession of a superior man, are more instructive than a heap of historians with their histories", and they are instructive because "they are beautiful; their utility grows with their perfection, and if they furnish documents it is because they are monuments".

But the study of literary authors and texts, as Taine explains in his Introduction to his *History of English Literature*, requires a scientific

approach, it is better done in a scientific manner, in particular by applying the methods of biology, as to penetrate the "mass of faculties and feelings" that make the inner man, to 'get inside' the life and works of an author in order to better disclose the social and moral rather than individual features of the human being. Literary criticism is thus a kind of add-on to social and moral history, because, Taine argues, a literary text "is not a mere individual play of imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners, a manifestation of a certain kind of mind" from which "we might discover (…) a knowledge of the manner in which men thought and felt centuries ago".

Emphasising the importance of history was also the Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, although the German philosopher is primarily considered in relation to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries German philosophical movement called 'Idealism', which is closely linked with both Romanticism and Enlightenment. Influenced by Aristotle, Descartes, Goethe, and Kant, Hegel's view of history, idealism, freedom and nature, immanence and transcendence, Master versus Slave dialectic, and 'dialectic of existence' (described in *Science of Logic* (1811, 1812, and 1816) as involving 'Sein' ('pure Being') and 'Nichts' ('Nothing') united as 'Becoming') influenced many writers and philosophers of the nineteenth century, among whom Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Russell, and Marx. Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883) produced his own, Marxist, or materialistic, dialectics, rejecting, together with Friedrich Engels, the philosophical idealism of Hegel and claiming that:

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

Marx's views of society were highly influential on literary practice but especially on critical thought, resulting in Marxist criticism, which, according to Malcolm Hicks and Bill Hutchings, seeks to

> establish the ways in which a text is both a product and critique of the society which has given rise to it. (…) Marxist critic rejects any notion that a text's excellence resides in its universality. (…) Rather, he or she approves of the social and historical placing of texts as essential for demonstrating their relevance to the political movement of their times.[53]

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[53] Malcolm Hicks and Bill Hutchings. *Literary Criticism*. London: Edward Arnold, 1989, p. 8.

With respects to the realistic literary practice, of greater influence was Comte's six-volume *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842), which made possible the appearance of the science of sociology, the term which he also invented. The work expresses Positivism as a philosophy and its scientific attitude towards social behaviour, the cause-and-effect relationship in economics, religion, culture, and other areas of human existence, and which explains the human conduct. Indeed, according to Andrew Milner, Comte is "credited as the author, not only of sociology, but also of 'positivism', that is, the doctrine that society and the human condition can be studied by means roughly analogous to the methods of the natural sciences".[54]

In his work, Comte traces the famous 'law of three stages', stating that knowledge begins in theological form, passes to the metaphysical form, and finally becomes positive, or, in Comte's own words,

> The law is this: – that each of our leading conceptions, – each branch of our knowledge, – passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive.

Developing one the first theories of the 'social evolutionism', Comte saw three phases in the development of human society – theological, metaphysical, and positivist – claiming that Europe was in the last of the three stages, which he calls 'scientific' and 'positive', and which is to embark on scientific research and scientific explanation of phenomena based on observation, experiment, and comparison. The scientific method is a means of positive affirmation of different theories which would offer the only authentic knowledge, which is the scientific one.

Comte's views influenced the realistic and naturalistic writings of Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hardy, and many other writers, of which some turned literary critics. For instance, Emile Zola (1840-1902) in his *Experimental Novel* (1879) explains the literary categories he has come to develop as Naturalism. This famous essay shows the influence on literature exerted by the contemporary naturalistic philosophy and science. Charles Darwin's *Theory of Evolution*, in particular, prompted the idea that man is a substance of chemical action and reaction and thus subject to biological heritage, and the product of the socio-economic milieu, whose institutions are in a process of evolution similar to nature itself. To be an experimental novelist is then for Zola to adopt and adapt the newly developed scientific methods in the literary creative process as to achieve "the study of separate facts, the anatomy of special cases, the collecting, classifying, and ticketing, of human data".

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[54] Andrew Milner. *Literature, Culture and Society*. London: Routledge, 2005, p. 18.

Zola himself claimed to have applied to his novels the experimental scientific method from the experimental medicine developed by Claude Bernard, who

> explains the differences which exist between the sciences of observation and the sciences of experiment. He [Bernard] concludes, finally, that experiment is but provoked observation. All experimental reasoning is based on doubt, for the experimentalist should have no preconceived idea, in the face of nature, and should always retain his liberty of thought. He simply accepts the phenomena which are produced, when they are produced.

Like a doctor studying the organism, the novelist is a scientist not only observing but also objectively experimenting to better understand the human intellectual and emotional life and the social milieu which, together with the biological heritage, shapes the character. The novelist then writes in a realistic manner – developing his plot as a chain of events linked by the cause and effect relationship – to reveal the destiny, or rather the struggle, of a human being presented with a certain biological heritage against specific socio-economic conditions.

Although Zola's view of the novelist as a scientist acquiring scientific knowledge of man in both his individual and social relations are considered by many as naïve and untenable, according to David Baguley, Zola's ideas

> may be viewed, for example, as an elaborate motivating system of fictional representation, one that is perfectly logical and understandable in the age of the prestigious biological episteme on which it is based. The scientifically verified laws of nature provided established, guiding sequences of consequentiality to motivate naturalist fictions, whose domain remained, as Zola was careful to insist, not the realm of the sciences themselves but the world of the novelist, of the individual in society.[55]

Opposite to Naturalism and Realism, and continuing the Romantic paradigm, were the principles of Aestheticism, Parnassianism, Symbolism, Decadence, and the entire spectrum of the late nineteenth century artistic avant-garde trends. The major emphasis is on the idea that art must be autonomous, which has its starting point in 1830s with the French writer, painter, and critic Théophile Gautier proclaiming the doctrine of 'l'art pour l'art', or 'art for art's sake'. Rejecting the Romantic worship of nature, Gautier, Baudelaire and other French Symbolists assert the artistic to be superior to the natural: "Nature is stupid, without consciousness of itself,

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[55] David Baguley in Groden, M. and Kreiswirth, M., eds. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 750.

without thought or passion", declares Gautier, "art is more beautiful, more true, more powerful than nature".[56]

Also, according to Gautier, the formal, aesthetic beauty is the very purpose of a work of art, and, as he claims in the Preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), art has no utility: "Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless, everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor nature. The most useful place in a house is lavatory". According to Gilbert Highet, the view of beauty as an independent value and the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' infiltrated into France and the rest of Europe from Kant and his philosophical successors who developed the idea that

> there is an aesthetic sense by which we appreciate the beautiful – a sense quite independent of our moral judgement, independent of our intellect. If that is true, it follows that the artist works through this special sense, and that it is quite irrelevant to introduce moral or intellectual standards into the appreciation of a work of art. Kant said works of art had 'purposefulness without propose', by which he meant that they seemed to have been created to serve some special end; yet they had no clearly defined function like a chair or a machine: rather, they were like a flower.[57]

With Gautier claiming that art has no utility, and Poe creating the theory of 'poem *per se*' and rejecting "heresy and other critics", the history of criticism encounters the objective theory of art, by whose standards art is autonomous, self-sufficient and serves no other purpose (moral, didactic, political, or propagandist) than the pursuit of the beauty, and should be judged only by aesthetic criteria.

These are actually the main principles of Aestheticism, an important movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, the dominant British figures being Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Unlike Matthew Arnold who believed that art had a power to transform the cultural milieu, Pater and Wilde argued that art is self-sufficient and quite useless. Wilde also insisted on the separation between art and morality – holding in *The Critic as Artist* that art and ethics are "absolutely distinct and separate" and rejecting any "ethical sympathy" in the artist – and, following Gautier, proclaims in *The Decay of Lying* nature to be inferior to art: "what Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition".

Aestheticism developed a theory reflecting the French influence of Symbolism – not Mallarme and Valery as much as Gautier and Baudelaire –

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[56] Théophile Gautier cited in Richard Harland. *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 103.
[57] Gilbert Highet. *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 444.

combined with native ideas, but its roots go back to the Romantic doctrine of Kant, Schiller, Coleridge and others, and its ideas help define in Victorian literature the reverence for beauty of the Pre-Raphaelites (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Charles Algernon Swinburne) and the concern with form of the Parnassians (Lionel Johnson, Andrew Lang, Ernest Dowson, Edmund Gosse), and in the first half of the twentieth century some thematic and structural aspects of the experimental writings of Modernism. Aestheticism asserts that art is self-sufficient, that there is no connection between art and morality, and that art should provide refined sensuous pleasure rather than convey moral or sentimental messages, have a didactic purpose, or be in some other ways useful.

The main theoretician of Aestheticism in England was Walter Pater (1839-1894), who coined the phrase 'art for art's sake' in English, introduced the impressionistic methods in criticism, and wrote on style, beauty, reception, and hedonism. Walter Pater was born at Shadwell, in East London, the second son of Dr Richard Globe Pater and Maria Hill Pater. All his life, Pater was a reclusive Oxford scholar, but insubordinate to Victorian standards and assumptions, at the same time a historical relativist, sceptical about all fixed and dogmatic doctrines or theories. Pater's first essay, on Coleridge's philosophy, was published in 1866, and, a year after, an essay on Winckelmann, both in the *Westminster Review*.

Pater's other critical studies include a number of essays, in *The Guardian*, *The Athenaeum*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, and other periodicals, on Leonardo, Botticelli, Michelangelo, and other artists, as well as on Wordsworth, Lamb, and Romanticism in general. His lectures were posthumously published as *Greek Studies*. Pater's contribution to English thought and literature also includes a volume of philosophic descriptions of characters carefully set in their environment, entitled *Imaginary Portraits* (1887); *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (1889), a collection of writings and an essay on his own theory of composition; a volume of highly stylized college lectures published as *Plato and Platonism* (1893), and designed to introduce the ancient philosopher and clarify his historical position; and *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), his most valuable legacy to imaginative literature, a novel written in the tradition of the Bildungsroman to illustrate through elaborate sentences the perfection of prose style and the ideal of the aesthetic life.

Pater's most famous and influential book was *The Studies in the History of Renaissance* (1872), which set the impressionistic criticism as a new trend in art criticism, and which focused on the effects of a work of art on the viewer. The book is famous for many phrases and passages of poetic prose, as the one describing Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, beginning with "she is older than the rocks on which she sits", but the most influential part of the book is the epilogue, Pater speaking here of "the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake", the phrase 'art for art's sake' being coined by Pater in

relation to the general European aesthetic doctrine that art is self-sufficient, could not or should not be in any way useful, and need serve no social, moral, or political purpose.

The Renaissance renders the author's conviction that it is in art where the finest sensations are to be found and where the human existence has the possibility of preserving the intense but fleeting moments of experience. The human life is indeed uncertain and fleeting, and, instead of pursuing inaccessible ultimate truths, man should strive to purify his sensations and passing impressions, so that, as Pater puts it in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*,

> we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend.

The artistic reception is possible when the spirit of the receiver is free from any constraints of tradition or theory, as art itself is autonomous and self-sufficient. Pater promotes what Abrams call the 'objective theory' of art by asserting the freedom of artistic reception over normative and prescriptive nature of the "philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism", which determine neither the artistic production nor the receiver's understanding, but only "may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us".

The doctrine of 'art for art's sake', which dominated the late nineteenth century avant-garde culture in Europe and England, made Pater the leading mastermind of the English aesthetic movement of the 1880s and the most important influence on the works of the aesthetic writers of the closing years of the nineteenth century. Among them, Oscar Wilde openly proclaimed himself a disciple of Pater and the cult of 'art for art's sake', his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explicitly materialising aesthetic doctrines and ideas. Pater's influence also continued in the literary context of the early twentieth century, namely that of Modernism, where his 'impressions' and 'moments' – "where every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us" – were transformed into the 'image' of Ezra Pound and the Imagist poets, and into the 'epiphany' of James Joyce.

Walter Pater and his followers advocated Aestheticism, aesthetic hedonism, the aesthetic doctrine of 'art for art's sake', and the refinement of sensation in pursuit of an ultimate truth in art and life, defying conventional opinion and the social, moral or political purpose in art. Pater's work was revered by Wilde, Swinburne, Rossetti, and all decadent and art-centric writers of the late Victorian period, who developed the cult of beauty, which they considered the basic factor in art, believing that life should copy art; in

art and literature they prompted suggestion not statement, sensuality not morality, and the use of symbols and synaesthetic effects, meaning the correspondence between words, colours and music.

Pater stated that life had to be lived intensely, following an ideal of beauty, his work showing a change in his thinking from the abstract idealism of Ruskin to more concrete reflections on beauty. In the Preface to *The Renaissance*, Pater rejects the use of abstract terms in critical study, and argues that beauty is not an abstract concept but a concrete one and should be defined by concrete terms. Moreover, to understand a work of art in all its complexity, the critic should discover the impressions it produces in the receiver and to discriminate between these impressions and the impressions produced by experiencing other works of art:

> the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, to analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others; and the rule for those who would reach this end is stated with great exactness in the words of a recent critique of Saint-Beuve: De se borner à connaître de près les belles choses, et à s'en nourrir en exquis amateurs, en humanists accomplish.

Likewise, another critic of the century, Henry James (1843-1916), in his famous *The Art of Fiction* (1884) asserts impression to be an essential condition of fiction: "A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression".

In this respect, Walter Pater, the major British aesthete, is considered to be the founder of impressionistic criticism (which should be distinguished, as having little in common, from Impressionist painting). According to Pater in *The Renaissance*, the real understanding of literature is less a result of the objective judgement than of the critic's individual responses to particular literary works and the critical act would be a beautifully expressed appreciation of the work. Further developing this view, Wilde considers the objective evaluation of literature as irrelevant and develops in *The Critic as Artist* a type of 'creative criticism', which he calls 'aesthetic' and which, based on the critic's own reading, would "treat the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation". From the perspective of Aestheticism, the literary work is independent and self-sufficient, and from the perspective of aesthetic or creative criticism, the literary work reveals its value if open to multiple interpretations. The true criticism, according to Wilde, must not confine itself to discover the real intention of the artist and accept that as final, because "when the work is finished it has, as it were, an independent

life of its own, and may deliver a message far other than that which was put into its lips to say".

Another Victorian critic dealing with art and beauty, and rejecting the dogmatic principles of his period, was John Ruskin (1819-1900). Much of his education was given at home, then at Christ Church, Oxford, where he developed confidence in the *Bible*, stern political views, strong affection for Romantic literature, attraction to contemporary landscape painting, and what he claimed to be his main interest: the study of the facts of nature. Ruskin produced a number of Byronesque poems and short stories written for Christmas annuals, but he is mainly known for his many essays, lectures, and letters written on a great number of subjects, revealing an astonishing diversity of concern, including painting, architecture, culture, natural history, travel, geology, war, trade, work, economy in general, the relationship of art and work, the status of the human being within a complex natural and industrial environment, and the moral duties of men and women.

Many of these subjects are some of the concerns in his most famous and important work represented by the five volumes of *Modern Painters* (the first appeared in 1834; the second, after seven months' work on its preparation in Italy, appeared in 1846; the third and forth were not published until 1856; and the final volume appeared in 1860).

But this work expresses, first of all, Ruskin's conceptions on art, artist, natural beauty and its representation. It also discusses the medieval buildings of Europe before they should be destroyed by neglect and restoration (*Modern Painters II*), the greed as the deadly principle guiding English life (*Modern Painters V*), and challenges the self-centred and scientific spirit of his period, promoting instead the recovery of medieval, heroic and Christian values.

Ruskin's influence emerges from his critical spirit, often provocative and offensive, and highly demonstrative. Believing in the human potential in art and literature, Ruskin sets for himself the task to open the contemporary Victorian mind to beauty as perceived and represented in earlier times, and to awaken it to both ethical and environmental principles, although by 1880 he became rather sceptical with regards to the success of any social changes.

Though exerting pervasive influence on many of their contemporary writers and, in the first half of the twentieth century, on writers of Modernism, Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde were outshined in their own time by the critical voice of Matthew Arnold, a major Victorian poet and critic, and, as a critic, the founder of a new school of criticism called 'New Humanism', or humanistic, and also referred to as 'moral criticism'.

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was born at Laleham on the upper Thames, son of Thomas Arnold, an eminent historian, educator, and a leader of the Broad Church Movement of the Church of England. In 1828 Arnold moved to Rugby School, where his father became famous as an educational reformer, and in 1844 he took second honours at Balliol College, Oxford.

The same year he took post as assistant teacher at Rugby School for one year. In 1847 Arnold received appointment to the post of private secretary to Lord Landsdowne, a liberal peer. In 1851 he married Frances Lucy Whightman, the daughter of an eminent judge. To support his family, Arnold took post as inspector of schools, a position he kept for 35 years. In 1857 he also became professor of poetry at Oxford, for ten years, and in 1867, after resigning, he gave up his poetic career. Arnold died in 1888 of a heart attack, and was buried at Laleham beside his three sons, whose early deaths had darkened his life.

Arnold published his first volume of poetry, *The Strayed Reveller, and Other poems*, anonymously in 1849. In 1852 he published, also anonymously, his second volume of verse *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*, containing, among others, *Tristram and Iseult* and some of the 'Marguerite' poems, including *To Marguerite*. In 1853 Arnold published another volume of verse, *Poems*, containing his famous Preface. The volume includes extracts from his earlier books, as well as *The Scholar Gipsy*, *Sohrab and Rustum*, *Memorial Verses to Wordsworth*, and others. In 1855 he published *Poems, Second Series*, a volume impregnated with melancholy, nostalgia, and the sense of loss.

During his work as a professor of poetry at Oxford, Arnold published several books of literary criticism, among which *On Translating Homer* (1861), *Essays on Criticism* (1865, including the famous *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (1865), *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), *The Study of Poetry* (1888). After he resigned from Oxford and gave up the poetic career, Arnold's interest began to include religious and social criticism, publishing *Culture and Anarchy* (1868), *Friendship's Garland* (1871), *Literature and Dogma* (1873). In 1873 he published the essay *Wordsworth* as the Preface to *The Poems of Wordsworth*, thus returning to his beginnings in literary criticism. In 1883 Arnold toured for the first time America, for which he prepared lectures on *Literature and Science*, *Emerson*, and *Numbers*.

Having read widely ancient and modern European literature, Arnold felt the necessity of the contemporary English literary productions to attain an intellectual and philosophical grasp comparable to what he admired in recent German poetry and French criticism. Hence his almost obsession with the second-rate position of the English literature and education, the separation and the cultural gap between the general European, Mediterranean culture and the northern one which English culture belongs to, and the critic's deep conviction of the necessity of their union. This aspect is also expressed in some of his poetry, for instance in *To Marguerite* and *Dover Beach*, where the idea is raised on the philosophical level coloured with a wide range of human concerns and natural symbolism. On the subject of translations of classical books, Arnold is acclaimed for his lectures *On Translating Homer* and his essay *On Translating Homer: Last*

Words (1861-1862) in which he prescriptively draws attention to the fact that every translator of Homer should remember that the ancient writer is noble, rapid, plain, and direct in language and in thought, and that every translator should preserve all these qualities in every new translation of the classic.

Concerning literary criticism, Arnold's first important critical study was the Preface to the volume of *Poems* of 1853. Here he introduced for the first time the principle that a major concern of criticism must be the work's effects on the emotional and moral health of the receiver, in particular, and of the nation, in general.

Arnold the critic assumed himself a distinctly prescriptive role, for the "confusion of the present time is great", and a young writer needed both "a hand to guide him through the confusion" and a voice "to prescribe to him the aim he should keep in view", Arnold, at that time a poet at the beginning of his career, having found yet no guide for himself.

Arnold's most famous critical study was *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, in which he described the mission of criticism, and argued why his own age was unpropitious for the creation of some "master-works" of literature and why he himself turned from poetry to criticism. According to Arnold, poetry is a "criticism of life" and the task of criticism is "to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas".

In this work, as well as in his later criticism, especially in the essays which became *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold argued for an idea of culture containing within it the combination of past achievement with fostered progressive improvement. In his work, he also argued for an ideal civilized mind, concentrating it in the phrase 'sweetness and light', which suggests at once openness and insight: the habit of perfection would direct a divided society towards a true and satisfying ideal, a culture of intellectual sweetness and moral light. Against the threat of popular anarchy, he prompted the concept of culture that should contain the sum of both poetry and religion, and should act as a catalyst to the rigid advances of modern social, philosophical, and scientific changes.

In *The Study of Poetry*, Arnold extends the discussion on poetry and its social function:

> mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it.

Relying on Wordsworth's and Shelley's ideas on poetry and combining them with those of the classics, Arnold, in *The Study of Poetry*, might have exaggerated the role of poetry in his period when conferring to it the place of philosophy and religion, or considering it an important part of

scientific research, the best source of knowledge for humankind, but it was his view of criticism as one of the most useful activities of mind that sustained the expansion and appreciation of criticism in Victorian period. Arnold gives to poetry, according to Hans Bertens, an "almost sacred function", building his reflections on

> ideas that earlier in the nineteenth century had been formulated by Romantic poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), who had attributed a special, visionary status to poetry, and on a long tradition, going back to the classics, that likewise gives literature, and especially poetry, special powers. It was only natural, then, for Arnold to put forward poetry as the major embodiment of 'culture'.[58]

Arnold's view of criticism is both humanistic and moral, according to which literary criticism is "a disinterested endeavour" whose function is "to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world". The literary critic is therefore asked to be objective, concrete and illuminating in his endeavour to discover the truest values expressed not only in his native literature, but also the universal values expressed in other literatures, in order to introduce them to reader and to encourage creative genius. Here Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* is revelatory, which shows the Victorian critic's understanding of modern literature as essentially comparative rather than national in its range of critical concerns, an idea anticipated by Goethe earlier, who stated in 1828 that "our present active epoch with its increasing communication between nations might soon hope for a world literature".

Apart from Taine, Comte, Marx, Nietzsche, Pater, Ruskin, and Arnold, a special impact on nineteenth century, as well as twentieth century, literary practice and critical scholarship came from the rising feminism. In rejecting the patriarchal model of their contemporary society and the gender discrimination, a great number of late eighteenth century and nineteenth century women writers and thinkers protested against the supposed physical and intellectual inferiority of women, on this matter producing theoretical analyses of women's position in society in relation to education, profession, family, art, and other social aspects.

Among them, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), who, in her best known *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), according to Christa Knellwolf, was among the first thinkers to argue "that the normative definition of femininity reflects the wish to perpetuate women's dependent position and that the education of girls is abused as a means of teaching them to internalise a sense of their intrinsic inferiority".[59]

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[58] Hans Bertens. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2005, p. 2.
[59] Christa Knellwolf in Knellwolf, C. and Norris, C., eds. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 9: Twentieth century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 194.

Reflected in the novels of Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and later Virginia Woolf, the feminist conceptions give in twentieth century the feminist school of literary criticism, which consists in a number of feminist theories, methodologies, and approaches to literary work. Whatever the approach or method, the feminist criticism analyzes and challenges the established literary canon – that in a male-dominated society has stereotyped women into images of physical and moral inferiority – and develops approaches to literary texts from a female point of view, developing a model of literary criticism based on a female consciousness (gynocriticism) and focused on culture and society, in particular the cultural forces in the society shaping women identities, and on female psyche, body, and language as reflected in literary texts or the ways in which are related to writing process.

Like in the rest of Europe, the Victorian England saw a greater variety of critical approaches to literature: realistic, naturalistic, impressionistic, aesthetic, historical, humanistic, moral, and other types of criticism. The Romantic aesthetic doctrine remains influential for the rest of the nineteenth century and many of the Victorian critics would follow the Romantic views of literature, as Matthew Arnold in *Essays in Criticism* (1865, 1888); others would be more original, like John Ruskin's and Walter Pater's critical texts on art and culture.

The Victorian criticism marked the transition from the previous, dependent on literary practice and literary movements, as well as subjective, defensive, normative and prescriptive, literary criticism to the twentieth century independent and scientific approach to literature.

The primary cause of the 'separation' between criticism and literature is said to have been the literary diversity in Victorian Age, and the diversity of literary trends was a result of Romanticism breaking the linearity of literary development dominated by classical views, reviving the innovative spirit in art, rejecting tradition and rules, and proclaiming the freedom of artistic expression.

Like in the rest of Europe, the Victorian Age consisted in a number of movements and trends co-existing during one period and as such reifying the co-existence of the traditional and innovative element in literature.

The former manifested as Realism which rejected Romanticism and which continued the Neoclassical emphasis on rules and ethics, and the interest in the actual, immediate reality. The latter – rejecting tradition, rules and prescriptive doctrines, and as a continuation of the Romantic rebellious attitude in art – is the real source of literary complexity in Victorian period.

Innovation in literature and arts growing out of Romanticism had a twofold perspective: first, innovation from Romanticism and heavily influenced by the Romantic attitude, thus comprising a great number of Romantic characteristics; and, second, innovation out of Romanticism, that is being less influenced by the Romantic attitude but still continuing a number of its features. The first kind of innovation manifested as post- and

neo-Romantic trends, including most of the Victorian poetry as well as some of the fiction of the period, such as the gothic novel of Emily Bronte and the later colonial prose of Kipling, Stevenson, Doyle, Wells, and Conrad. The second type of innovation manifested as Symbolism, Aestheticism, Impressionism, Expressionism – and other trends which represent the artistic avant-garde of the second half of the nineteenth century – and gave, together with other manifestations of innovation as well as tradition, the literary and artistic diversity in Victorian Age.

Facing a literary diversity, literary criticism developed its own diversity, its own typology which may or may not correspond to the literary or artistic one. As diverse as they were – realistic criticism, naturalistic criticism, impressionistic criticism, aesthetic criticism, historical criticism, humanistic criticism, and others – it was a common practice at the time to attach a general discussion to a particular criticism. On the whole, Victorian critics dealt with the nature of culture, art and literature, mainly poetry and novel, bringing into discussion such topics as the social function of art and literature, hedonism and its relation to art and literature, morality and immorality in art, imaginative faculty of the artist, the style of the literary work, the theory of the comic genre and the presence of the comic spirit in the novel, and many others.

Also, the subjective component in criticism and the critical dependence on literary practice, together with the prescriptive nature of criticism, are rejected and become extinct, as one may see in the great works of Victorian criticism by the leading critics of the second half of the nineteenth century Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, George Meredith, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater.

Amid the ravages of "the fierce intellectual life of our century", as Arnold puts it, the rise of different literary movements and trends (Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Symbolism, Aestheticism and the doctrine of 'art for art's sake') co-existing in the second half of the nineteenth century – together with the major discoveries in science and developments in philosophy – helped the rise of different types of literary criticism in that period, many of which already revealing the separation of literary criticism from the constraints of artistic trends and movements, while relying on the new developments in philosophy, psychology, science, and social studies.

Indeed, where the previous periods reveal that literary criticism is dependent on literary trends and movements which are dominant in different periods, the nineteenth century shows that literary criticism is rather dependent on new developments in science and philosophy, of which those of Comte, Taine, Darwin, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, and Wollstonecraft were mostly influential on both literary practice and literary criticism.

However, it was twentieth century to witness the actual expansion and diversification of independent from art and literature critical approaches and their typology organized in schools and trends representing the modern

scientific and methodological literary theory and criticism. The twentieth century criticism neither belongs nor responds to particular artistic or literary trends, but develops its own trends and schools aiming at approaching theoretically and critically the literary practice from a multitude of perspectives.

Still, one may argue, some of these trends, like the literary criticism of the previous periods, are dependent on trends and movements of creative literature (like Formalism on Futurism); others are dependent on different developments in science, philosophy, and society (hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, Marxist or feminist approach); and others are somewhere in between or emerging from within the interpretative perspectives of literary scholarship itself (like Narratology from Structuralism).

Some of the twentieth century trends in literary scholarship continue the nineteenth century artistic and philosophical input, bur most of them rejects it, being, as Raman Selden calls them, "anti-Romantic, anti-humanistic, and anti-empiricist" and rejecting "the privilege of emotion, the belief in the unity and identity of human subjectivity, and the blind faith in observation and experience as the only sources of knowledge".[60]

In fact, the twentieth century begins with a reaction against the nineteenth century traditional humanistic and moral criticism, a reaction coming from a number of critics focusing on literary text in itself, its form and structural organization. This first modern critical perspective represents the formal approach to literature and includes three major schools of literary criticism: Formalism, New Criticism, and Structuralism.

On the other hand, the human and social sciences from the first half of the twentieth century, unlike physics or biology, were concerned, according to Lawrence Cahoone, "not merely with facts but with the *meaning* of facts for human subjects", and a number theories – which also gave particular trends in literary theory and criticism – emerged with the task "to diagnose contemporary alienation". These theories, continues Cahoone, embarked on a historical analysis

> of how human society and the human self develop over time, in order to see how and why modern civilization had gone wrong. What was needed, it seemed, was a return to the true, or authentic, or free, or integrated human self as the centre of lived experience. This meant not an abandonment of modern industry, technology and secularism, but some reconstruction of society (for Marx), or of moral culture (for Freud), or of our openness to the vicissitudes of our own authentic experience (for phenomenology and existentialism).[61]

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[60] Raman Selden. *Practising Theory and Reading Literature: An Introduction*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 4.
[61] Lawrence Cahoone in Introduction to Lawrence Cahoone, ed. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 3.

These trends, along with the rise of linguistic studies and some new philosophical doctrines, as well as the more recent postmodernist and other postist cultural and social attitudes, have marked throughout the century the rise and consolidation of other approaches to literature.

Nowadays, at the beginning of a new millennium, the literary critic faces a multitude of such approaches, among which, apart from the formal approach, mention should be made of the approach through reading (includes hermeneutics, phenomenology, and reader-oriented theories), the approach through socio-cultural context (includes Marxist theories, cultural materialism, and New Historicism), the approach through gender (includes feminist criticism), the psychoanalytical approach, post-structuralism and deconstruction, archetypal criticism, ethnic literary and cultural studies, racial studies, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, and many others.

Fragments and Analyses

Renaissance: from Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*:

Now then go we to the most important imputations laid to the poor poets; for aught I can yet learn they are these. First, that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in this. Secondly, that it is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires, with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tail of sinful fancies, – and herein especially comedies give the largest field to ear, as Chaucer saith; how, both in other nations and in ours, before poets did soften us, we were full of courage, given to martial exercises, the pillars of manlike liberty, and not lulled asleep in shady idleness with poets' pastimes. And, lastly and chiefly, they cry out with an open mouth, as if they had overshot Robin Hood, that Plato banished them out of his Commonwealth. Truly this is much, if there be much truth in it.

First, to the first, that a man might better spend his time is a reason indeed; but it doth, as they say, but petere principium. For if it be, as I affirm, that no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poesy, then is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed. And certainly, though a man should grant their first assumption, it should follow, methinks, very unwillingly, that good is not good because better is better. But I still and utterly deny that there is sprung out of earth a more fruitful knowledge.

To the second, therefore, that they should be the principal liars, I answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar; and though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar. The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars. How often, think you, do the physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses, which afterwards send Charon a great number of souls drowned in a potion before they come to his ferry? And no less of the rest which take upon them to affirm. Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false; so as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies.

But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth. The poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth. He citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry calleth the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention; in troth, not laboring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true he lieth not; without we will say that Nathan lied in his speech, before alleged, to David; which, as a wicked man durst scarce say, so think I none so simple would say that Æsop lied in the tales of his beasts; for who thinketh that Æsop wrote it for actually true, were well worthy to have his

name chronicled among the beasts he writeth of. What child is there that, coming to a play, and seeing Thebes written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive at that child's-age, to know that the poet's persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written. And therefore, as in history looking for truth, they may go away full-fraught with falsehood, so in poesy looking but for fiction, they shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground – plot of a profitable invention. (…)

But hereto is replied that the poets give names to men they write of, which argueth a conceit of an actual truth, and so, not being true, proveth a falsehood. And doth the lawyer lie then, when, under the names of John of the Stile, and John of the Nokes, he putteth his case? But that is easily answered: their naming of men is but to make their picture the more lively, and not to build any history. Painting men, they cannot leave men nameless. We see we cannot play at chess but that we must give names to our chess-men; and yet, me thinks, he were a very partial champion of truth that would say we lied for giving a piece of wood the reverend title of a bishop. The poet nameth Cyrus and Æneas no other way than to show what men of their fames, fortunes, and estates should do.

In the above selected fragment, Sidney states the three accusations of the poet haters, that is, the Puritans, against poetry, and, using the techniques of rhetorical argumentation, answers them. The first accusation is that poetry teaches nothing, or offers useless knowledge; poetry is useless knowledge and "there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in this". To this accusation, Sidney's answer is that poetry gives the most complete knowledge, as compared to other disciplines, because, the critic claims, poetry "teacheth and moveth to virtue". For Sidney, 'fruitful knowledge' is the one that both teaches what virtue is and determines the reader to become a virtuous being.

The second accusation is that poetry does not tell the truth, being "the mother of lies". Sidney's answer to this allegation is paradoxical, the paradox challenging the validity of the accusation itself. Like with the previous accusation, and using again rhetorical devices, Sidney asks what is to lie, and answers that to lie is "to affirm that to be true which is false", which is the matter of history, medicine and other disciplines. Unlike them, Sidney argues, poetry "nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth". Poetry does not affirm anything for the simple reason of being the result of a "good invention", the "profitable" product of the poet's imagination, and allegorically and figuratively written. Hence Sidney's paradoxical answer to this accusation: poetry does not tell of true things, indeed, but, at the same time, does not lie because it affirms nothing.

The accusation has no validity in its meaning, argues Sidney, since poetry nothing affirms, therefore it never lies, because of its imaginative, allegorical and figurative essence, and poetry must be taken seriously, for it

helps the mind escape the boundaries of earth and reach eternity by inspiring and elevating it.

The third accusation is that poetry is sinful, "the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires, with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tail of sinful fancies". The answer to this accusation might be found in the answer to the first accusation, where Sidney claims that poetry both "teacheth and moveth to virtue", one of the most important, including to Puritans, ethical principles.

The poetry, in Sidney's opinion, might have its origin in the sinful experience of mankind, but it ultimately offers both a vision of freedom and the sense of strength, both a celebration of mortal love and the hope for spiritual immortality. Based on the classical views and conceptions, Sidney emphasizes the importance of poetry for mankind, and states its superiority over other human activities. Sidney also emphasises the importance of poetry over other arts: poetry offers delight and teaches virtue, but also moves the man towards this moral category so dear to the Puritan mind. By both teaching and moving to virtue, that is making the human being virtuous and morally strong by means of *mimesis* and *catharsis*, poetry becomes the most complete and useful human knowledge.

The conclusion that emerges from the analysis of this fragment, as well as from the *Defence of Poesie* in general, is that Sidney was not intentionally writing literary criticism, but a defence of poetry against Puritan attacks. In this respect, Sidney's criticism is to be considered as defensive, but also dependent on the period (Renaissance) it belongs to, expressing its mentality and values.

Being one of the first English works of literary criticism, Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* has its origins not in the critical act conceived as a self-conscious endeavour, but results from within the literary context and as being determined by an extra-literary problem. However, the three major components of a critical discourse – concern with particular literary texts, the use of theory and method, and the development of personal opinions – are to be found in Sidney's critical text, in which the main concern is his own and his contemporary poetry; the theory is not far removed from the main principles of imitation and purification, and of usefulness of poetry found in ancient doctrine; the method is borrowed from rhetoric; and the abundance of personal, often subjective, considerations of the poetry's superior status are easily noticeable.

Sidney's critical treatise resulted as a need to answer the accusations made by Puritans, the poetry haters of the time, namely by Stephen Gosson in *The School of Abuse* (1579), against the poets and poetry of the Elizabethan period. Sidney, himself a Renaissance writer of pastoral poetry and sonnets, was the person Stephen Gosson directly aimed at by addressing his article to Sidney himself.

Sidney's criticism is first of all defensive, and he came to defend not just his own poetic work, or even the poetry of the period, but the entire imaginative writing from the second half of the sixteenth century. While answering the accusations, Sidney expressed his own ideas on poetry, and thus emerge some genuine parts of literary criticism, a type of critical judgement based on the works of ancients as well as modern poets. Sidney also aims at defining the future ways of English poetry by offering prescriptive definitions, his criticism being, in this respect, also normative and prescriptive.

Restoration: from John Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*:

As Neander was beginning to examine *the Silent Woman*, Eugenius, looking earnestly upon him; "I beseech you Neander," said he, "gratifie the company and me in particular so far, as before you speak of the Play, to give us a Character of the Authour; and tell us franckly your opinion, whether you do not think all Writers, both French and English, ought to give place to him.

I fear", replied Neander, "that in obeying your commands I shall draw a little envy upon my self. Besides, in performing them, it will be first necessary to speak somewhat of Shakespeare and Fletcher, his Rivalls in Poesie; and one of them, in my opinion, at least his equal, perhaps his superior. (…)

To begin then with Shakespeare; he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of Mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his Comick wit degenerating into clenches; his serious swelling into Bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of the Poets (…).

As for Johnson, to whose Character I am now arriv'd, if we look upon him while he was himself, (for his last Playes were but his dotages) I think him the most learned and judicious Writer which any Theater ever had. He was a most severe Judge of himself as well as others. One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit and Language, and Humour also in some measure we had before him; but something of Art was wanting to the Drama till he came. He manag'd his strength to more advantage then any who preceded him. You seldome find him making Love in any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had

performed both to such an height. Humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted most to represent Mechanick people. He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latine, and he borrow'd boldly from them: there is scarce a Poet or Historian among the Roman Authours of those times whom he has not translated in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. But he has done his Robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authours like a Monarch, and what would be theft in other Poets, is onely victory in him. With the spoils of these Writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its Rites, Ceremonies and Customs, that if one of their Poets had written either of his Tragedies, we had seen less of it then in him. If there was any fault in his Language, 'twas that he weav'd it too closely and laboriously in his serious Playes; perhaps too, he did a little to much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latine as he found them: wherein though he learnedly followed the Idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with ours. If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; Johnson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare. To conclude of him, as he has given us the most correct Playes, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us.

John Dryden, the second in the line of the most prominent English literary critics, represents the Restoration period in the history of English literary criticism, and, like Sidney's critical work, Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* reveals the condition of the contemporary to him literature. Written in the dialogue form borrowed from Plato, Dryden introduces in his text four characters as speakers, who represent ancient Greek drama (Crites) versus modern literary tradition (Eugenius), and the contemporary French dramatic practice (Lisideus) versus English literary practice (Neander). The voice of Dryden in the text is Neander, who, in the chosen fragment, expresses critical ideas by comparing Jonson and Shakespeare, the two most important English Renaissance writers.

Working on the seventeenth century concept of 'wit' as the writer's creative power, imaginative flight, and the ability to create unexpected imagery, literature of high aesthetic status, Dryden embarks on a comparative critical evaluation of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, startling in its approach and concluding reflections.

John Dryden's criticism on Shakespeare reveals, actually, only two directions of approach: first, that the great Renaissance writer is the complete Renaissance man, having "the largest and most comprehensive soul"; and, second, that Shakespeare is the greatest wit.

Concerning Jonson, Dryden is able to identify a greater number of characteristics, namely that Jonson is (1) subject to training, rules and

discipline: "the most learned and judicious Writer which any Theatre ever had", "a most severe Judge of himself as well as others"; (2) promoter of common sense and measure, using to a lesser degree the imaginative faculty, or 'wit': "one cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it"; (3) rational, 'saturnine' and less expressive of feelings: "you seldom find him making Love in any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully"; (4) satirical in his work: "humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted most to represent Mechanick people"; and (5) educated in the spirit of the ancient tradition and imitative of the ancient models: "he was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latine, and he borrowed boldly from them".

What appears as strange and surprising is the subjective and, at the same time, superficial criticism on Shakespeare as compared to the more objective and profound approach to Jonson. In this, one can easily notice that Dryden's preference is for Jonson, "the more correct poet", and that the Restoration critic concentrates more on Jonson than on Shakespeare, and that his critical ideas on Jonson are better, that is, more systemic and comprehensive, than those on Shakespeare.

The question is, then, what has determined Dryden to follow this critical path, especially that in the history of British literature Shakespeare is considered to be a more important writer than Jonson. Dryden, certainly, does not deny Shakespeare's status, the greatest of English writers, for whom he claims to feel sincere love, but Jonson is a no less important writer, for whom Dryden expresses his sincere admiration:

> If I would compare him [Jonson] with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.

In these different attitudes, and especially in considering Restoration – the period in which Dryden wrote his critical text – as the period offering the beginnings of Neoclassicism in England, one can find the answer to the question of what might have been the reason for Dryden's critical emphasis on Jonson rather than on Shakespeare.

Moreover, by the help of realising that the characteristics of Jonson, as presented by Dryden, are clear aspects and major principles of the Neoclassical doctrine on its way of being implemented in English cultural background, one may easily give the answer by saying that Dryden finds and promotes Ben Jonson as an admirable, if not perfect, model found in Renaissance of a complete Neoclassical writer.

In more general terms, it is clear again that John Dryden, in his *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, a work of art in itself, pleading for European recognition of his native literature and for the synchronization of British with

the general European literature, prescribes with full judicious detachment and open-mindedness to his fellow writers the ancient classical and contemporary, in particular French, doctrines to be followed in thought and the Elizabethan drama of Shakespeare and especially Jonson to be revived, and, along with the contemporary European models, to be imitated in literary practice. In this respect, one might consider Dryden's critical discourse to be first of all prescriptive, then dependent on and highly expressive of its literary period, as well as defensive and subjective.

Neoclassicism: from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*:

Having proposed to write some pieces on human life and manners, such as (to use my lord Bacon's expression) came home to men's business and bosoms, I thought it more satisfactory to begin with considering Man in the abstract, his nature and his state; since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection or imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being.

The science of human nature is, like all other sciences, reduced to a few clear points: there are not many certain truths in this world. It is therefore in the anatomy of the mind as in that of the body; more good will accrue to mankind by attending to the large, open, and perceptible parts, than by studying too much such finer nerves and vessels, the conformations and uses of which will for ever escape our observation. The disputes are all upon these last, and I will venture to say, they have less sharpened the wits than the hearts of men against each other, and have diminished the practice, more than advanced the theory of morality. If I could flatter myself that this Essay has any merit, it is in steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite, in passing over terms utterly unintelligible, and in forming a temperate yet not inconsistent, and a short yet not imperfect, system of ethics.

This I might have done in prose; but I chose verse, and even rhyme, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious; that principles, maxims, or precepts so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards: the other may seem odd, but it is true; I found I could express them more shortly this way than that much of the force as well as grace of arguments or instructions depends on their conciseness. I was unable to treat this part of my subject more in detail, without becoming dry and tedious; or more poetically, without sacrificing perspicuity to ornament, without wandering from the precision, or breaking the chain of reasoning. If any man can unite all these without any diminution of any of them, I freely confess he will compass a thing above my capacity.

What is now published is only to be considered as a general map of Man, marking out no more than the greater parts, their extent, their limits, and their connection, but leaving the particular to be more fully delineated in the charts which are to follow. Consequently, these Epistles in their progress (if I have health and leisure to make any progress) will be less dry,

and more susceptible of poetical ornament. I am here only opening the fountains, and clearing the passage. To deduce the rivers, to follow them in their course, and to observe their effects, may be a task more agreeable.

Alexander Pope was the dominant figure among the Neoclassical writers, his theoretical contribution and poetical practice exemplifying in the best way the Neoclassical optimism, self-confidence and urbanism in an age pleased with its civilization. Pope expresses also at best the Neoclassical emphasis on reason, order, common sense, rules in the creation of poetry, and imitation of the classics and of the laws of nature, as in *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man*.

The former reveals, actually, Pope's status as a Neoclassical literary critic, but, being written by Pope in his earliest years of literary activity, this work does not provide an original contribution to literary theory, except the fact that it is addressed to critics and that it combines in one poetic discourse the theoretical ideas of the Neoclassical doctrine with the creation of a literary text based on such ideas.

This is also the principle of composition of a more original work which is the philosophical poem *Essay on Man* (1730), and which, like the previous one, displays Pope's alliance to the Neoclassical doctrine and the principles of 'imitate the classics' and 'follow the nature', as well as his wide knowledge and intellectual brightness combined with a dynamic literary expression.

Essay on Man consists of a 'Design' in prose followed by four epistles in verse form addressed to Henry St. John, Viscount of Bolingbroke, a leading Tory figure and himself a writer of philosophical and political essays. The poem is designed as a philosophical work focused on the task "to vindicate the ways of God to Man"; it largely draws on the poet's personal understanding of the philosophy of Leibnitz, and examines the human condition against Miltonic, cosmic background. One may hardly argue that *Essay on Man* is focused on commonplace and the ordinary aspects of everyday life, as the poem is full of many and often disputable doctrines, where the philosophical speculation is dramatic and concrete, the ideas being transmitted in witty couplets by attractive wording.

In discussing human condition and human nature, Pope ignores the view that the world is not perfect but fallen, and that men are free agents responsible for their actions. Instead, Pope attempts to prove that everything is well in the best of the possible worlds, that the scheme of the universe is the best of all possible schemes, and that the people's failure to see the perfection is caused by their limited vision.

The evil exists in the world, but is limited and partial, as "Partial Ill" is but a part of "Universal Good", and, in order to achieve happiness and reach perfection, the human being should transcend the self-love towards social-love and then to the love for God, where "self-love and social" "All

are but parts of a stupendous whole, / Whose body Nature is, and God the soul".

The above selected fragment represents *The Design*, that is, the introductory part, of the *Essay on Man*, which is then followed by the four epistles written in verse form. *The Design* contains some ideas on poetry expressed through the argumentation of the reasons for which Pope has chosen the poetic form for his philosophical work.

First, poetry has stronger effects on the reader leading to a better understanding of the poet's message: "strike the reader more strongly at first". Second, the poetic form is characterized by concision, as it "could express them [ideas] more shortly this way than in prose". Finally, as a Neoclassical writer, Pope accepts the necessity of poetic diction and decorum in a poetic text, but the use of ornamentation must not affect the reasonable, concise expression of ideas: "perspicuity" must not be sacrificed to "ornament" and the poet must not be "wandering from the precision, or breaking the chain of reasoning".

In that, one may easily see again Pope expressing, advocating, and promoting the Neoclassical principles concerning poetry writing, which makes his ideas on literature, as little as they are stated in the Design and scattered throughout the epistles, to be highly dependent on and expressive of the dominant doctrine of the period, as well as prescriptive, and to a lesser degree defensive and subjective. Apart from the Design, throughout the entire poem, Pope's literary theory and practice, as combined in one verbal discourse, reveal a poet focused on expressing and prescribing rules not so much on poetic composition but existence in general, expressing the optimism and self-confidence of an urban society pleased with its own civilization. At moments, however, the optimism in *Essay on Man* co-exists with a satirical resentment as two facets reflecting the inner contradictions of the poet and those of the period itself.

The Rise of the English Novel: from Henry Fielding's Preface to *Joseph Andrews*:

> As it is possible the mere English reader may have a different idea of romance with the author of these little volumes; and may consequently expect a kind of entertainment, not to be found, nor which was even intended, in the following pages; it may not be improper to premise a few words concerning this kind of writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language.
>
> The EPIC, as well as the DRAMA, is divided into tragedy and comedy. HOMER, who was the father of this species of poetry, gave us the pattern of both these, tho' that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which Aristotle tells us, bore the same relation to comedy which his Iliad bears to tragedy. and perhaps, that we have no more instances of it among the writers of antiquity, is owing to the loss of this great pattern, which, had it

survived, would have found its imitators equally with the other poems of this great original.

And farther, as this poetry may be tragic or comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise either in verse or prose: for tho' it wants one particular, which the critic enumerates in the constituent parts of an epic poem, namely, metre; yet, when any kind of writing contains all its other parts, such as fable, action, characters, sentiments, and diction, and is deficient in metre only, it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the epic; at least, as no critic hath thought proper to range it under any other head, nor to assign it a particular name to itself.

Thus the Telemachus of the archbishop of Cambray appears to me of the epic kind, as well as the Odyssey of Homer; indeed, it is much fairer and more reasonable to give it a name common with that species from which it differs only in a single instance, than to confound it with those which it resembles in no other. Such are those voluminous works, commonly called Romances, namely Clelia, Cleopatra, Astræa, Cassandra, the Grand Cyrus, and innumerable others which contain, as I apprehend, very little instruction or entertainment.

Now, a comic romance is a comic epic-poem in prose; differing from comedy, as the serious epic from tragedy: its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters. It differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this: that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous; it differs in its characters, by introducing persons of inferiour rank, and consequently of inferiour manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us; lastly in its sentiments and diction; by preserving the ludicrous instead of the sublime. In the diction I think, burlesque itself may be sometimes admitted; of which many instances will occur in this work, as in the description of the battles, and some other places not necessary to be pointed out to the classical reader; for whose entertainment those parodies or burlesque imitations are chiefly calculated.

The rise of the novel, a genre that received a status of popularity equal to that of Elizabethan drama during the Renaissance, and founded by such writers as Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and others, is a major aspect of the eighteenth century British literature, next to Neoclassicism and Pre-Romanticism.

The above selected fragment is a part of Henry Fielding's preface to *Joseph Andrews*, in which he states the general principles that govern his writing. From the very beginning, Fielding shows that he is aware of the fact that his writing is a totally new genre, a "new species of writing", which he does not remember "to have seen hitherto attempted in our language". He defines his work as a "comic romance", which is a "comic epic poem in prose". Having read widely in classics, Fielding bases his ideas on them to find points of contact between the established traditional genres and his new literary creation.

In doing so, Fielding proves that he has been writing within a highly respectable tradition – that of the ancient epic – and the aim would be thus to prove that his work is important enough to be considered as a literary tradition in itself – that of the comic novel – aesthetically valuable enough to be accepted by the reading public and to be implemented in the contemporary literary background. In this respect, Fielding claims, in ancient period both epic and drama had the tragic and comic modes, and the ancients left patterns of those types, except the comic epic: Homer is said to have written one but now it is lost.

Fielding attempts to fill this empty case with his own work, which possesses all the elements of an epic – fable, action, character, sentiment, and diction – except metre, his text being written in prose. Almost all the elements being similar, except one, then it is appropriate, Fielding believes, to call his novel *Joseph Andrews* an epic.

Fielding then carefully delimits his text from other literary species, with which it has certain elements in common, namely from comedy and serious romance (including other novels written in his period).

It differs from comedy, "as the serious epic from tragedy", in that "its action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger circle of incidents, and introducing a greater variety of characters".

It also differs from the serious romance in its fable and the action, which are "light and humorous", whereas in the serious romance they are "grave and solemn"; in its characters, by introducing characters of different types, including "persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners", whereas the serious romance "sets highest before us"; and finally in its sentiments and diction by introducing the ludicrous instead of the sublime in sentiment and the burlesque in diction.

Being a playwright before coming to novel writing, in particular of comedies, Fielding is able to delimit clearly these two notions of the comic genre, as well as that of the ridiculous, which has its source in affectation arising from hypocrisy and vanity as depicted in the representation of characters and their feelings.

The comparative approach to his comic novel (which he calls "comic romance" and "comic epic poem in prose") and the three traditional genres of epic, comedy, and serious romance results in some similarities between *Joseph Andrews* and epic, in a series of differences between *Joseph Andrews* and comedy, and in a number of differences between *Joseph Andrews* and the serious romances.

Here it is interesting to observe that in his comparative assessment of *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding, by comparing his text to epic and comedy, points to the characteristics of the novel in general and gives a very modern definition and explanation of what a novel is in the broadest sense, whereas by comparing his comic novel to the serious romance Fielding

draws the comic elements in the novel and thus offers the modern definition and understanding of what a comic novel is in particular.

In the eighteenth century, English literary history witnessed the rise and consolidation of the novel writing tradition, Fielding being not only one of the founders of this genre but also the founder of a new species of novel, which is the comic novel, *Joseph Andrews* coming first in the line. Henry Fielding is also successful in having proved the relationship between his new, comic type of the novel and some long-established literary genres, and thus proving the literary validity of his work, which makes his literary criticism first of all defensive, as well as a dependent on its period type of criticism, and finally a criticism which is subjective and to the least degree prescriptive.

The Romantic Period
From William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and

capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

I cannot, however, be insensible to the present outcry against the triviality and meanness, both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and I acknowledge that this defect, where it exists, is more dishonourable to the Writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though I should contend at the same time, that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences. From such verses the Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy purpose. Not that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formerly conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If this opinion be erroneous, I can have little right to the name of a Poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.

It has been said that each of these poems has a purpose. Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling. (…)

Having dwelt thus long on the subjects and aim of these Poems, I shall request the Reader's permission to apprise him of a few circumstances relating to their *style,* in order, among other reasons, that he may not censure me for not having performed what I never attempted. The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. (…)

If in a poem there should be found a series of lines, or even a single line, in which the language, though naturally arranged, and according to the strict laws of metre, does not differ from that of prose, there is a numerous class of critics, who, when they stumble upon these prosaisms, as they call them, imagine that they have made a notable discovery, and exult over the Poet as over a man ignorant of his own profession. Now these men would establish a canon of criticism which the Reader will conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes. and it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written. The truth of this assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all the poetical writings, even of Milton himself.

From Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*:

But in order to render myself intelligible I must previously, in as few words as possible, explain my views, first, of a Poem; and secondly, of Poetry itself, in kind, and in essence.

The office of philosophical disquisition consists in just distinction; while it is the privilege of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware, that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical process of philosophy. But having so done, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist; and this is the result of philosophy. A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference therefore must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object being proposed. According to the difference of the object will be the difference of the combination. It is possible, that the object may be merely to facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observations by artificial arrangement; and the composition will be a poem, merely because it is distinguished from prose by metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly. In this, the lowest sense, a man might attribute the name of a poem to the well-known enumeration of the days in the several months;

"Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November," etc.

and others of the same class and purpose. And as a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities, all compositions that have this charm super-added, whatever be their contents, may be entitled poems.

So much for the superficial form. A difference of object and contents supplies an additional ground of distinction. The immediate purpose may be the communication of truths; either of truth absolute and demonstrable, as in works of science; or of facts experienced and recorded, as in history. Pleasure, and that of the highest and most permanent kind, may result from

the attainment of the end; but it is not itself the immediate end. In other works the communication of pleasure may be the immediate purpose; and though truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end, yet this will distinguish the character of the author, not the class to which the work belongs. Blest indeed is that state of society, in which the immediate purpose would be baffled by the perversion of the proper ultimate end; in which no charm of diction or imagery could exempt the BATHYLLUS even of an Anacreon, or the ALEXIS of Virgil, from disgust and aversion!

But the communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, as in novels and romances. Would then the mere superaddition of metre, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poems? The answer is, that nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it. They must be such, as to justify the perpetual and distinct attention to each part, which an exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound are calculated to excite. The final definition then, so deduced, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species – (having this object in common with it) – it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.

Controversy is not seldom excited in consequence of the disputants attaching each a different meaning to the same word; and in few instances has this been more striking, than in disputes concerning the present subject. If a man chooses to call every composition a poem, which is rhyme, or measure, or both, I must leave his opinion uncontroverted. The distinction is at least competent to characterize the writer's intention. If it were subjoined, that the whole is likewise entertaining or affecting, as a tale, or as a series of interesting reflections; I of course admit this as another fit ingredient of a poem, and an additional merit. But if the definition sought for be that of a legitimate poem, I answer, it must be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement. The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgment of all countries, in equally denying the praises of a just poem, on the one hand, to a series of striking lines or distiches, each of which, absorbing the whole attention of the reader to itself, becomes disjoined from its context, and forms a separate whole, instead of a harmonizing part; and on the other hand, to an unsustained composition, from which the reader collects rapidly the general result unattracted by the component parts. The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasureable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; – at every step he pauses and half recedes; and from

the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. Praecipitandus est liber spiritus, says Petronius most happily. The epithet, liber, here balances the preceding verb; and it is not easy to conceive more meaning condensed in fewer words.

But if this should be admitted as a satisfactory character of a poem, we have still to seek for a definition of poetry. The writings of Plato, and Jeremy Taylor, and Burnet's Theory of the Earth, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistringuishing objects of a poem. The first chapter of Isaiah – (indeed a very large portion of the whole book) – is poetry in the most emphatic sense; yet it would be not less irrational than strange to assert, that pleasure, and not truth was the immediate object of the prophet. In short, whatever specific import we attach to the word, Poetry, there will be found involved in it, as a necessary consequence, that a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry. Yet if an harmonious whole is to be produced, the remaining parts must be preserved in keeping with the poetry; and this can be no otherwise effected than by such a studied selection and artificial arrangement, as will partake of one, though not a peculiar property of poetry. And this again can be no other than the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written.

My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in some of the remarks on the Fancy and Imagination in the early part of this work. What is poetry? – is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? – that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control, laxis effertur habenis, reveals "itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant" qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. (…)

Finally, Good Sense is the Body of poetic genius, Fancy its Drapery, Motion its Life, and Imagination the Soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

From Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*:

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. Hence epitomes have been called the moths of just history; they eat out the poetry of it. A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.

The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem. A single sentence may be a considered as a whole, though it may be found in the midst of a series of unassimilated portions: a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought. And thus all the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets; and although, the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them; from developing this faculty in its highest degree, they made copious and ample amends for their subjection, by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images. (...)

Having determined what is poetry, and who are poets, let us proceed to estimate its effects upon society.

Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight. In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry: for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness; and it is reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the strength and splendour of their union. Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fullness of his fame; the jury which sits in judgement upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers: it must be impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations. A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why. The poems of Homer and his contemporaries were the delight of infant Greece; they were the elements of that social system which is the column upon which all succeeding civilization has reposed. Homer embodied the ideal perfection

of his age in human character; nor can we doubt that those who read his verses were awakened to an ambition of becoming like to Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism, and persevering devotion to an object, were unveiled to the depths in these immortal creations: the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration. Nor let it be objected, that these characters are remote from moral perfection, and that they can by no means be considered as edifying patterns for general imitation. Every epoch, under names more or less specious, has deified its peculiar errors; Revenge is the naked idol of the worship of a semi-barbarous age; and Self-deceit is the veiled image of unknown evil, before which luxury and satiety lie prostrate. But a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as a temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty. An epic or dramatic personage is understood to wear them around his soul, as he may the ancient armour or the modern uniform around his body; whilst it is easy to conceive a dress more graceful than either. The beauty of the internal nature cannot be so far concealed by its accidental vesture, but that the spirit of its form shall communicate itself to the very disguise, and indicate the shape it hides from the manner in which it is worn. A majestic form and graceful motions will express themselves through the most barbarous and tasteless costume. Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit, be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears.

The whole objection, however, of the immorality of poetry rests upon a misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man. Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life: nor is it for want of admirable doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive, and subjugate one another. But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists. The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thought of ever new delight, which have the power

of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

William Wordsworth is firstly approached in the line of English Romantic critics, owing it to the Preface added to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). The above selected fragment from the Preface contains Wordsworth's critical ideas on the subject matter of poetry, language of poetry, poetic imagination, the mission of the poet, and the definition, origin and purpose of poetry. Bringing into discussion the subject matter of poetry, Wordsworth identifies countryside, nature, and feelings as the three distinct aspects of the thematic concern: first, "incidents and situations from common life", "humble and rustic life", "rural life"; second, "the beautiful and permanent forms of nature"; third, "essential passions of the heart", "elementary feelings", and "passions of men". These three thematic concerns do not exist separately one from another, but represent a unity of interrelated and interdependent aspects, where elementary feelings, unaltered by "social vanity", stand as the dominant and the most important of all elements of the subject matter of poetry, their source being the rustic life and their highest expression and embodiment being the natural objects.

Wordsworth's literary practice materialises his conception, where in *Tintern Abbey*, for instance, nature and rural life are symbiotically united – "these pastoral farms, / Green to the very door" – and represent the source of poet's emotions, a necessary state prior to poetic composition:

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind,
> With tranquil restoration: – feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure

Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, his long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, and most of his other poems also clearly show that the main thematic concern of his poetry is the poet's own subjective experience, his feelings and states of mind, Wordsworth constantly writing himself into his poetry and his apprehension of the universe being purely personal. Wordsworth's best poetry renders the growth of the poet's own consciousness, which made Keats call it "egotistical sublime" and others acclaim Wordsworth as the beginner of modern poetry, the poetry of the

growing inner self, for, after him, the poets' main subject has been their own subjectivity.

Wordsworth's ideas on the subject matter of poetry merge in the Preface with those on the language of poetry, which should be also found in the "humble and rustic life", in which people speak "a plainer and a more emphatic language". It is necessary, insists Wordsworth, "to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men". Also, in Wordsworth's opinion, the language of poetry allows no sharp differences from the language of prose:

> the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written.

One may point here to a contradictory expression of ideas about the language of poetry, in that the language "really used by men", "a plainer and a more emphatic" one, a language that would not differ from the language of prose, is actually required to be "a more permanent and a far more philosophical language" and even made complex, "dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures", or, at least,

> a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them [figures of speech] as such; but have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription.

In Romanticism, as a reaction against the Neoclassical emphasis on reason and common sense, poets gave value to imagination as the most important human faculty, the primary and the actual creative principle in poetic activity. Likewise, Wordsworth, in the above selected fragment, regards imagination as the creative principle which, when used by the poets, would modify the simple and common aspects of life, chosen as the subject matter, where

> ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature.

As it is expressed in the Preface, the purpose of poetry is to teach, purify the soul, and improve morally the human being: "the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified". To this, Wordsworth also adds the principle of pleasure: "whatever passions he [the poet] communicates to his Reader, those

passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure".

Bringing into discussion the nature of the poet, Wordsworth offers one of the most famous definitions of poetry and a very interesting conception about its origin, claiming that all good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", to which later in the Preface he adds the idea that the emotion, experienced earlier, should be "recollected in tranquillity":

> Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.

This theory of origin of poetry is also remarkably materialised in his own poetry, the poem *Tintern Abbey*, for instance, from one interpretative perspective, apart from its themes of nature, memory, and the growing poetic mind, clearly revealing, or rather representing in itself, the poetic activity in progress, a poem about writing a poem, a poem disclosing, or deconstructing, it own process of composition.

Wordsworth's critical text shows that his ideas on poetry define the major characteristics of the Romantic poetry in general, and that they originate mainly as a rejection of the key Neoclassical principles while demonstrating the validity of the new, Romantic type of literature. In this respect, the main characteristic of Wordsworth's criticism is its defensive nature; his criticism is also dependent on and expressive of his own literary practice, and that of a whole generation, being at the beginnings of its consolidation as Romantic literary tradition, as well as subjective and prescriptive.

Unlike Wordsworth's literary criticism, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's estimation of literature in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is not simply Romantic, merely expressive of a new literary sensibility, but is viewed as the first important work of philosophical criticism in English. The above selected fragment clearly shows the philosophical thinking of a literary critic attempting to build up an original conception on poetry, in general, and, in particular, the definition and purpose of poetry, and the nature of poetic imagination.

Remarkable in its unity of concern and logical organization of ideas and arguments, the fragment, presenting his views, "first, of a Poem; and secondly, of Poetry itself, in kind, and in essence", starts from the

presentation of the philosophical method aimed at obtaining "adequate notions of any truth" and consisting of a "technical process", by which one "must intellectually separate" the "distinguishable parts" of the studied object, followed by the restoration of these parts "in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist", which is "the result of philosophy", that is, the realization of some truth, or knowledge, about the object.

On this philosophical premise builds Coleridge his conception on poetry. A poem, according to him, is also such an object consisting of "distinguishable parts", the different structural and thematic elements of a poem, and of their "unity", the "whole" of the poetic text, its message and meaning expressed by the poet. Starting from this assumption, Coleridge develops his own opinions on language and structural organization of poetry, on purpose of poetry and the function of imagination.

Concerning the language and structure, a poem "contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference therefore must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object being proposed". Different from prose, as combined in the "whole" of the poetic text, these elements receive an "artificial arrangement" by "metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly".

But this arrangement, though it may produce "a particular pleasure" in "anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities", is not enough to attribute the name of a poem to such a text. The "superficial form", insists Coleridge, cannot offer the adequate understanding of what poetry is; to do so, one should focus on the immediate purpose of poetry.

In science and history, the immediate purpose is "the communication of truths", "either of truth absolute and demonstrable", and from the attainment of this end may result pleasure, which, however, whatever "of the highest and most permanent kind" it might be, is still not an immediate end in itself.

Unlike in science and history, in poetry and literature the "communication of pleasure" is "the immediate object", an immediate end in itself. It is the first and foremost purpose of literature, in general, and, in particular, of poetry, as well as of those literary works that are "not metrically composed", such as novels and romances. The difference is, according to Coleridge, that in novels, romances, and drama, the pleasure results from "the whole", after reading the text and understanding its meaning; in poetry, unlike in other literary genres, the pleasure results not only from "the whole" of the poem, from what it is written about, but – as poetry, unlike other genres, has a special arrangement of language by rhyme and metre – the pleasure emerges also from "each component part", from how the poem is written, which is in the process of reading before coming to its end and understanding its message.

Concerning imagination, earlier in *Biographia Literaria*, one may find Coleridge's theory of poetic imagination, where he distinguishes

between 'Primary Imagination' and 'Secondary Imagination', and then opposes the latter, which is actually the poetic imagination, to 'Fancy'. There and in this fragment, Coleridge insists on imagination as the most important creative principle, as well as unifying principle, which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify". In relation to this idea, in the selected fragment one can find – based on Coleridge's philosophical distinction of the object into its parts and unity – the idea that imagination is the "syntactic and magical power" that fuses the parts into the unity of poem:

> This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control, laxis effertur habenis, reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

The person who has the ability to diffuse "a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each [part] into each" is the poet possessing the power of imagination, and, as such, can be "described in ideal perfection", for he "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity".

In short, by applying the philosophical method and, as a result, the consideration of a poem in its 'parts' (the component elements of a poem) and 'unity' (the whole of the poem), Coleridge offers a unity of approach to imagination, language, purpose, and definition of poetry. In this respect, the language of poetry is characterised by an artificial arrangement of the parts into the unity by meter and rhyme. The purpose of poetry is the communication of pleasure that originates from both the parts (that is, on the structural level, from the way the text it is written) and the whole (that is, on the thematic level, from understanding its message or meaning after finishing the reading) of the poem. Imagination is the creative principle that assembles, fuses, combines the elements, be they even of opposite qualities, into the unity of a poem. The definition of poetry summarises all these ideas:

> The final definition then, so deduced, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species – (having this object in common with it) – it is discriminated by proposing to

itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.

Coleridge's critical discourse on literature is better organised than that of Wordsworth and other English Romantic critics, and he develops his critical ideas less as a reaction against the Neoclassical principles, as Wordsworth does, than as an attempt to achieve originality of theoretical opinions and critical reasoning. By applying philosophy and its methodology to the making of literary criticism, Coleridge shows himself to be a critic conscious of the fact that in order to produce critical ideas on poetry and develop theoretical principles on poetry in general, one should find and apply a solid methodological basis, and, indeed, which might be a better one than that of philosophy, the mother of all disciplines, with its universally applicable system and method. Relying not on classical principles to be used in literary criticism, which would not be appropriate, since Romantic poetry is a new type of literature, Coleridge turns to genuine philosophy, on one hand, and, on the other hand, chooses as his models the German philosophers Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Fichte, and others who paved the way for the rise of Romanticism.

In this respect, Coleridge is both original and plagiaristic; nonetheless, he is aware of the fact that literary criticism is on the way of freeing itself from the previous classical tradition, for which a new and strong theoretical and methodological basis is required. Thus Coleridge's literary criticism, although dependent on and expressive of its Romantic period, is to a lesser degree defensive, subjective, and prescriptive.

Unlike Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, another important English Romantic critic, in his essay entitled *A Defence of Poetry*, is less concerned with critical originality and relies heavily on the classical heritage. A non-conformist in real life, a rebel and radical in literary practice, the creator of 'Prometheus unbound' shows himself to be a traditionalist in critical thinking. This is justified by the fact that Shelley came to write his essay as a reply to the article entitled *The Four Ages of Poetry*, in which his friend Thomas Love Peacock argues that poetry has become useless, and that the modern mind must turn instead to scientific and technological concerns. Shelley conceived his essay as an answer to this article, which offered him the opportunity to express his own ideas on imagination, poet, language and purpose of poetry.

The purpose of poetry is, actually, the main critical concern, since Shelley attempts to defend the value of poetry and of imaginative literature, in general, against the rising industrial culture. The purpose of poetry, as attributed by Shelley, considers a wide spectrum of social and moral implications, already expressed and argued about in the traditional background of classical literature since Horace's *utile et dulce*. Likewise, throughout his essay, Shelley associates poetry with social freedom and defends its status as a moral benefactor for the community, insisting on the

social function of poetry, on one hand, through imagination, "to produce the moral improvement of man", and, on the other hand, to award learning and pleasure, as it offers to reader "the wisdom which is mingled with its delight". Also, poetry acts in

> diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents.

The selected fragment reveals that apart from the continuation of the Neoclassical views (for instance, the purpose of poetry to teach, delight, and strengthen the ethical values, or the subject matter of poetry being "the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator", or the definition of poetry: "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth"), Shelley embraces many of the new Romantic ideas and even develops original critical opinions.

As a Romantic writer, Shelley expands together with Wordsworth and Coleridge the expressive theory of authorship and emphasises the importance of imagination; poetry, the way Shelley conceived of it, is the expression of imagination. Like for other Romantic critics, imagination is for Shelley the most important human power and the main artistic principle for the poet, the most resourcefully creative, unifying, and ordering principle in the act of creation, but Shelley's approach to imagination reveals also a Neoclassical perspective with clear social and moral implications regarding, first of all, its function to improve the man, for imagination is "the great instrument of moral good":

> The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thought of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

An example of original critical thought, which also goes against the classical view of art as *mimesis*, would be Shelley's ideas on the language of poetry, which, in his opinion, "is arbitrarily produced by imagination and has relations to thoughts alone", that is, the word has no equivalent, or referent

in reality, and represents the textual expression of the poet's thoughts and feelings, or any of the poet's ideas that are produced and exist only in his mind without being reflections of reality. Moreover, against the classical tradition emphasising harmony and musicality of the verse, the poet is free to deviate from tradition and innovate it:

> An observation of the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular, and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification.

However bound to classical tradition, or expressing Romanticism, or being original, Shelley's critical ideas have one particular task and are directed to one end – to demonstrate the utility of poetry and defend its aesthetic validity as well as social and moral function – which make Shelley's criticism first of all defensive, as well as subjective, prescriptive, and expressive of its period and literary tradition.

The three critics Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley belong to one literary movement, displaying similar critical concerns, among which of primary importance stands the nature of the poet, his creative sensibility and imaginative power, which made Abrams consider the 'expressive theory on art' as a new kind of critical theory developed by the Romantics.

Romanticism has proclaimed the freedom of artistic expression next to the freedom in thought, and the critics differ by the ideas and conceptions developed on similar critical concerns, by the perspectives of approach to these concerns, and by choosing either to conform to or defy tradition. In this respect, it would be interesting and revelatory a comparative arrangement of the main critical ideas from the fragments, as expressed by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, on such common concerns as the subject matter of poetry, the language of poetry, poetic imagination, the nature and mission of the poet, the function and the purpose of poetry, and the origin and definition of poetry:

	Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*	***Biographia Literaria***	***A Defence of Poetry***
Subject matter of poetry	"incidents and situations from common life", "ordinary things", "humble and rustic life",	"the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural", "persons and characters	"life expressed in its eternal truth", "unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator",

	"the essential passions of the heart", "our elementary feelings", "the manners of rural life", "rural occupations", "passions of men", "the beautiful and permanent forms of nature"	supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith"	"[poetry] is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature"
Language of poetry	"a selection of language really used by men", "a plainer and more emphatic language", "feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions", "a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language", "a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion", "the language of a large portion of every good poem, (...) except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise (...) the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written"	"by artificial arrangement (...) by metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly", "a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities"	"language, color, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry", "poetry in a more restricted sense expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man", "language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone", "the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential

			that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. (…) every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification"
Imagination	"to throw over them [aspects of rural life] a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect"	"It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead", "a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (...) fuses, each [part] into each", "magical power (...), first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control, (...) reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant" qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the	"mind acting upon those thoughts so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity", "the great instrument of moral good is the imagination"

		representative (...)"	
The purpose of poetry	"the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified", "whatever passions he [poet] communicates to his Reader, those passions (…) should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure"	"pleasure, not truth (...) from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part"	"poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight", "auditors (...) are moved and softened", "poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man", "poetry acts in (...) diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought", "poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents", "poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man"
Definition and origin of poetry	"poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity"	"a poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species – (having this object in common with it) – it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the	"the expression of the imagination", "a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth", "a poem (...) is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of

		whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part"	all other minds", "poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted"

Although the three critical texts belong to the representatives of one literary movement, they reveal differences in both content and form.

On the thematic level, the texts share common concerns – such as the subject matter of poetry, the language of poetry, the purpose of poetry, and others – of which the status of the poet is the new and the most discussed topic, especially the concern with the poet's imagination. However, the perspectives of approach to these concerns are different: the poet, for example, is discussed by Wordsworth on the premises of his emotional experience; Coleridge's perspective is philosophical as well as psychological; and Shelley discusses the poet from a Neoclassical perspective, which is in universal terms and with strong moral considerations.

Also, the critics differ in matters of originality of their ideas, in the different degrees of accepting or rejecting the established critical tradition of the classics revived and institutionalized as Neoclassical. In this respect, most of Wordsworth's critical ideas emerge as a strong reaction against the Neoclassical ones, especially those on subject matter of poetry, language of poetry, and definition and origin of poetry; Coleridge is rather original in many of his critical ideas, in particular about subject matter of poetry, imagination, the purpose of poetry, and definition and origin of poetry; and Shelley the critic, unlike the rebellious and radical Shelley the poet, shows his alliance to the ancient and Neoclassical aesthetic doctrine, namely through his ideas on subject matter, definition, origin, purpose of poetry.

Concerning the form, Wordsworth's Preface is acclaimed for its density of ideas, direct and plain style, and persuasive manner. However, the text, in many of its parts, seems rather disorganised and loose in the presentation of ideas which receive little argumentation, the critic often returning to the same concern and giving different if not contradictory ideas on the same matter. Such is the case about the language of poetry, or about the origin of poetry, as if Wordsworth starts the discussion with the aim to reject some Neoclassical principles only to return afterwards with explanations and additions: for instance, against the Neoclassical principles of decorum and poetic diction, the language of poetry is first simple, plain, and close to that of prose, but, later in Wordsworth's text, it is also philosophical and open to different stylistic devices. Poetry, as defined at the beginning of the Preface, is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, and a few pages later, returning to the idea, Wordsworth develops a highly original theory on the origin of poetry, stating that this is not enough, the emotions experienced earlier must be recollected in a special, poetic state of

tranquillity, this theory being materialised in his poetic practice, as, for instance, it is expressed as a major theme in *Tintern Abbey*. It is interesting to notice that in the returning to his earlier stated ideas and in their further development or cancellation by contradictory statements stands Wordsworth real merit as a literary critic.

Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge's critical discourse is much better organized, more academic and methodological. It seems that with great range of learning and remarkable sense of critical detachment, Coleridge has realized the importance of literary criticism, its utility and necessity, and its rise as a distinct discipline. Conscious of the need for a methodological basis for such a discipline, the method is borrowed from philosophy, as Coleridge, himself a philosopher, influenced, in particular, by the contemporary German idealistic philosophy, has truly conceived of philosophy as the mother of all disciplines and of the philosophical method as universally applicable, including in the field of literary theory and criticism.

Shelley, on the other hand, writes his essay in a poetic style with figures of speech and ornamentation of the phrases, in some of its parts the essay being a true poem in prose, where, for instance, the poet is "a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician".

In the Romantic period, literary criticism became more important and critics self-conscious of their task, because criticism was needed to prove the validity of Romanticism as a new type of literature which broke the linearity of the literary development dominated by the revived classical tradition. Romantic criticism was the promoter and representative of a new literary sensibility, and thus – like the criticism of Renaissance, Restoration, and Neoclassicism – the voice of a movement, and as such subjective, prescriptive and defensive, perhaps to a higher degree than the previous periods, given the aim to develop and implement a new type of literature in a cultural background still sensible to the Neoclassical mentality.

Truly, the great majority of the Romantic critical ideas originated in a reaction against Neoclassical principles (in Wordsworth), although some Neoclassical ideas prove their validity in the context of the new Romantic doctrine which rejects the previous one (in Shelley). However, there is also a strong tendency towards originality of approach while attempting at establishing methodologies of the critical discourse (in Coleridge).

Moreover, there is a strong tendency towards originality of concern, as Romantic aesthetic attitude has developed a number of new critical topics or subject matters, the focus now being on imagination, inspiration, feeling, emotion, sensibility, and psychological insights into the poetic mind. All of them are reified through the concentration on particular literary texts, often combined with attempts at theoretical speculation (such as the theory of

imagination) and development of new concepts (such as 'Secondary Imagination' by Coleridge or 'Negative Capability' by Keats).

And all of them point to the fact that the major critical concern is the poet, that the producer of art has moved to the centre of critical attention, the true function of art being now the expression of the artist's own subjective and psychological states. It is what made Abrams formulate the 'expressive theory' as a new critical theory of art coming into existence with Romanticism after the long dominance of the mimetic and pragmatic ones, which Victorian Age would add to the existing typology a number of others, including the objective theory.

The Victorian Age
From Matthew Arnold's *The Study of Poetry*:

We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry 'the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science'; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'; our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry.

But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment. Sainte-Beuve relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan: 'Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there not charlatanism?' – 'Yes' answers Sainte-Beuve, 'in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being.' It is admirably said, and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism shall find no entrance; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions

between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true. It is charlatanism, conscious or unconscious, whenever we confuse or obliterate these. And in poetry, more than anywhere else, it is unpermissible to confuse or obliterate them. For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as in criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue on half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

Yes; constantly in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments – the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal.

Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in its poetry.

From John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*:

The Imaginative artist owns no laws. He defies all restraint, and cuts down all hedges. There is nothing within the limits of natural possibility that he dares not do, or that he allows the necessity of doing. The laws of nature he knows; these are to him no restraint. They are his own nature. All other laws or limits he sets at utter defiance; his journey is over an untrodden and pathless plain. But he sees his end over the waste from the first, and goes straight at it; never losing sight of it, nor throwing away a step. Nothing can stop him, nothing turn him aside; falcons and lynxes are of slow and uncertain sight compared with his. He saw his tree, trunk, boughs, foliage and all, from the first moment; not only the tree, but the sky behind it; not only that tree or sky, but all the other great features of his picture; by what intense power of instantaneous selection and amalgamation cannot be explained, but by this it may be proved and tested; that, if we examine the tree of the unimaginative painter, we shall find that on removing any part or parts of it, though the rest will indeed suffer, as being deprived of the proper development of a tree, and as involving a blank space that wants occupation, yet the portions left are not made discordant or disagreeable. They are absolutely and in themselves as valuable as they can be; ever stem is a perfect stem, and every twig a graceful twig, or at least as perfect and as graceful as they were before the removal of the rest. But if we try the same experiment on the imaginative painter's work, and break off the merest stem or twig of it, it all goes to pieces like a Prince Rupert's drop. There is not so much as a seed of it but it lies on the tree's life, like the grain upon the tongue of Chaucer's sainted child. Take it away, and the boughs will sing to us no longer. All is dead and cold.

This then is the first sign of the presence of real imagination as opposed to composition. But here is another not less important.

We have seen that as each part is selected and fitted by the unimaginative painter, he renders it, in itself, as beautiful as he is able. If it be ugly it remains so; he is incapable of correcting it by the *addition of another ugliness*, and therefore he chooses all his features as fair as they may be (at least if his object be beauty). But a small proportion only of the ideas he has at his disposal will reach his standard of absolute beauty. The others will be of no use to him: and among those which he permits himself to use, there will be so marked a family likeness that he will be more and more cramped, as his picture advances, for want of material, and tormented by multiplying resemblances, unless disguised by some artifice of light and

shade or other forced difference: and with all the differences he can imagine, his tree will yet show a sameness and sickening repetition in all its parts, and all his trees will be like one another, except so far as one leans east another west, one is broadest at the top and another at the bottom: while through all this insipid repetition, the means by which he forces contrast, dark boughs opposed to light, rugged to smooth, etc., will be painfully evident, to the utter destruction of all dignity and repose. The imaginative work is necessarily the absolute opposite of all this. As all its parts are imperfect, and as there is an unlimited supply of imperfection (for the ways in which things may be wrong are infinite), the imagination is never at a loss, nor ever likely to repeat itself; nothing comes amiss to it; but whatever rude matter it receives, it instantly so arranges that it comes right: all things fall into their place, and appear in that place perfect, useful, and evidently not to be spared; so that of its combinations there is endless variety, and every intractable and seemingly unavailable fragment that we give to it, is instantly turned to some brilliant use, and made the nucleus of a new group of glory; however poor or common the gift, it will be thankful for it, treasure it up, and pay in gold; and it has that life in it and fire, that wherever it passes, among the dead bones and dust of things, behold! a shaking, and the bones come together bone to his bone.

And now we find what noble sympathy and unity there are between the Imaginative and Theoretic faculties. Both agree in this, that they reject nothing, and are thankful for all: but the Theoretic faculty takes out of everything that which is beautiful, while the Imaginative faculty takes hold of the very imperfections which the Theoretic rejects; and, by means of these angles and roughness, it joints and bolts the separate stones into a mighty temple wherein the Theoretic faculty, in its turn, does deepest homage. Thus sympathetic in their desires, harmoniously diverse in their operation, each working for the other with what the other needs not, all things external to man are by one or other turned to good.

From Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*:

To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought. Let us begin with that which is without – our physical life. Fix upon it in one of its more exquisite intervals, the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat. What is the whole physical life in that moment but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? But those elements, phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres, are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places most remote from it. Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them – the passage of the blood, the waste and repairing of the brain under every ray of light and sound – processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us: it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven in many currents; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are

but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them – a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways.

Or if we begin with the inward world of thought and feeling, the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring. There it is no longer the gradual darkening of the eye, the gradual fading of colour from the wall – movements of the shore-side, where the water flows down indeed, though in apparent rest – but the race of the midstream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought. At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to play upon these objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. Analysis goes a step further still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in to, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves.

Philosophiren, says Novalis, ist dephlegmatisiren. vivificiren. The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, – for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How

may we see in them all that is to seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the sense, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy, of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own. Philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us. "Philosophy is the microscope of thought". The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or of what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

The above fragments representing Victorian criticism, selected from Matthew Arnold's *The Study of Poetry*, John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*, do not show any similarities in matters of ideas expressed in them; moreover, the three critics represent different literary and critical trends, and, in matters of their critical concern, Ruskin's and Pater's main focus is on art, in general, and, in particular, on painting, and not on poetry and literature, as in Arnold, though one ought to take poetry as a literary genre and therefore as one of the arts, and in this respect might consider poetry to be indirectly discussed by Pater and Ruskin as well.

The reason behind the selection is that all three fragments contain – apart from critical ideas on art and artist (Ruskin and Pater), and on poetry and the poet (Arnold) – clear references to criticism, indicating the diversity of critical thought in Victorian period, and, first and foremost, revealing the changes taking place in that period regarding the status and purpose of criticism.

The condition of literary criticism in Victorian Age, as revealed in the fragment from *The Study of Poetry*, expresses a typology, a variety of critical approaches to poetry, Arnold speaking about three types of criticism, or "estimate": "historic estimate", "personal estimate", and the "real estimate".

The 'real estimate' is Arnold's own humanistic and moral criticism, "the only true one" in his opinion, since its aim is to unveil in poetry "a clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it", and assist the reader in understanding what is the best in poetry. The true criticism, then, has the power to discover, sustain and teach the moral and humanistic values expressed in poetry, which, in its turn, has "a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting" the reader.

Arnold's view of literary criticism is based on his own view of poetry as "capable of higher uses", such as "to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us". As Arnold conceives of it, poetry will come to replace religion and philosophy, and become a part of the scientific study: "Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it".

Arnold's high estimation of poetry parallels the important role given to literary criticism as intermediary factor between poetry and reader, between "the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy" in poetry and the understanding of these elements from poetry by the public. Criticism, as Arnold conceived of it, resembles the nature and mission of poetry itself, being reader oriented, having a social and moral function, and working together with poetry for the moral and intellectual improvement of man.

Poetry does it by expressing what "the best, the really excellent" is; criticism does it by providing the reader with the sense of what "the best, the really excellent" is, a sense that "should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read".

This is possible, according to Arnold, only if the critical act is objective, impartial, and independent from any personal or historical responses to poetry, being focused exclusively on the real poetic values, on its moral aspect, on what is "the best, the really excellent" in poetry.

That is why the other two types of criticism, 'historic' and 'personal', are both wrong, both "fallacious", the main problem in both cases being the subjective response to poetry, on either historical or personal grounds. In the case of historic approach to poetry, one may tend to exaggerate the value of a poem especially if the text expresses important for a nation historical events or figures:

> the course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic.

Similarly, one may exaggerate the value of a poem or a poet when they

> may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments – the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal.

Both historic and personal types of criticism give untrue understanding of poetry, because they both are subjective, using "a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising" poetry and over-rating its value, subjectivity resulting from the consideration of a poem in relation to some historical or personal affinities and circumstances, which the true criticism must avoid.

Evidence on the status of criticism in Victorian Age is also given in the fragment from *Modern Painters*, in which John Ruskin distinguishes between the 'Imaginative faculty' and 'Theoretic faculty'. The imaginative faculty belongs to the artist, and the imaginative artist, the only true one, unlike the unimaginative artist (who tends only towards perfection), embraces perfection and imperfection, beauty and ugliness, and defies all laws and limits:

> The Imaginative artist owns no laws. He defies all restraint, and cuts down all hedges. There is nothing within the limits of natural possibility that he dares not do, or that he allows the necessity of doing. The laws of nature he knows; these are to him no restraint. They are his own nature.

The theoretic faculty belongs to the critic, and, as discussed in relation to the theoretic faculty, imagination, the faculty of the artist, "takes hold of the very imperfections which the Theoretic rejects". As in Coleridge's view of imagination as the unifying principle in the act artistic creation, the imaginative faculty, according to Ruskin, ascends from the imperfection it takes hold of, and, "by means of these angles and roughness", that is imperfection, creates artistic perfection which becomes the concern of criticism: "it [imaginative faculty] joints and bolts the separate stones into a mighty temple wherein the Theoretic faculty, in its turn, does deepest homage". Unlike imagination of the artist, the theoretic faculty of criticism assumes a different task: it "takes out of everything that which is beautiful" and evaluates, "does deepest homage" to the "mighty temple", that is, the artist product created by imagination.

Criticism, then, according to Ruskin, although interdependent and placed in "noble sympathy and unity" with the imaginative faculty, both

agreeing in "that they reject nothing, and are thankful for all", is different in its concern and mode of operation from the imaginative faculty and as such should be considered as an independent from artistic practice discipline: although "sympathetic in their desires", the theoretic and imaginative faculties are "harmoniously diverse in their operation, each working for the other with what the other needs not, all things external to man are by one or other turned to good".

Arnold rejects subjectivity in criticism, Ruskin considers criticism to be independent from artistic practice, and Walter Pater, another Victorian art critic, rejects the normative and prescriptive features of criticism. In the fragment from *The Renaissance*, more precisely from the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, Pater points to the modern world growing accustomed to different and continuously changing manners and methods – "to regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought" – which might intervene between art and its perception. In their place, Pater advocates an impressionist criticism, according to which the artistic perception is a private experience, a personal understanding, consisting in a myriad of impressions emerging from the individual "inward world of thought and feeling", or, as Pater puts it, in a "race of the midstream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought". At first it seems that the experience of observation of art 'buries' the viewer under "a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality", but when the objects of contemplation start to be reflected upon, the observation, or "reflexion", "begins to play upon these objects" so they "are dissipated under its influence" and "each object is loosed into a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer". The artistic perception changes from an observation "of objects in the solidity with which language invests them" to an observation "of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them", and finally "the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind".

The experience of perception, involving observation and analysis, of the artistic object is thus reduced to a group of impressions, these individual "momentary acts of sight and passion and thought", which are surrounded by "that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us". Each one of these impressions "is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world". Moreover, insists Pater, as the process of analysis goes on, these impressions of the individual mind

> are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is.

It is, then, the human mistake to establish and follow rules and convention, or, as Pater puts it, "our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes two persons, things, situations, seem alike". Instead, one should let himself be taken by that movement of impressions, that "passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations", that "continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves". To maintain the spirit connected to the intense but fleeting chain of impressions, to the powerful but transitory moments of experience – where every moment "some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us" – represents "what is real in our life" and what "is success in life".

The life itself is fleeting, and, instead of pursuing some ultimate truths and theories, one should follow impressions, and let the spirit be free for at least a moment from any constraints of traditional theories, so that,

> while all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend.

In the experience of artistic reception, insists Pater, one should be free in his/her response to the artistic object, and never acquiesce in any theory or convention, such as that of Comte, or of Hegel, or even the impressionistic one of Pater himself. Instead, "what we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions".

Criticism, then, with its 'instruments', which are "philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view", is needed to assist the viewer in artistic reception by helping "us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us". And, concludes Pater, rejecting the normative and prescriptive types of critical analysis, criticism provides insight into philosophy, or unknown to the receiver theories, or conventional opinions on the object, without determining or influencing in any way the act of artistic creation and the receiver's reception of the artistic object:

> The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or of what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

The above selected fragments show that in Victorian Age the literary criticism started to become independent from artistic and literary practice, this separation between criticism and a literary movement or theory resulting

in the development by criticism of its own types – humanistic, historical, aesthetic, impressionistic, and others – different from literary ones, and in the diminution of its previous characteristics as subjective, defensive, prescriptive, and dependent on the literary background it belongs to. Thus, in *The Study of Poetry* Arnold rejects subjectivity in criticism; in *Modern Painters* Ruskin rejects the dependence of criticism on period and movement; and, in *The Renaissance*, Pater rejects the prescriptive and normative features of criticism. With Arnold, the receiver of art remains an important literary and critical concern, but with Ruskin and Pater, the former distinguishing between the imaginative faculty of the artist and the theoretical faculty of the critic, and the latter claiming that criticism does not determine the artist's production or receiver's understanding, helping only with some theoretical suggestions, the doctrine of art as autonomous and self-sufficient changes the status and purpose of criticism as well, which results in what Abrams calls the 'objective theory' on art.

Following the Romantic break with linear development of literature dominated by classical principles and the Romantic revival of literary experimentation and originality, and amid the subsequent literary and philosophical diversity in the nineteenth century, the Victorian criticism represents a period of transition from the dependent, subjective, normative, prescriptive, and defensive criticism of the earlier periods to the twentieth century scientific and methodological literary theory and criticism.

Conclusion

For the periods prior to twentieth century, apart from the common considerations as 'humanistic' and 'moral', the literary criticism in Britain can be characterised as (1) dependent, meaning that criticism represents and expresses a literary period and/or movement it belongs to; (2) prescriptive, meaning that criticism explains and gives rules and shows the direction for literary production; (3) subjective, because the critics are also writers who would often give more importance and over-evaluate their own work, exaggerate or diminish the value of the work because of the critic's personal responses to the text, or some historical context, and because criticism on the whole lacks the scientific, methodological, and objective approach; (4) defensive, meaning that criticism defends the literary validity of the literature it belongs to against another type of literature or any accusation or attacks on the type of literature it is representative of.

Literary criticism implies the intellectual capacity to evaluate and understand the literary work, the analysis of particular works being the main aim of the literary criticism, but, though achieved by most of the critics prior to twentieth century, in English background criticism has started with some alien to the nature of critical act purposes. For instance, Sydney defends, Dryden prescribes, and Fielding introduces a new genre and Wordsworth a new type of poetry.

The main reasons are given by the main characteristics of criticism developed in the periods coming before the twentieth century. Criticism, being dependent on the cultural background it belongs to, expresses the ideas and principles of the dominant movement or cultural doctrine. In this case, criticism is also subjective for having a defensive role in relation to a literary movement or set of ideas, for having not established yet as a normative discipline, and for being produced by critics who are also the writers representing a particular literary movement.

However, with Romantic period, criticism marked an important phase in its development: criticism became necessary and writers became conscious of the importance of criticism and its usefulness for the implementation in the cultural background of a new type of literature against the dominance of the classical ideas.

Romantic criticism, like the criticism of the previous periods, and in some respects even to a greater degree, remained subjective, prescriptive, defensive, and dependent, that is representative of its literary tradition, but it became more scientific as it started to develop theory (for example, Coleridge's theory of poetic imagination) and new critical concerns (the expressive theory of authorship focused on the poet and all related to him aspects involved in poetic creation, such as imagination, inspiration, sensibility), to search and establish methodology (Coleridge again, who applied the philosophical method to the discussion on poetry).

In the rest of nineteenth century, after Romanticism, because of the Romantic contribution to the field of literary criticism, but also because Romantic literature broke the linearity of literary development and determined the literary diversity consisting of a number of trends and movements co-existing during the same period, literary criticism started to separate from the field of literature.

First, Victorian criticism rejects the characteristics of the earlier criticism – subjective, defensive, prescriptive, defensive, normative, and literature-dependent – as in *The Study of Poetry* Arnold is against subjective response to literary practice in critical reasoning; Ruskin in *Modern Painters* rejects the dependence on period and movement; and Pater in *The Renaissance* exalts the freedom of artistic reception against the prescriptive, normative and defensive features of criticism and theory. With Ruskin's distinction between the imaginative faculty of the artist and the theoretical faculty of the critic, and Pater claiming that criticism does not determine the artist's production or receiver's understanding, helping only with some theoretical suggestions, the idea of autonomy and self-sufficiency of art became one of the dominant in the period and resulted in what Abrams calls the 'objective theory' on art.

However, the receiver of art remains an important critical concern, and if poetry, as Arnold states, would come to replace philosophy and religion, and even become a part of scientific research, then criticism becomes intermediary between the real value of literature and its comprehension by the reader. Criticism assumes a new purpose, which is to find in literature what is the best, the most valuable and moral, and help reader with apprehending all that, and thus becomes didactic and reader oriented. Second, Victorian criticism developed its own typology – impressionistic, realistic, aesthetic, historical, moral-humanistic, biographical, and others – thus also revealing the separation between literature and criticism.

By the two dominant aspects, the nineteenth century criticism that came after the Romantic period marked the transition from the subjective, prescriptive, defensive and dependent criticism to the twentieth century modern, independent, objective, scientific, methodological literary theory and criticism with its own trends and schools having specific objects, principles, and methods of research.

Following the approach to a number of critical texts belonging to Renaissance, Restoration, the eighteenth century Neoclassicism and the rise of the novel, Romanticism, and Victorian Age, as the main periods in the history of English literary criticism, one may notice that the condition of criticism in Victorian period is subject to major changes which make it different from the criticism of the previous periods and be taken separately from the earlier criticism.

Also, the answers to the questions concerning the awareness of being a critic and concerning the origin, form, and the characteristics of criticism would then refer to the major critical voices of Renaissance, Restoration, eighteenth century, and Romanticism, rather than to those of Victorian Age.

The answers resulting from the approach to the critical fragments – from Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, John Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, Henry Fielding's Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, William Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* – may be better revealed, diachronically and comparatively, by the help of a table:

Critic / question	*Can we consider a given text to be of literary criticism?*	*Did the critic make conscious attempts at writing literary criticism?*	*What is the origin of the critical text?*	*What is the form of the critical text?*	*What is the prevalence of the main characteristics in relation to each text?*
Sidney	yes	no	to defend and praise the value of poetry	rhetorical argument	defensive, dependent, subjective, prescriptive
Dryden	yes	no	to prescribe and defend	dialogue	prescriptive, dependent, subjective, defensive
Pope	no (it is a philosophical poem)	no	to express and prescribe Neoclassical principles	verse	dependent, prescriptive, defensive, subjective
Fielding	yes (moreover, its main concern is a particular literary text)	yes	to defend and implement a new type of literature	preface	defensive, dependent, subjective, prescriptive
Wordsworth	yes	yes	to reject Neoclassicism and defend the value of a new type of literature	preface	defensive, dependent, subjective, prescriptive
Coleridge	yes	yes	criticism in	articles,	dependent,

			itself	lectures, letters	defensive, subjective, prescriptive (the last three to a small extent)
Shelley	yes	yes	to defend and praise the value of poetry	essay	defensive, subjective, dependent, prescriptive

The table shows that predominant is the defensive characteristic (three or four times), prescriptive (twice), subjective (none or once), and dependent (once). Although all four characteristics co-exist in the critical texts of all periods, the most dependent on its literature is the critical discourse of Alexander Pope, the most prescriptive one is that of John Dryden, the most subjective one seems to be Shelley's, and the most defensive criticism can be considered that of Philip Sidney, Henry Fielding and most of the Romantic critics.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, these characteristics of criticism diminish and some become extinct, opening the way to the rise, in the twentieth century, of the first objective and scientific approach to literature, which is the formal approach consisting of three trends: Russian Formalism, New Criticism, and Structuralism. Other twentieth century critical trends include feminism, psychoanalytic criticism, reader-oriented criticism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, cultural studies, postcolonialism, and many other trends and schools of a complex and continually developing contemporary critical discourse, which requires a separate and a more profound assessment, eventually reified as the concern of another, independent study.

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2.

Contemporary Trends in Literary Theory and Criticism

Estella Antoaneta Ciobanu

The Formal Approach to Literature

The formal approach to literature includes three major schools of literary theory and criticism: Formalism, New Criticism, and Structuralism.

Russian Formalism

A. **Brief history**

Formalism developed in Russia in the early 1920s as a polemical reaction to what its early practitioners perceived as the obscurantism of symbolist poetics and an impressionistic method of assessing literature, but also in response to Russian futurist poetry. Hence, the Russian formalists endeavoured to offer the model of an objective, scientific examination of literary *style*, which they defined in terms of a departure from established linguistic norms by means of identifiable and analyzable devices.

Two formalist groups emerged, the Moscow Linguistic Circle, founded in 1915, and the St Petersburg *Opoyaz* (the Russian acronym for 'The Society for the Study of Poetic Language'), founded in 1916. Despite their marked differences in concern, as their very names imply, the two groups had as their common denominator a firm *linguistic grounding* (since both derived their basic techniques from Ferdinand de Saussure's theory) and the belief in the discontinuity of the language of literature from other kinds of language, which legitimized the formalist proposition about the *autonomy of the literary work* (hence their text-orientation). The formalists posited a qualitative difference between the *referential or denotative use of everyday and scientific language* for communicative purposes (e.g. to communicate ideas, to name facts), hence the transparency of form in relation to content, on the one hand, and *the connotative use of literary language and its foregrounding of form*, on the other hand. In time, however, the formalists managed to assimilate their linguistic techniques to the study of literary history and biography, i.e. to what had been the subject matter of much literary criticism before formalism.

An important formalist concern was defining and describing the specific qualities and characteristics of particular genres and discourses, from the poetic (the early formalists) to the novelistic discourse (Bakhtin). Given their commitment to the formal dimension of literature (grounded in the mechanics of the text), the Russian formalists could subsequently argue that the history of transformations in literature was due entirely to formal metamorphoses, and that the evolution of literary forms broadened the scope of the literary content (i.e. it determined new contents, e.g. the range of characters and ideas).

The term 'formalist' was used pejoratively by Soviet critics to imply limitations, for the formalists' concern with the mechanics of meaning production independent of the non-literary context could be particularly

suspect in the eyes of Marxist theorists and the new political regime. Because of political frictions, in fact, some of the major formalist theorists had either to publish under pseudonym (Bakhtin) or to flee from Russia (Jakobson, Eikhenbaum, Shklovsky, Troubetskoy). The latter category provided some of the leading figures of the Prague School of linguistics (or the Prague Linguistic Circle), founded in 1926 and active until the early 1930s, which united Russian Formalism and Saussurean linguistics.

In recent times, formalism has been criticized from various quarters for failing to take into account its own implicit politics and for not justifying the separation of formal from other concerns (social or political). Positing the autonomy of the literary work and the specificity of literary language can be interpreted as maintaining and endorsing loci of interest now decried as expressive of white male-dominated socio-political hierarchies and ideology.

B. **Major representatives**
a. the Moscow Linguistic Circle:
   Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) and **Peter Bogatyrev**, after their emigration to Czechoslovakia, helped found the Prague School. Jakobson (who finally emigrated to the U.S. in 1941) was instrumental there in the dissemination of formalist ideas and theorized their influence on structuralism; he also paved the way for a new approach to versification. Bogatyrev formulated the principles of a functionalist-structuralist approach to folklore (later furthered by Vladimir Propp in his structuralist studies of the morphology of the folk-tale). Other leading members: **Yuri Tynyanov** – the theory of literary evolution (1927); **Boris Tomashevsky** – studies on literary genres and on versification.
b. the St Petersburg *Opoyaz*:
   Viktor Shklovsky – *Art as Technique*, the formalist manifesto (1917); **Boris Eikhenbaum** – an overview of the formalist method as a scientific approach to literature (1927).
c. **Mikhail Bakhtin** (1895-1975): In the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929), he analyzed the novelistic discourse as '*heteroglossic*' (or polyphonic, dialogic), in opposition to the *monological* discourse of poetry or even of some novels (i.e. typically 'narrated' in a single, authoritative voice and from a single perspective). 'Heteroglossia' (*raznorecie*) in novels refers to their incorporation of different modes of speech through the narrator's adoption of a character's point of view, through embedded commentary of the fictional events, or through what the structuralists will later call 'intertextuality' (from the use of irony and parody to hidden polemics against other writers). Heteroglossia liberates the characters to speak 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices' (Bakhtin). This is so because of the *dialogic principle* informing

language itself: language precedes subjectivity and is never neutral or unaddressed, but constitutively intersubjective, therefore social. Any speaking 'I' always uses simultaneously a polyphony of languages derived from diverse social contexts and origins, yet Bakhtin celebrates the novel as the genre whose technical resources have an inherent capacity to represent languages other than the author's, hence the novelistic discourse may influence and disrupt the authority of the authorial voice (that regulates any interplay of other voices in the text). In fact, in an essay in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin argues that *all* novels are typically dialogic (or polyphonic) in form. Bakhtin's study of the carnival and the carnivalesque in the Middle Ages, and its influence on Rabelais (*Rabelais and His World*, 1965), also reveals heteroglossia at work.

C. **Key terms**
1. **Form** (**formal**): the shape and structure as well as the manner in which a literary work is made, as opposed to its *substance* or *paraphrasable content* ('what is said'). Shklovsky, Tomashevsky and Jakobson were the first to argue that the formal dimension of literature, from rhythm patterns in poetry to narrative strategies in fiction, should be the primary concern of literary study. In fact, early Russian formalists could go as far as to assert that content was merely an effect of form, whereas the American New Critics (the formalists' closest counterparts from the 1930s to the 1960s) deemed form only an essential component of content. (In everyday parlance but *not* in formalist readings, the term 'form' may be broadly used to refer to literary kinds or genres.)
2. **Literariness** (Jakobson, *literaturnost*): 'The subject of literary science is not literature, but literariness, i.e. *that which makes a given work a literary work*' (Roman Jakobson, 1919). Like 'defamiliarization', it is a concept which emphasizes that the defining features of a literary work reside in its form.
3. **Defamiliarization** (Shklovsky, *ostranenie*, 'making strange'): broadly speaking, making new, different, strange, fresh what is known and familiar; in a narrow sense, modifying the reader's habitual perceptions by drawing attention to the artifice of the text through literary technique, i.e. 'laying bare' (exposing) the techniques and devices by which a work is constructed (e.g. Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*).

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult.... *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*
> (Shklovsky, *Art as Technique*, 1917)

4. **Foregrounding** (the pre-war Prague School, Czech *aktualisace*): the abnormal use of a medium relative to the conventions which regulate its ordinary use, its obtrusion against a background of automatic responses; the artistic use of devices and techniques pushes the act of expression to the fore, so that language draws attention to itself, which, in its turn, draws attention to the way that language represents reality. According to Jan Mukařovský, a Czech linguist originally affiliated with the Prague School, foregrounding occurs especially in *poetic language*, which 'is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself' (*Standard Language and Poetic Language*).

> In literature, foregrounding may be most readily identified with linguistic *deviation*: the violation of rules and conventions, by which a poet transcends the normal communicative resources of the language, and awakens the reader, by freeing him [*sic*] from the grooves of cliché expression, to a new perceptivity. Poetic metaphor, a type of semantic deviation, is the most important instance of this type of deviation.
>
> (Fowler, ed. 1987: 98)

Unlike the romantics' focus on a similar literary achievement (e.g. P. B. Shelley's view, in *A Defence of Poetry*, that 'poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar'), the formalist concern with defamiliarization insists on the literary means and effect rather than on casting a new light on things. Foregrounding in *prose works* applies rather at the levels of theme, character, plot, argument, etc. than at the level of linguistic choice.

5. **Dominant, the** (the Prague School): 'the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components' (Jakobson, 1935). The dominant gives the work its Gestalt, its organic unity. This concept emerged as a development and response to Shklovsky's definition of defamiliarization (where form or technique was itself a defamiliarizing agent), and emphasized the distinction between those formal elements which function to defamiliarize (the dominant) and those which function passively.

6. **Story** (*fabula*) vs. **plot** (*syuzhet*): the logico-chronological order of events (the raw story material) vs. their narrative structuring in the text (i.e. the devices which defamiliarize the story).

D. **Application**

Russian Formalism is concerned with describing the procedures and techniques of a literary work. In so doing, it highlights how texts disrupt the reader's expectations by using language in novel ways (defamiliarization), so that meaning appears as a function of the work's formal procedures.

Steps in applying the formalist method:

a. Identify the formal devices of the text (e.g. the use of rhyme, rhythm, euphony and alliteration, figures of speech and of thought in poetry, and narration and plot construction in fiction).

b. Explain how these formal devices act as defamiliarizing agents by foregrounding the workings of literary language and/or story-telling, and establish whether or not the defamiliarizing effects instantiate any crucial procedures at work throughout the text.

c. Establish the meaning such defamiliarization leads to.

E. **Relevance**

The Russian Formalist method has shifted the focus of literary studies from a superficial, impressionistic approach immersed in biographical data to a systematic one grounded in the linguistic features of the text. In recent years it has been able to provide, with emendations, the basis for more context-orientated approaches, e.g. for feminist or post-colonial readings. In very practical terms, it has provided students/readers of literature the basic conceptual tools and practical methods of reading and appreciation of literary works that render the student a self-sufficient reader of texts by focusing of the workings of literary language.

American New Criticism

A. **Brief history**

New Criticism emerged in the U.S. in the 1920s and flourished from the 1930s to the 1960s, in reaction to what its proponents regarded as the literary critics and theorists' undue emphasis on the mind and personality of the poet, sources, the history of ideas and socio-political implications. The New Critics shared with the Russian Formalists a sense that literary language, especially poetry, is of a different nature than ordinary practical speech, since it possess connotative potentials. Rather than engage in scientific descriptions of literary forms and genres, however, the New Critics advocated the 'close reading' (detailed textual analysis to reveal the *texture* of language and imagery) of individual, especially poetic, works. Their method thus favoured the text over both reader and context, and made semantics an important tool in literary analysis.

The New Critics' 'ontological' bias made them focus on the way a particular literary text expresses universal truths through a *reconciliation of contraries* (language vs. meaning, spirit vs. matter, content vs. form, subsumable under the rubric the universal vs. the particular). Hence, *paradox* has been seen by Cleanth Brooks (*The Well-Wrought Urn*, 1947) as the trope most characteristic of poetry in so far as it embodies the very reconciliation of contraries that poetic texts are by their very nature.

B. **Major representatives**
W. K. Wimsatt and **Robert Penn Warren** (*Understanding Poetry*, 1938,
helped spread the NC principles throughout the American academe); **John
Crowe Ransom** (*The New Criticism*, 1941, established the name of the
'movement'); **Cleanth Brooks** (*The Well-Wrought Urn*, 1947); **Kenneth
Burke**; **Allen Tate**; **R. P. Blackmur**.

C. **Key terms**
- **Close reading**: detailed textual analysis to reveal the *texture* of language
  and imagery of individual (especially poetic) works.
- **Reconciliation of opposites/contraries**: the way a particular literary
  text expresses universal truths in dyadic pairs (language vs. meaning,
  spirit vs. matter, content vs. form, subsumable under the rubric the
  universal vs. the particular).
- **Paradox**: broadly, an apparently self-contradictory (even absurd)
  statement which, on closer inspection, is found to contain a truth
  reconciling the conflicting opposites; from an NC perspective, the very
  condition of the language of poetry because it works out a reconciliation
  of contraries.
- **Irony**: broadly, an oblique quality or mode of expression, often the
  (un)witting instrument of truth. Most forms of irony involve the
  perception or awareness of a discrepancy or incongruity between words
  and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between
  appearance and reality, often tinged with an element of the absurd and
  the paradoxical. The two basic kinds are *verbal irony* and *situational
  irony* (or irony of behaviour): at its simplest, the former involves saying
  what one does not mean, while the latter may describe the
  precariousness of one's vantage point especially regarding one's
  assumed superiority.

D. **Application**
While, like the Russian Formalists, they maintained the importance of
form for the literary work, the New Critics only regarded it as an essential
component of content rather than the latter's very cause, and argued that
great works are actually characterized by an organic unity of form and
meaning. In order to elucidate the texture of imagery in a literary work it is
necessary to describe its meaning.
Steps in applying the NC method:
a. Identify the text's texture, i.e. its verbal patterns (e.g. tropes and
    imagery in poetry, narrative design, dramatic technique), especially
    ironies and paradoxes (at the level of both action and imagery);
    highlight especially those image patterns that cross two opposing
    values or terms.

b. Relate these verbal patterns to the meanings the work both enunciates and instantiates, establishing how ironies and paradoxes in particular represent a successful reconciliation of contraries (the universal and the particular).

E. **Relevance**

The New Criticist close reading, with its special attention to the text's texture, has helped ground otherwise impressionistic insights regarding the handling of language for rendering meanings that can relate to universal values. Thus, it highlights the way in which the use of tropes in a poetic text can appraise ontological and axiological systems or embody a sense of the critical issues of the day.

Its critics have pointed out that, in its 'ontological' focus on allegedly universal values, New Criticism can be accused of upholding a conservative ideology in response to the 20th century social and artistic changes challenging precisely such a static view of values. This doesn't, however, detract from NC's value as an analytic step *before* engaging the issue of how a particular literary text represents, underrepresents or misrepresents topical issues.

Suggestions for a formalist reading

a. **John Donne, 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning'** – regular foregrounding of metaphor/conceit (the dominant: the pair of compasses to identify the lovers) & defamiliarization

b. **William Carlos Williams, 'This Is Just to Say'** – counterintuitive example in terms of the formalist theory of poetic lg.

Structuralism

A. **Brief history**

The concept of structuralism should be understood on two levels of generality at least:

1. a broad intellectual movement underpinning theorizing in various human sciences in the 20th century, from linguistics to cognitive sciences to cultural anthropology;

2. a particular set of approaches to literature and other aspects of culture, flourishing especially in France in the 1960s.

As its very name implies, structuralism (especially in the first sense) addresses structures and the structuring process: its basic premise is that human activity and cognitive-perceptual processes are not natural but *constructed*. Hence, structuralism sees itself as a human *science* whose self-appointed task is to understand, in a systematic way, the fundamental structures that underlie all human experience.

To account for the diversity of human experience, structuralism has postulated the existence of two fundamental levels: (a) *surface phenomena* in the visible world, and (b) *depth structures* underlying and organizing the former in the invisible world. Basically, this view holds that a large but limited set of elements and a number of rules governing their selection will supply the lexicon and grammar of whatever object of inquiry, from a language system to artistic creation to mental processes. Structuring principles, whether or not we are aware of them, allow us to differentiate among items within a group and likewise among groups within a domain, and ultimately to organize and understand (and thus impose meaning and value on) the (natural) world. These structuring principles are credited to the human mind, thought of as a structuring mechanism. Such a radical proposition challenges the view that structures inhere in the order of things, and advances the idea that whatever structures are perceptible in the world are in fact projections of our mind onto it, not factual reality: just as beauty, in a famous turn of phrase/mentality, is in the eye of the beholder, so, according to the structuralists, is structure in the human mind when we mistakenly believe we 'see'/'find' it in the world.

The Russian Formalist concern with the study of literary language but also the form of literary genres – developed and widely disseminated especially by Roman Jakobson under the auspices of the Prague School (before the Second World War) and then in the US – paved the way for French structuralism. The other major precursor discipline was linguistics in the aftermath of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The Swiss linguist's theory of the linguistic sign articulated coherently and systematically not only fundamental insights into the conventionality of language – as already intimated by writers, e.g. Shakespeare or Lewis Carroll[62] – but also the relationships that obtain within the linguistic system for meaning to emerge.

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[62] Juliet's 'What's in a name' tirade or Humpty Dumpty's oft-quoted words anticipate Saussure's proposition about the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, yet always meaningful and stable within widely held conventions. Such early intimations of modern linguistic propositions, important though they may be, do not qualify as scientific remarks since they lack both a systematic context and especially emphasis in the economy of the work's argument. Here are the relevant quotations:

'Tis but thy name, that is my enemy; – / Thou art thyself though, not a Montague. / What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man. O, be some other name! / What's in a name? that which we call a rose, / By any other name would smell as sweet; / So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd; / Retain that dear perfection which he owes, / Without that title ….

(W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.2)

'I don't know what you mean by "glory,"' Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"' 'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument,"' Alice objected. 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said

In *Cours de linguistique générale* (published posthumously in 1916), Saussure abandoned the traditional diachronic study of language in favour of a synchronic one, viz. shifted the focus from language as a collection of individual words with their history to that of language as a structural system of relationships among words as they are used at a particular point in time. He used the terms *langue* ('language') to denominate *language as a structural system* and *parole* ('speech') for the *individual utterances that occur in speech/writing*, with the former as the proper object of structuralist study and the latter of interest only inasmuch as it reveals *langue*. Saussure's structuralist linguistic thus provided both the terms and the theoretical insights that structuralists would apply to literature: there is a *langue* that structures individual literary works (*parole*) and at the same time structures the system of literature as a whole.

For Saussure, the components of the (linguistic) structure, i.e. the (linguistic) signs, can be perceived because of the differences from one another. Such differences are organized by the human mind, according to structuralism, in terms of *binary oppositions*, i.e. as two directly opposed concepts, each of which is defined by means of its opposition to the other rather than as a fixed term in its own right.

Saussure defined the linguistic sign as a compound of *the signifier* (*le signifiant*), or 'sound-image', and *the signified* (*le signifié*), or the concept to which the signifier refers. This dyadic view was premised on the tenet of the *arbitrariness of the linguistic sign*: there is no necessary connection but only a widely accepted *linguistic convention* that regulates the association between a given signifier (e.g. the *t-r-e-e* sequence) and the concept to which it refers ('a woody perennial plant that grows to a height of several feet and typically has a single erect main stem with side branches'), as prove the different signifiers that various languages have for it (e.g. the German *Baum*, French *arbre*, Italian *albero*, Spanish *árbol*). Furthermore, the signifier/signified definition of the linguistic sign excluded, at this point, its relationship with the actual referent, or the 'thing' in the world (which later linguists would attempt to restore *within* the sign structure as a triadic relationship), and it thereby bolstered the structuralists' crucial proposition that it is concepts generated in our mind that structure our understanding of and relation to the world. (Hence, learning a foreign language entails the potential of learning to see the world in new ways.)

Signification, then, occurs not as a link between words and non-linguistic reality, but strictly within the autonomous system of signs

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in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.'

(L. Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, chap. VI: 'Humpty Dumpty')

(language), viz. as the association of signifier and signified within the linguistic sign. Furthermore, as the signifier is constituted through its *relations with other signifiers within the linguistic system*, such relations are of primary interest. They are organized along two axes: (a) the *paradigmatic*, which identifies the vertical axis of possible substitute terms from which only one is *selected* for use at any given place in a sentence, and (b) the *syntagmatic*, which identifies the way in which individual elements are *combined* in contiguous chains to form meaningful sentences. You can think of a *paradigm set* either as a group of nouns (or verbs, respectively) that can fill the subject/object position (or predicate position, respectively) in a sentence, or as the various forms a noun/verb/relative pronoun, etc. has in a given language. In the former case, you can think of 'cat', 'dog', 'rabbit', etc and 'fell asleep', 'woke up', 'was stretching out', etc. respectively. In the latter case, the paradigm set of 'cat' admits two realizations in English, 'cat' and 'cats', while that of 'fell asleep' also includes 'fall asleep', 'falls asleep', 'has fallen asleep', 'have fallen asleep', 'is falling asleep', 'will fall asleep', etc. A *syntagm* consists of any one part of the sentence that can be isolated from another: in the sentence 'The dog fell asleep within minutes', the syntagms are 'the dog', 'fell asleep' and 'within minutes'.

Saussure's influence on literary and cultural criticism can be noticed in several important directions:
1. Structuralist critics have shifted attention away from the relation between texts and world towards the study of literary systematicity, so as to highlight how texts operate logically or systematically, the mechanisms for meaning production, the structures texts have and share in common with other texts, the interrelations between parts of a text, etc.
2. Structuralist critics focus on the way the elements of a text are combined according to latent logical or grammatical rules that can often be also noticed in other similar texts. For instance, the plot of a text can be studied as structured by grammatical rules and the moral qualities of the characters as organized in binary oppositions of the type 'possessing trait x'/'not possessing trait x'. One of the major contributions has been to identify 'grammars' and 'invariant structures' of various literary genres or subgenres, e.g. Vladimir Propp's study of Russian fairy tales (the *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, a proto-structuralist extension of Russian Formalism).[63]

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[63] Published in Russian in 1928, this breakthrough study was generally unnoticed in the West until it was translated in the 1950s; it influenced Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Propp identifies the general structure of the fairy tale as comprised of thirty-one functions (the 'language'), e.g. a member of a family leaves home (the hero is introduced); an interdiction is addressed to the hero; the interdiction is violated (villain enters the tale); the villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance; etc. These functions are realized differently in various fairy tales (the 'speech').

3. Unlike traditional humanist criticism with its approach to characters as if they embodied real moral qualities, structuralist criticism regards texts as systems of signs wherein a character is a signifier linked to signified concept, and what it signifies has meaning only in relation to other signifiers/characters.

Being engaged in structuralist activity, therefore, does not involve describing the structure of a literary text in order to interpret what the work means or to evaluate its literary accomplishments and value, but describing the text's structure to discover how its composition demonstrates the underlying principles of a given structural system. Alternatively, the structure of a large number of texts of the same (sub)genre can be examined so as to discover the underlying principles that govern their composition.

B. **Major representatives**

2. in **literary criticism**, **genre studies** and **archetypal literary criticism**:
Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992) – *Sémantique structurale. Recherche et Méthode* (1966), *Maupassant. La sémiotique du texte. Exercices pratiques* (1976) / *Maupassant: The Semiotics of Text: Practical Exercises* (1988).
Claude Bremond (1929–) – "La logique des possibles narratifs" (1966) / "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities" (1980), *Logique du récit* (the actantial model, 1973).
Tzvetan Todorov (1939–) – *Grammaire du Decameron* (1969) / *The Grammar of the Decameron*, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970) / *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973).
Gérard Genette (1930–) – His multi-volume work, *Figures I-V*, is a demonstration in narratological criticism: the series *Figures I-III* (1966, 1969, 1972), but not *Figures IV* (1999) and *Figures V* (2002), is better known especially through a selection entitled *Discours du recit: essai de methode* / *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) and *Figures of Literary Discourse* (1982). Other structuralist studies include: *Introduction à l'architexte* (1979) / *The Architext: An Introduction* (1992), *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (1982) / *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997), *Nouveau discours du récit* (1983) / *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988), *Seuils* (1987) / *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), and *Fiction et diction* (1991) / *Fiction and Diction* (1993). Genette has coined the now widespread term *paratext* to refer to prefaces, introductions, illustrations,

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Furthermore, the fairy tale characters can ultimately be classified into several types: the hero, the villain, the magical helper, the donor, the sought-for person, the dispatcher, and the false hero.

notes, book covers, blurbs or any other material accompanying the text. He has also reintroduced into circulation the term *palimpsest* (originally, 'a written document, usually on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible')[64] to refer to the manifold relationships a text may have with prior texts: a later literary work or *hypertext* is a graft on earlier *hypotexts*, e.g. Joyce's *Ulysses* is a hypertext in relation to Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, both its hypotexts.[65] All texts can be regarded as hypertextual, though some are more so than others: the massively hypertextual ones, resulting from *bricolage*[66] show how literary discourse plays with other discourses and reads them in unforeseen ways. According to Genette, the proper object of poetics should not be the individual text but, in view of its palimpsestuous[67] nature, its *architext* (1979/1992), i.e. 'the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each individual text' (*Palimpsests* 1997:1), or rather *transtextuality* (1982/1997), i.e. the 'text's textual transcendence', which 'goes beyond, and at the same time subsumes, architextuality, along with some other kinds of transtextual relationships' (ibid.), viz. *intertextuality* (a term coined by Julia Kristeva, but restricted by Genette to quotation, plagiarism, allusion), *paratextuality* and *metatextuality* (viz. critical commentary).

Northrop Frye (1912-1991) – *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957) seeks to identify the structural principles underlying the western literary tradition by means of four different approaches: (a) the theory of modes or historical criticism (the tragic, comic and thematic modes); (b) the theory of symbols or ethical criticism (the literal/descriptive, formal, mythical and anagogic phases); (c) the theory of myths or archetypal criticism (comedy, romance, tragedy and irony/satire as the four *mythoi*

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[64] Here is the context of palimpsest making in the Middle Ages: 'In the absence of writing material, scribes resorted to using older manuscripts of classical authors. Sometimes the earlier writing was only incompletely erased or scraped away, and so can be deciphered by means of modern detection aids such as ultraviolet light. The importance of palimpsest manuscripts is in the ancient works that they preserve' (*Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2005).

[65] This rewriting can be achieved either by textual *imitation* (e.g. pastiche, caricature, forgery) or by *transformation* (e.g. parody, travesty, transposition).

[66] 'Bricolage' was originally used by Claude Lévi-Strauss (in *La Pensée sauvage / The Savage Mind*) to refer to a nonspecialist that works by improvisation with what is at hand. Genette uses it (in *Palimpsests*) as a metaphor for the work of the literary critic; defined as 'the making of something new out of something old', *bricolage* is then another manifestation of hypertextuality. The term *bricoleur* has entered the metatext of the arts to refer to a creator who draws for her/his work on heterogeneous models and sources.

[67] The adjective *palimpsestuous* was coined by Philippe Lejeune.

(the plural of *mythos*), viz. the narrative patterns or structural principles structuring the all-encompassing myth of literature: the quest); and (d) the theory of genres or rhetorical criticism (the genres of epos, prose, drama and lyric).

3. in **semiotics**:
   Roland Barthes (1915-1980) – *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953) / *Writing Degree Zero* (1967), *Mythologies* (1957) / (1972), 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' (1966) / 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' (1975), *Système de la mode* (1967) / *The Fashion System* (1983), *Éléments de sémiologie* (1964), / *Elements of Semiology* (1967), 'La Mort de l'Auteur' (1967) / 'The Death of the Author' (1977).[68]

4. in **linguistics**:
   Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) – *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916).
   Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949) – *Language* (1933).
   Charles W. Morris (1901-1979) – *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938), proposing a threefold division of the linguistic sign (*sign vehicle*, *designatum* and *interpreter*), and of semiotics (*syntactics*/*syntax* (the formal or structural relations between signs), *semantics* (the relationship of signs to what they stand for) and *pragmatics* (the relation of signs to interpreters) – a distinction that became normalized in linguistics).
   Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) helped found the *Cercle Linguistique de Copenhague* (1931); in *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1943/1953) he developed a linguistic theory whose task was to discover and formulate the premises of 'an immanent *algebra* of language', hence its name, *Glossematik* (in English, *glossematics*), coined from the Greek *glossa* ('language') and patterned on 'mathematics'.

5. in **structural anthropology**:
   Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–) – *Structural Anthropology* (1958), *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1962). He considers culture a system of symbolic communication to be investigated with methods used more narrowly in the discussion of novels, political speeches, etc. so as to

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[68] The essay is symptomatic of Barthes' poststructuralist inclination in his later years: Barthes rejects the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, hence the source of its meaning and the only authority for interpretation. Each text possesses a plurality of meanings actively created by the reader through a process of textual analysis, an insight which Barthes will elaborate on in *S/Z* (1970) through an analysis of Balzac's 'Sarrasine'. There, he establishes five major codes for determining a plurality of meaning, with numerous *lexies* (i.e. elements that can take on various meanings for various readers) throughout the text.

unearth the underlying structures that link all humans together despite the differences among the surface phenomena (e.g. ritual forms, myths) of the cultures they belong to. He coined the term *mytheme* (on the linguistic template of *phoneme*) to refer to the fundamental unit of myths that represents relations between two or more concepts (e.g. 'the hero kills a monster') and consists of all its variants (e.g. in the above-mentioned mytheme, different kinds of heroes, of monsters, of reasons to kill the monster).

6. in the **cognitive sciences**:
   Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927) – *Systematic Psychology: Prolegomena* (1929).
   Jean Piaget (1896-1980) pioneered structuralist work in cognitive developmental psychology through his constructivist theory of knowing: *La naissance de l'intelligence chez l'enfant* (1936) / *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (1963), *La Psychologie de l'intelligence* (1947) / *The Psychology of Intelligence* (1950), *Introduction à l'Épistémologie Génétique* (1950), *Structuralism* (1970), *Psychology and Epistemology: Towards a Theory of Knowledge* (1972).

C. **Key terms**
- **Structure**: not a physical entity, but a *conceptual framework* that people use to organize and understand physical entities. A structure is any conceptual system that has the following three properties: (1) *wholeness* (i.e. the system *functions* as a unit because of the interrelatedness of its elements, e.g. a sentence is more than the sum of its component words); (2) *transformation* (the system is dynamic, i.e. it is a structure that can also always structure new material, e.g. language is capable of transforming its basic components, phonemes, into new structures, words and sentences); and (3) *self-regulation* (the transformations of which a structure is capable according to (2) never lead beyond its own structural system, e.g. the elements engendered by linguistic transformations, new utterances, always belong to the language system and obey its laws).
- **Langue** vs. **parole** (Saussure): 'language' as a (latent) *structural system* vs. 'speech' as the (actual) *individual utterances that occur in speech/writing* and are informed by the system's structures.
- **Decoding**: interpreting the 'structure' of a culture as a whole by studying its interactive systems of signs; such systems include literary texts and genres as well as other cultural formations, e.g. advertising, fashion, taboos on certain forms of behaviour.
- **Linguistic sign** (Saussure): a compound of *the **signifier** (le signifiant)*, or 'sound-image', and *the **signified** (le signifié)*, or the concept to which

the signifier refers; it excludes the linguistic sign's relationship with the actual referent, or the 'thing' in the world.

- **Denotative** vs. **connotative** (Barthes): what the signified actually is, its 'definition' in brain language vs. what points to the signified but has a deeper meaning; e.g. 'tree' – denotation: 'a woody perennial plant that grows to a height of several feet and typically has a single erect main stem with side branches'; connotation: 'luxuriant green', 'shady', etc.
- **Arbitrariness of the linguistic sign** (Saussure): there is no necessary connection but only a widely accepted *linguistic convention* that regulates the association between a given signifier (e.g. the *t-r-e-e* sequence) and the concept to which it refers, as prove the different signifiers that various languages have for it.
- **Binary opposition**: two ideas/concepts, directly opposed, each of which is defined and understood by means of its opposition to the other, e.g. day/night, light/darkness, white/black, good/evil, up/down, inside/outside, male/female, nature/culture etc. The structuralists simply *assume* the existence of such ('given') binaries and, unlike the deconstructionists, *do not investigate* the history of a particular binary opposition, including its hierarchical and axiological arrangement as reflecting major societal ideological biases.
- **Metaphor** vs. **metonymy** (Jakobson): rhetorical figures that in structuralism provide models for two fundamental ways of organizing discourse which can be traced in every kind of cultural production, i.e. for the selective and combinative processes, respectively (or synchronic vs. syntagmatic/diachronic dimensions). The metaphoric mode tends to be foregrounded in poetry, while the metonymic one is characteristic of prose.
- **Semiotics**, **semiosis**, **semiology**:[69] the study of signs and signification, the process of attaching signifieds to signifiers, the study of signs and signifying systems. Nowadays the term *semiotics* is more likely to be used as an umbrella term, despite the differences between Saussure's term 'semiology' (*semiologie*, from the Greek *semeîon*, 'sign'), sometimes still used to refer to the Saussurean tradition of 'investigat[ing] the nature of signs and the laws governing them' (Saussure), and 'semiotics', to refer to the Peircean tradition, where *semeiotic* was the 'formal doctrine of signs' which was closely related to logic (C.S. Peirce). Semiotics began to become a major approach to cultural studies in the late 1960s, partly as a result of the work of Roland Barthes, who claimed that 'semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified. This relation concerns objects which

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[69] My brief reference to, and inclusion of, *semiotics* in this chapter on structuralism is only justifiable for didactic reasons concerning linguistic/structuralist roots of semiotics and the elusiveness of its early advocate, Roland Barthes, when it comes to classifications.

belong to different categories, and this is why it is not one of equality but one of equivalence' ('Myth Today', in *Mythologies*). Hence, 'semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not *languages*, at least systems of signification' (*Elements of Semiology*, 1967: 9). Umberto Eco's broad definition of semiotics regards it as 'concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (*A Theory of Semiotics*, 1976: 7). Ever since Barthes' *Mythologies*, semiotics has been employed in the analysis of texts, with the proviso that the semioticians' 'text' is defined at its broadest, viz. it can exist in any *medium* and may be verbal, non-verbal, or both. Semiotic studies in art, literature, anthropology and the mass media undertaken by linguists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychoanalysts, literary, aesthetic and media theorists, not only display, unsurprisingly, considerable variation amongst leading practitioners as to what semiotics involves, but also, significantly, broach the moot point of human ascription of significance to anything in the world.

- **Myth** (Barthes): a second-order sign. Saussure's *linguistic sign* (comprised of a signifier and a signified) constitutes merely the signifier that will correlate with a certain signified to form a new sign (a 'myth') in a 'second-order semiological system'. Thus, *myth* as a 'global sign' is a correlation of a *signifier* or the raw material of mythical speech (comprised of modes of representation, e.g. the language itself, rituals, objects, etc.), which constitutes the 'meaning' of a sign in its respective system but only the 'form' in the second-order semiological system of myth, and a *signified* or 'concept', creating together the 'signification'.
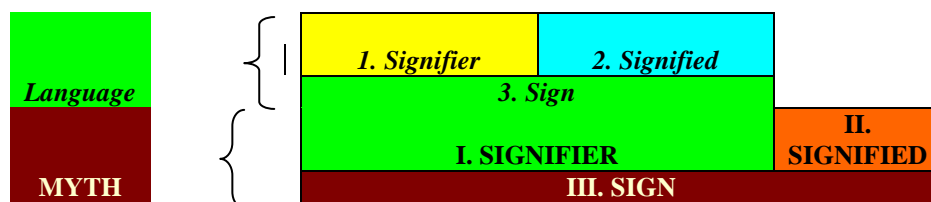
D. **Application**

Structuralists analyse mainly prose narratives, relating the text to larger containing structures, e.g. the conventions of a particular literary (sub-) genre, intertextual network, a notion of narrative as a complex of recurrent patterns and motifs, a projected model of an underlying universal narrative structure. Furthermore, they apply the concept of systematic structuring to the whole culture, whether focused on the West or across cultures, hence the relation with semiotics.

Steps in applying the formalist method on a given *prose* text:[70]
1. Identify the genre and subgenre the text belongs to, with their typical conventions.
2. Identify the text's macro-structure and the plot (subplot, double plot) in functional terms, e.g. 'the hero is dispatched to rescue the victim', thus underlining the logical sequencing of functions.
3. In the case of prose and sometimes of drama too, identify the text's narratological makeup (point of view, voice, focalization, type of diegesis, representation of time) as a grid that engenders/allows certain types of interactions and forestalls others.
4. Identify micro-structures, e.g. parallels, echoes, reflections, repetitions, contrasts, patterns, to be found at the level of general structure, plot, characters, situation, language (interactions of stylistic registers, dialects, idiolects, neutral and ironical uses of language) and imagery, and study their interrelations so as to highlight how they *create* meaning.
5. Discuss characters as signifiers of abstract concepts (signifieds) that are organized in oppositional pairs, and study the interactions and reconfigurations of such pairs in the signifying process.
6. Identify intertextual and interdiscursive relations of the text with others by the same author, of its genre/subgenre, and generally other literary/cultural 'texts', e.g. themes, motifs, echoes of characters or texts, pastiche and parody.

Steps in applying the formalist method on a given *poem*:
1. Identify the genre and subgenre the text belongs to, with their typical conventions.
2. Identify the text's macro-structure: division into and type(s) of stanzas, type(s) of rhyme and rhyming scheme, meter; discuss any binary opposition, including the symmetry/asymmetry (or presence/absence) of a certain feature's distribution.
3. Identify micro-structures, e.g. parallels, echoes, reflections, repetitions, contrasts, patterns, to be found at the level of general structure or substructures; these concern as much words as sounds and even typographical layout (where created by the author), language and imagery, figures of speech and figures of thought, and neutral, ironical or rhetorical sentences/phrases. Organise your

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[70] I am assuming that nowadays a structuralist text reading will merely attempt to practise the structuralist method on a number of (un)related texts and possibly also to study to what extent they conform to generic conventions (and the horizon of expectation these engender in readers), rather than endeavouring to establish new 'grammars' of genres.

findings in oppositional paradigms which list the various realizations in the text of a particular binary opposition.

4. Identify any dialogical setting (especially in its relation to the conventions of the sub-genre) and establish a pattern of interaction (especially binary oppositions), hence meaning, created by lyrical voice(s) and/or characters, the presence/invocation/ evocation of figures.

5. Study the creation of meaning from the interaction between 'language' structures and 'content' features, paying particular attention to the relation between the paradigmatic sets and syntagmatic chains observable in the text.

E. **Relevance**

Especially in its narrow application on literary/cultural texts, structuralism has enabled a study of (literary) systematicity that is caused by and conducive to a propensity for identifying structures as ultimately cognitive anchors. The attention given to the systematic operations of meaning production and to the intertextual and interdiscursive dimensions of texts has made redundant a liberal humanistic 'impressionistic' reading which may have promoted the flawed idea of the critical genius. From a broader perspective, structuralist thought has highlighted the relations between types of 'discourse' which otherwise would not have been compared, e.g. myths, kin relations, advertisements, or the system of fashion. In fact, the last element mentioned would never have been regarded as a system at all, but rather as mere caprice and indulgence: Barthes' work has thus paved the way for a more thoughtful integration of fashion in the 'framework' of the presentation of the self, to be taken up by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his analysis of *habitus* and by theorists of postmodernity.

Nonetheless, various objections have been raised against one structuralist proposition or another, or even against the structuralist approach to literature/culture. They range from doubts as to whether language (in Saussure's definition) is exclusively a system of differences with no fixed terms, to the imputation of reductionism and mechanistic interpretation, to that of harmful dehistoricization, hence apoliticization, and biased Euro-Americanocentrism in its privileging of a certain mode of thought, exclusively logical, dichotomous and hierarchical. (The poststructuralist historicization and contextualization of binary oppositions has attempted to correct this structuralist flaw, moving so far as to reach an epistemological aporia with Derrida's discussion of Western thought, and his solution to place binary oppositions *sous rature*.)

The Approach through Reading

The Reader-Response Approach to Literature

A. Brief history

Special attention to the reading process and to what the text *does* to the reader as a self-conscious critical phenomenon emerged in the 1930s but came into prominence only in the 1970s, mainly in reaction to some theories' tendency to reject the reader's role in creating meaning (e.g. New Criticism in the 1940s-1950s). Even though the name of this type of approaches to literature sounds appealing, reader-response criticism does not legitimize an 'anything-goes' appreciation of the literary text, nor does it jettison any analytical engagement with it. On the contrary, what the plethora of theories focusing specifically on the readers' response share in common is precisely a *self-reflexive* phase as part of the process of understanding the *experience of reading*, and the notion that the readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by a literary text but actively make it. (The latter might easily provide prima facie evidence for the diversity of interpretations of any text even by critics who share the same set of theoretical tools and practical strategies.)

On the other hand, various types of critical responses to literature can be easily subsumable under the term 'reader response' once they focus on the very act of reading. Culler (1982: 31) and Tyson (1999: 154) adduce examples to support this rather unsurprising observation: structuralist criticism, though one of the most likely approaches to by-pass the reader's role, could be considered a form of reader-response criticism when it focuses on the literary conventions a reader has internalized and deploys (un)consciously in order to be able to read a particular text.[71] More overtly interested in the reader are, of course, psychoanalytic, feminist, lesbian and gay criticism, when they investigate, respectively, the psychological motives for certain kinds of interpretation, the patriarchal frame of sexist interpretation, or the homophobic cultural constraints which blind readers to the homoeroticism of literary texts.

This should not deceive us, however, into believing that a certain interest in the readers' response to literature is a 20th century theoretical breakthrough, far from it. Ever since Aristotle's *Poetics* (composed in *c*. 330 BCE), there has been an interest in the effects literature may have on readers. In fact, it is generally assumed that early accounts broached, to various

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[71] A case in point is Barthes' *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973/1975), celebrating as it does the reader at the moment when s/he takes her/his pleasure. Ironically, in *Image, Music, Text* (1977), Barthes claims that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author' (qtd. in Culler 1982: 31), a death already theorized in 'La Mort de l'Auteur' (1967/1977).

degrees, the affective impact of literature on its audience, as is the case with Aristotle's famous, though controversial, notion of *catharsis* in Greek tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy as the work which arouses the passions of pity and fear[72] in a powerful way (which is achieved by ultimately 'testing or finding the limits of what is human', according to Sachs), yet he never defines the very notion of 'catharsis'. Brown (2005) overviews the major modern responses to the Aristotelian catharsis. Some critics have explained catharsis as the purging of pity and fear from the spectators during observing the action on stage, hence the beneficial role of tragedy for the spectators as it relieves them of harmful emotions. Other critics, however, fault this interpretation on being inconsistent with the *Poetics*'s focus on dramatic form: they find it hard to believe that Aristotle might have defined tragedy in terms of audience psychology yet by dropping a mere hint. Hence, critics like Else and Hardison view catharsis as the resolution of dramatic tension within the plot.[73]

Although most historical overviews of the readers' response to literature tend to gloss over any such concerns during the Middle Ages and jump to the Renaissance interest in the affective effects of literature on readers, a glance at the medieval context of construing reading would be quite instructive. While illiteracy[74] was by far the rule in western Europe around the turn of the first millennium CE – yet with the number of the people who could read in the vernacular steadily on the increase – reading was regarded as a cognitive and didactic tool even when it concerned literature, especially the writings of the 'pagan' ancient world. Particularly in the latter case, reading a literary piece in Latin was meant not just as a means

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[72] '… through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions' (Aristotle, *Poetics* VI.2, Butcher's translation).

[73] Brown (2005) summarizes this latter explanation (Else and Hardison) of how catharsis explains the audience's experience of satisfaction even from an unhappy ending, considering that the dramatist depicts incidents which arouse pity and fear *for the protagonist*. Human nature may cause the spectators to hope that things work out for the protagonist they sympathize with, but, because of the insurmountable obstacles in the situation and the ironies of fate, the worst is in fact to be expected. Hence, a happy but contrived conclusion would make the spectators feel cheated, for they should have been able to finally recognize the probable or necessary relation between the hero's actions and their results, and appreciate the dramatist's honest depiction of harsh reality.

[74] The very notion of *literacy* referred, until the modern times, to being able to read and write *in Latin*, not simply in one's vernacular language (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, or Old English, and later Middle English, for the British Isles). In western Europe, literate people would receive a religious education in Latin up to the 12th century establishment of the first universities. This also happened thenceforward but only as regards their first stage of education; at a later point it could diversify to more practical concerns (e.g. law or medicine).

of learning the language,[75] but especially as a mechanism for triggering spiritual thought. Following St Augustine's interpretation of the biblical Book of Revelation as the closed book of man's *conscientia* and *memoria*, a host of medieval writers would focus on the book as a similitude for *memoria*, and on *conscientia* as a book of things hidden in each soul and meant to be revealed at the Last Judgement, according to Alanus de Insulis (Gellrich 1985: 163).[76] Thus, a famous 12th-century anonymous distich – used for *mnemonic* purposes[77] – described concisely the four levels of text interpretation and thus implied the effects it was to have on readers:

> *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,*
> *moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.*
> [The letter teaches the deed, the allegory what you believe, the moral what you should do, the anagogy what you strive for.]
>
> (qtd. in Gellrich 1985: 73)

With the exegesis of *the* Book – with capital B, viz. the Bible – the medieval levels of text interpretation were comprised, in an ascending order of complexity, of (1) the *literal* (or historical), (2) the *allegorical*, (3) the *tropological* (or moral) and (4) the *anagogical* (or spiritual). Accordingly, any given text, on the pattern of the Bible, could be read as a historical account of an event, which, however, spoke allegorically about something else (viz. it was a metaphorical representation) and moreover encoded a set of moral values in the story, whose final interpretation should lead the reader to contemplating the ultimate religious truth. Quite obviously, this process was construed as an upward spiritual progress from mundane and visible facts to spiritual and intelligible ultimate realities, where the epistemological would finally give way to the ontological on the threshold of the divine. In a manner of speaking, our common reading practices and their metalanguages

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[75] Latin was the language of the Catholic Church and theology, scientific pursuits, royal administration and even entertainment, though the last one was a social activity preferably conducted in the vernacular language so as to reach a broad audience.

[76] Such interest in reading should come as no surprise, in fact, considering that Alanus de Insulis (or Alan of Lille, in vernacular 'translation') could sum up, in the 12th century, the medieval view of the Book of Nature: *Omnis mundis creatura / Quasi liber et pictura / Nobis est, et speculum* ['The whole created universe is to us like a book, and a picture, and a mirror'] (qtd. in Gellrich 1985: 34).

[77] Reading a text was, due to the scarcity of copies available – in its turn due to the expensive and time-consuming mode of manuscript production – an affair which also required committing it to memory. There were various mnemotechnical steps involved: basically, a text was to be coded into images and these in turn were to structured in 'scenario'-like configurations; the latter could be memorized and later recalled at will (and reconverted into text) by the striking aspect they had and thus the powerful impression they produced on one's intellective faculties.

are a far cry from it, despite the endeavours of philosophers like Martin Heidegger (in *The Origin of the Work of Art*) and his pupil Hans-Georg Gadamer (in *Truth and Method*) to argue for the ontological condition of the work of art and hence its reception too.

Reverting to the 20th century, one can speak, with Jonathan Culler, about 'stories of reading' (1982: 64), viz. how the reader experiences reading and gets engrossed in the interpretation of a text, which accounts for the various approaches known collectively as *reader-response criticism*. It is, like the other types of criticism, not free from problematical terms and practices. Apart from the strategies of interpretation each theorist deploys in/as '*the* reading process', there is also the moot point of the 'reader', all the more so as traditionally this 'function' has been deemed universal, viz. human, when it is actually male, premised as it is on a male world of criticism within a patriarchal society imbued, as feminist psychoanalysts claim, with male fantasies.

Androcentric bias notwithstanding, the very wording in a particular theory suggests the level of generality the author deploys (Tyson 1999: 173-4): the term 'readers' (in the plural) refers to actual readers whose reading experiences the theorist analyzes (e.g. Norman Holland, David Bleich); on the contrary, 'the reader' (in the singular, with or without an adjective to qualify it) evokes a hypothetical and ideal figure which covertly or overtly is enacted by the particular critic deploying the term.[78] Thus, Fish calls the practitioner of affective stylistics an *informed reader*, since s/he has attained the literary competence necessary to experience the text – like Fish – in all its linguistic and literary complexity. Depending on the text under scrutiny, the actual reader may feel her-/himself 'informed' or not. Other terms which refer to the hypothetical reader in the same terms as Fish's 'informed reader' are the *educated reader*, the *optimal reader* or the *ideal reader*. At this point, the very idea of reader response may strike some of you as off-putting and completely at odds with what you may have thought reader-response theory celebrates: flesh-and-blood readers who are just beginning to learn the practice of formal response to texts, and who are never asked whether they prefer theoretical sophistication over a 'take-it-or-leave-it' yet 'heart-felt' response. A somewhat less off-putting term for this hypothetical figure is used by Wolfgang Iser: the *implied reader*, i.e. the reader that the text apparently addresses, whose particularities depend on the general make-up of the text, from style to the 'attitude' encoded in the narrative. A synonymous term for Iser's is the *intended reader*: it evokes even more explicitly how a specific text positions its readers in order to guide their

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[78] In this latter case, 'the reader' may be taken to provide a shorthand for the critic analyzing her/his own reading experience of a specific text, and has been ironically named after the critic by those who object to the respective reader-response theory (e.g. a Fishean reader, viz. one able to read as Stanley Fish does as he analyzes the reading process).

interpretation. It is important here to distinguish between such a hypothetical reader as a figure *encoded* in the text and the narratee ('you') explicitly *interpellated* by the narrator, though deceivingly positioned so as to be mistaken for you-the-flesh-and-blood-reader-reading-the-text.

As Culler perceptively notes, though some theorists appear to celebrate the creative or productive role of the reader (e.g. Norman Holland in *5 Readers Reading*, Stanley Fish in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Wolfgang Iser in *The Act of Reading*), most such accounts can collapse in the inverse, structuralist-minded, story of 'the text provoking certain responses and actively controlling the reader' (Culler 1982: 70). This 'easy shift between freedom and constraint' (ibid.) can occur anywhere, from a markedly distinct approach of a certain theorist (e.g. Michel Riffaterre), to variations within a theorist's work (e.g. Roland Barthes; Umberto Eco), to switches back and forth within the same work (e.g. Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?*; Roland Barthes' entry on 'Texte, théorie du' for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*). To take a famous example: early in his career Umberto Eco argues, in *Opera aperta*, 1962 (*The Open Work*, 1989), that works can be classified into 'closed works' (whose tight structures seem to give readers no creative options of reading) and 'open works' (whose unrealized constructions invite creativity). Later, however, he contends that the open work also imposes the greatest constraints: a particular role of the 'model reader' and also 'limits of interpretation'. Thus, a 'text is a place where the irreducible polysemy of symbols is in fact reduced because in a text symbols are anchored in their context' (*The Role of the Reader*); moreover, polysemy is reduced because the hermeneutic enterprise itself provides its own lawful limits in order to distinguish responsible interpretations from wild interpretations or over-interpretations.

As Culler argues, 'the more a story [of reading] stresses the reader's freedom, control, and constitutive activity, the more likely it is to lead to stories of dramatic encounters and surprises which portray reading as a process of discovery' (1982: 72). This raises the question of the what-is-'in'-the-text which a reader is faced with; the theorists' answers range from positing 'a plenitude' beyond the reader's grasp, to 'a determinate structure with some gaps that the reader must fill in', to 'a set of indeterminate marks on which the reader confers structure and meaning' (1982: 73). Such positions can all be found in Fish's work, hence his contention that the reader is ultimately a product of the strategies of an 'interpretive community', viz. is constituted as reader by the mental operation this community makes available.

In what follows I am relying on Tyson's (1999: 157-73) classification of reader-response criticism, with her proviso (1999: 157) that, though such an attempt is motivated by didactic purposes, it is, like all other classifications, rather artificial, reductive and possibly misleading: it is quite likely to find more substantial similarities between representatives of

different types of reader-response criticism than among those within the same type, on the other hand, and to tuck together theorists/practitioners who hold a rather different view of their own work, on the other.

According to Tyson (1999: 157), reader-response criticism may be loosely organized under five headings: transactional reader-response theory, affective stylistics, subjective reader-response theory, psychological reader-response theory and social reader-response theory.

1. *Transactional reader-response theory*

The notion of a 'transactional' theory was introduced by Louise Rosenblatt, yet this type of reader-response theory is also associated with the work of Wolfgang Iser, though the label usually associated with his name is *phenomenological*, rather than 'transactional' reader-response, criticism.

Rosenblatt's influential *Literature as Exploration* (1938) argues that the act of reading literature involves a '*transaction*' (interaction) between the reader, the writer and the text, where each transaction is in fact a unique experience. Her theory of reading as transaction is further elaborated in 'Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading' (1969) and *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978). In this third study, Rosenblatt distinguishes between three critical notions: '*reader*', '*text*' (viz. the printed artefact) and '*poem*' (viz. the literary work resulting from the transaction between the reader and the text).

She contends that during reading the reader responds to the text-as-*stimulus* in a personal way (involving feelings, associations and memories), yet it is the text that ultimately provides a *blueprint* for ulterior self-corrections. For this type of transaction to occur, however, the approach should not be efferent but aesthetic. A *reading* in the *efferent mode* focuses solely on the informational dimension of the text, whereas one in the *aesthetic mode* makes the reader experience a personal relationship to the text, focusing on the *emotional subtleties of language* and *inviting the reader to make judgements*.

By turning literature itself into a mode of reflection, Wolfgang Iser has contributed to the literary theory and also to literary anthropology a theory of reception whose *Wirkungsästhetik* ('aesthetics of effect') conceives of the literary text as a structure that 'elicits aesthetic responses in its reader *by opening up her/his habitual worldview*' (Van Inschoot 2005; my emphasis). Iser rethinks 'literary fiction in terms of *fictionalizing acts* that transgress what is real and engage it in interplay with the imaginary' (ibid.): in *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (1989) and *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre. Perspektiven literarischer Anthropologie* (1991) / *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (1003), literature is 'recast as a medium that makes it possible to act out the very groundlessness of our anthropological condition and virtually explore what is otherwise inaccessible' (Van Inschoot 2005).

This allows Iser to extend his theory into the realm of intercultural translatability and up to the 'range of interpretation' by means of which humans arrange their world (*The Range of Interpretation*, 2000).

Drawing as it does on the phenomenological work of Roman Ingarden, Iser's theory of reading in *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1976) / *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978) redefines the critic's task as explaining the effects of a text on the reader. As Iser aptly notes, previous concerns with either the *author's intention* or *the text's meaning* have rendered literary criticism and theory oblivious to the fact that *the text can only have a meaning when it is read.* However, the phenomenological theory of art (e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*) has already drawn attention that central to the study of a literary work should be the interaction between its structure and its recipient, viz. the actions involved in responding to that text.

Thus, Iser construes the text as a potential structure which is '*concretized*' by the reader in relation to his/her extra-literary norms and values but also past experience, which collectively make up the reader's 'world-view'. In Iser's terminological system, Rosenblatt's 'efferent mode' corresponds to a reading dependent on the *determinate meaning*, viz. the clearly stated facts of the plot, while her 'aesthetic mode' is cognate with both the determinate and the indeterminate meaning. Iser's *indeterminate meaning*, or *indeterminacy*, designates the gaps in the text (e.g. either actions that are not clearly explained or those seemingly having multiple meanings) that invite the reader's own interpretation.

Iser identifies the reader's '*presence* [sic!] in the text' as the '*wandering viewpoint*', viz. the 'point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a *continual modification* of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation' (Iser 1978: 118; my emphasis). These processes provide perspectives, or 'backgrounds', whose interaction 'provokes the reader into a synthetizing activity' (119): it is her/his prerogative to 'decide which differences shall be significant in… the establishment of equivalences' that have the character of 'configurative meaning[s]' (ibid.). In other words, it falls with the reader to convincingly argue what may count as indeterminacy in a certain text.

The 'wandering viewpoint divides the text up into interacting structures, and these give rise to a grouping activity that is fundamental to the grasping of a text' (Iser 1978: 119). Iser names the product of this interaction between text and reader '*consistent interpretation*' or '*gestalt*' (ibid.), and specifies that the reader's role is to identify the connection between the signs. He argues that while the '*autocorrection*' will prevent the reader from projecting an arbitrary meaning on the text, at the same time 'the gestalt can only be formed as an identified equivalence through the hermeneutic schema of anticipation and fulfilment in relation to the connections perceived between the signs' (Iser 1978: 120).

Like Rosenblatt, then, Iser believes that the text does guide the reader through the process of interpretation, viz. the reading activities of meaning construction are 'prestructured' by the text: the text may allow a certain range of interpretations, but it authorizes some more than others. In fact, Iser oscillates with respect to the relative weight allotted to the text's *determinacy* (viz. its power to set the terms on which it is read by creating its own 'implied' reader) and to the 'actual' reader's experience of the text's '*concretization*', but he is usually credited for emphasizing the latter.

During reading, the interplay between determinate and indeterminate meaning experienced by the reader can lead to a number of ongoing experiences, from *retrospection* and *revision* to *anticipation* and its *fulfilment* or *disappointment*, mainly due to the fact that as the reading progresses, what originally appeared to be a determinate meaning can be no longer ascertained as such, but rather will be viewed as an indeterminate meaning. Iser accounts for this in terms of the *selections* made by the reader: in reading, 'an overflow of possibilities' is produced, that remain virtual (as opposed to actual). From their virtual presence arise the 'alien associations' (1978: 126) that accumulate and challenge the formulated gestalten to the point of undermining them, thus bringing about a reorientation of the reader's acts of apprehension: it is where the reader sees characters or events 'in another light'.

However, Iser contends, this process also 'lends itself to being manipulated by textual strategies', devised in such a way that the range of virtual strategies 'will be eclipsed during the processing of the text' (1978: 127) – and the text assumes a didactic tone. Nonetheless, if the strategies are organized so that they increase the pressure exerted by alien associations, then the 'original implications of the signs themselves become the objects of critical attention' (ibid.) – hence the reader's 'illusion of having lived another life', in Henry James' description of narrative prose (qtd. in ibid.), or of an 'involvement' (of course, only a virtual projection) in the text.

Iser spells out the reader's involvement as productive of a 'specific form of tension that leaves him [sic] suspended… between total entanglement and latent detachment', whose outcome is the reader-produced *dialectic between illusion-forming and illusion-breaking* (ibid.): in more mundane terms, 'the reader experiences the text as a living event' to which s/he relates as both participant and observer (128).

In the process of reading, the reader's previous experiences will be restructured in accordance with the new experience being acquired; the process will moreover reveal its very workings, by providing the reader insights into the formation of both the aesthetic experience and its constitution:

> The ability to perceive oneself during the process of participation is an essential quality of aesthetic experience; the observer finds himself in a strange, halfway position: he is involved, and he watches himself being

involved. However, this position is not entirely nonprogrammatic, for it can only come about when existing codes are transcended or invalidated.

<div align="right">(Iser 1978: 134)</div>

2. *Subjective reader-response theory*

In contrast to the claims of transactional reader-response theorists, David Bleich and his followers contend that 'readers' responses *are* the text', both in the sense that 'there is no literary text beyond the meanings created by readers' interpretations' and in the sense that 'the text the critic analyzes is not the literary work but the written responses of readers' (Tyson 1999: 163). Bleich's contention comes from his notion that, though the text is, in its manuscript or printed form, a *real object*, the experience of reading it renders the text a *symbolic object*, viz. one that occurs in the conceptual (or mental) world rather than in the physical one. The reader's subjective reaction to the text[79] is thus called *symbolization*; however, when a reader interprets the text's meaning, s/he actually interprets the meaning of her/his own symbolization, hence a *resymbolization* occurs as a desire for explanation. The outcome is the production of knowledge about the experience of reading. Bleich's name of his approach, 'subjective criticism' (as it appears in the very titles of his 1975 and 1978 studies), rests on the belief that all knowledge is subjective: what is deemed 'objective' knowledge is actually comprised of whatever a community conventionally holds as objectively true, e.g. the propositions of the discourse of science at any given moment. Hence, Bleich's method focuses on how the truth of interpretation is constructed in a given community, viz. the 'subjective classroom', by a two-step technique:

1. the students write a *response statement* (in response to a given literary text), which can be:
   a. *reader-oriented*: focusing on one's memories, personal experiences, yet not specifically as they are triggered by aspects of the text;
   b. *reality-oriented*: focusing on one's opinions about political, social, religious issues, etc. raised by the text, but with little or no explicit reference to aspects of the text;
   c. *experience-oriented*: discussing the reader's reactions to and judgements of specific passages in the text; the reader's personal associations embedded in such judgements permit the other readers in the group to see what aspects of the text have affected that reader, how and why, and trigger group discussion within a context determined by the group.
2. the students write a *response-analysis statement* that analyzes their own response statement (in step one), viz. it entails a self-scrutiny by the reader as reader, where the reader

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[79] Robert J. Graham has traced the roots of Bleich's approach to the work of the psychoanalytic critic Norman N. Holland.

a. characterizes her/his response to the text as a whole (e.g. enjoyment, satisfaction, discomfort, disappointment, etc., involving various emotions, e.g. joy, fear, anger, etc.),

b. identifies the various responses triggered by different elements of the text, and

c. determines why these responses occurred.

Bleich's experiments have revealed that students' responses to a text (encompassing both a meaning statement and a response statement), when elicited by the requirements of a traditional 'objective' essay, still produce statements rooted in their personal responses. He has thus concluded that the sources of interpretation in traditional objective criticism lie in the readers'/critics' personal responses evoked by the text, even though they are couched in impersonal metalanguage. Such an approach benefits the beginning practitioners of literary studies by sensitizing them to the variability of people's perceptions and to an examination of taste, as well as to how the experience of pleasure or displeasure during the reading experience can be put to good analytic use for informing their understanding of literature and of sense-making.

3. *Psychological reader-response theory*

Psychoanalytic critic Norman Holland argues that the reader's interpretation of a text is revealing about her-/himself rather than about the text, in that the former only projects upon the latter one's *identity theme*. Simply put, during the act of reading the reader unconsciously re-creates in the text her/his psychic world, since the same psychological responses triggered off by events in ordinary lives also underpin one's defensive reaction to a particular literary text. As said by Holland, what interpretation entails, then, is precisely coping psychologically with the literary text once a hint at unconscious or forbidden desires, painful (and repressed) past memories has been perceived in it. Restoring one's psychological equilibrium can be brought about, for instance, by minimizing the harm a character experiences or by faulting the innocent character. Furthermore, Holland contends, the reader remains unaware of her/his essentially psychological interpretation of the text, for s/he disguises it unconsciously out of a sense of guilt or anxiety: this dissimulation takes on the appearance of intellectual, aesthetic or moral abstraction as the outward, socially sanctioned, response to that literary text. Holland's view of interpretation involves three *modes* (or stages) that recur as reading proceeds:

1. In the 'defense mode', the text raises the reader's psychological defences, which are anxiety-producing.

2. In the 'fantasy mode', the reader finds a way to interpret the text so as to defuse the defences and thereby to restore her/his need for protection (conducive to psychological equilibrium).

3. In the 'transformation mode', the reader transforms the first two stages into an abstract interpretation, an expedient way to avoid the emotional response to the text.

Holland believes that such an analysis results in an understanding of the author's identity theme and thus engenders the reader's empathic merger with the author, an experience of the 'mingling of self and other' (qtd. in Tyson 1999: 171).

4. *Affective stylistics*

As pioneered by Stanley Fish in his early work, especially 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics' (1970), affective stylistics furthers the transactional theorists' claim that the literary text is an event, by stressing that it occurs in time, viz. it comes into being during reading, rather than existing in space as an objective, autonomous entity. Ultimately, Fish claims that what a text means is the experience that it produces in the reader, as he will reiterate later in his career (1980: 32).

Though the main thrust of this approach is affective, i.e. it examines '*how* (stylistics) [the text] *affects* (affective) the reader in the process of reading', it achieves its goal through a 'cognitive analysis of the mental processes produced by specific elements in the text' (Tyson 1999: 160) during the process of close reading. Tyson (1999: 160-62) uses Fish's example in 'Literature in the Reader' in order to provide a step-by-step account of the methodology of affective stylistics:

a. a *close reading* of the text focuses on how the text affects the reader (rather than inquiring directly what the text's meaning is) and thus how it leads to meaning-making; the reader's expectations of a particular sentence or part of it narrow the possible meanings of the next, but may be continually frustrated, thus increasing uncertainty as the reading progresses; this process should yield an analysis of the *pattern* of raising/disappointing expectations which ultimately describes the very experience of reading rather than a singular text;

b. it is habitual to adduce examples of other readers' (usually critics') responses to the text, so as to problematize a general reading assumption, viz. that the goal of reading is to reach the stage of certainty about the meaning of texts;

c. the text itself is summoned to provide thematic evidence for the fact that any text ultimately encodes the experience of reading as its 'meaning', e.g. the reader's experience of uncertainty is mirrored in the text in dark settings or in a character's failed experiences of interpretation.

5. *Social reader-response theory*

Like his early affective stylistics, Stanley Fish's social reader-response theory challenges the formalist belief of the American New Critics that the text alone is the basic, knowable, neutral and unchanging component of

literary experience. Nonetheless, arguing for the right of the reader to interpret and in effect create the literary work may fall back into the trap of proliferating subjective interpretations (as encouraged by the liberal humanist reading tradition) that New Criticism fought to terminate. To avoid any such presumption, Fish posits that even though each reader essentially participates in the making of the literary text, s/he approaches the literary work not as an isolated individual but in her/his capacity as a member of a community of readers, viz. an 'interpretive community', so much so that it is the latter rather than the former the one that ultimately produces meanings.

The term 'interpretive communities' was coined by Fish in the essay 'Interpreting the *Variorum*' (1976), which explores how meanings are actualized in the process of reading from the interaction between two separate entities: the *text* and the *reader*'s expectations, projections, conclusions, judgements and assumptions. In his introduction to *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980), Fish revises his early view of the division between subject (reader) and object (text), and reverses the polarity of the exertion of control (earlier, by the text over the reader), arguing instead that it is the *reader* who *makes the text* with the aid of '*interpretive strategies*' shared among the members of an '*interpretive community*' wherein the reading takes place.

Thus, while the interpretation of a text may depend on each reader's own *subjective* experience in one or more communities (each of which is defined as a 'community' by a distinct epistemology), relativism and subjectivism are, however, precluded by the reader's deployment of her/his interpretive community's interpretive strategies, which ensure the know-how.

> Skilled reading is usually thought to be a matter of discerning what is there, but… it is a matter of knowing how to *produce* what can thereafter be said to be there. Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them.
>
> (Fish 1980: 327; his emphasis)

By way of consequence, as members of the same community, the interpreters constitute, more or less in agreement, the same text, although the sameness would be attributable solely to the communal nature of the interpretive act:

> the fact of agreement, rather than being a proof of the stability of objects, is a testimony to the power of an interpretive community to constitute the objects upon which its members (also and simultaneously constituted) can then agree.
>
> (Fish 1980: 338)

One of Fish's examples (1980: 306) will hopefully demonstrate what he means. The practices and assumptions of an institution, such as a college,

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constrain the interpretive activities of those working there, professors and students alike, thereby making them produce utterances, statements, interpretations, etc. consonant with each other's because they are already organized with reference to certain assumed purposes and goals of the institution, their interpretive community, rather than by virtue of the rules and fixed meanings of the language system.

> [C]ommunication occurs within situations and… to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place; and it is within the assumption of these purposes and goals that any utterance is immediately heard.
>
> (Fish 1980: 531)

However, Fish does not dismiss the language system as irrelevant: on the contrary, it bears upon the very notion that even if a certain sentence, e.g. 'Is there a text in this class?', does not have a determinate meaning (viz. a stable meaning irrespective of the change of situations), its meaning might still be imagined as capable, in the course of time, of being clarified, by virtue of the *social* possibilities and norms already encoded in the language.

> [M]eanings come already calculated, not because of norms embedded in the language but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social; and therefore it is not a single structure with a privileged relationship to the process of communication as it occurs in any situation but a structure that changes when one situation, with its assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals, has given way to another.
>
> (Fish 1980: 531)

It has been objected (Miall 2005) that Fish's theory cannot account for the initial emergence of resistant or heterodox readings within a community, or for how changing membership to a new interpretive community and learning to interpret texts anew might produce new interpretive modes that either co-occur with or replace older ones. Likewise, Fish's deterministic account appears to 'strip agency from both the reader/interpreter and the writer/text, and… denies the transformative efficacy of what happens *between* reader and text or between interpretive communities or modes'.

B. **Major representatives**
   Louise Michelle Rosenblatt (1904-2005): American literary critic.
   Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007): German literary scholar whose reader-response theory began to evolve in 1967, while he was working in the University of Konstanz. Together with Hans Robert Jauss, he is considered to be the founder of the 'Constance School' of reception aesthetics ('Rezepzionsästhetik'). *Der implizite Leser.*

Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett (1972) / *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1974) elaborates the notion of an implied reader that he also deploys in *The Act of Reading* (1978).

Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997): German academic, notable for his work in reception theory as well as in medieval and modern French literature. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) introduces his famous notion of *Erwartungshorizont* ('horizon of expectations'), which defines an area of collective assumptions, genre conventions and cultural ideologies shared by texts and readers: various textual strategies (e.g. overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions) 'awaken memories of the familiar, stir particular emotions in the reader' and with the beginning provided 'arouse expectations for the "middle and end"' (Jauss, qtd. in Holden 2003). By evoking for the reader elements and rules familiar from earlier texts, the text thus predisposes her/him to a very definite type of reception, viz. it engenders a horizon of expectations. As reading proceeds, the expectations aroused at the beginning relative to how the text will proceed and end 'can be continued intact, changed, re-oriented or even ironically fulfilled… according to certain rules of the genre or type of text', viz. both expectations and the generic rules can subsequently be 'varied, corrected, changed or just reproduced' (ibid.). In other words, variation and correction determine the scope, alteration and reproduction of the borders and structure of the genre. However, when the text seems to call up no horizon of expectations, as it happens in the case of your first encounter with a text belonging to an unfamiliar genre or with a modernist text that disrupts tradition in a radical way, you will feel that text an 'opaque reality'.

Jauss proposes that the study of a text should involve a 'reconstruction of the horizon of expectations on the basis of which a work in the past was created and received' by its original audience. The modern reader can thus 'find the questions to which the text originally answered and thereby to discover how the reader of that day viewed and understood the work' (ibid.). Jauss proposes this approach so as to illuminate the hermeneutic difference between past and present ways of understanding a work, viz. the history of its reception, which will thereby 'challenge as patronizing dogma' the notion that a literary work has 'objective meaning, determined once and or all and directly open to the interpreter at any time' (ibid.).

In Cornis-Pope and Woodlief's (*c*. 1993) concise formulation, in retracing the work's horizon of expectation, reading can tease out the socio-cultural contexts activated by a work and participate in their reformulation. Similarly, by identifying her/his own expectations, a

reader can begin to understand the assumptions, experiences, preconceptions that s/he brings to the process of reading.

Norman Holland (1927–): American literary critic and theorist.
Stanley Fish (1938–). American literary theorist best known for his theory of 'interpretive communities'.
Umberto Eco (1932–). Italian medievalist, semiotician, philosopher, literary critic and novelist, whose literary theory has changed focus over time. Initially, Eco was one of the pioneers of reader response: in proposing the notion of the 'open work' (*Opera aperta*, 1962) he argues that most literary texts are to be understood as open, internally dynamic and psychologically engaged fields (rather than strings) of meaning. Eco has extended the axis of meaning from the continually deferred meanings of words in an utterance to a play between expectation and fulfilment of meaning. However, confronted with 'the cancer of uncontrolled interpretation' and vulgarized deconstruction, he has defended the rights of texts (the *intentio operis*) in *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, 1990 (*The Limits of Interpretation*, 1990). The English edition *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (1979) collates essays from *Opera aperta*, *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), *Forme del contenuto* (1971), *Il Superuomo di massa* (1976), *Lector in fabula* (1979) and *I limiti dell'interpretazione*.

C. **Key terms**
- **Horizon of expectations** (Jauss): the collective assumptions, genre conventions and cultural ideologies shared by texts and readers during reading, which guide the reader during the process of reading/interpretation and can be continued intact or altered (adapted).
- **Interpretive community** (Fish): the community in which one lives, works, etc., which socially conditions the individuals' knowledge and thinking, thereby furnishing them a set of presuppositions which ground and constrain, viz. impose cultural and social limits on, any interpretation they undertake so as to ensure its conformity within the community. Such interpretive communities are purely conventional, viz. they are constructions created by human consensus, not reflections of some transcendental reality.
- **Interpretive strategies** (Fish): the shared property of an interpretive community, which at once enable and limit the operations of each member's consciousness and interpretive work.
- **Indeterminate meaning** or **indeterminacy** (Iser): the gaps in the text (e.g. either actions that are not clearly explained or those seemingly having multiple meanings) that invite the reader's own interpretation in the process of meaning formation.

- **Determinate meaning** (Iser): the reading dependent on clearly stated facts of the plot, etc., though as reading proceeds determinacies may be reappraised as indeterminacies.

D. **Application**

Here is how Tyson (1999: 175-6) summarizes applying reader-response criticism to texts:

1. An approach informed by the transactional reader-response theory will focus on how the *interaction of text and reader creates meaning*, by looking at how the text's indeterminacy functions as a stimulus to interpretation:
   - work out what events/descriptions are unexplained, incomplete or omitted;
   - identify what images might have multiple associations;
   - explain how the text leads you to correct your interpretation as you read.

2. A subjective reader-response approach will presuppose conducting your own study using a group of real readers, e.g. your classmates, to learn about the reading activity: the role of reader's interpretive strategies or expectations, the reading experience produced by a particular text.

3. Psychological reader-response theory: identify the author's identity theme by drawing on a broad spectrum of thoroughly documented biographical data, and investigate how that theme expresses itself in the sum of the author's literary output. This is a rather daunting task, preferably engaged with only in a broad scope paper, e.g. a BA dissertation.

4. Affective stylistics resorts to the close reading of a short text or of key passages of a long one to investigate how the reading experience is prestructured by the text, and how it differs from what the text 'says' or 'means'.

5. A social or psychological reader-response approach will draw on the body of criticism published about a literary text
   - to study what it suggests about the critics who interpreted the text and/or about the reading experience produced by it;
   - to contrast critical camps writings during the same period, during different periods, or both.

   This activity should attempt to suggest answers to the question of how the text is created by
   - the readers' interpretive strategies,
   - the readers' psychological projections,
   - the readers' ideological projections.

A thought-provoking set of suggestions for practising reader-response criticism is available from the Virginia Commonwealth University course in Critical Reading and Writing, 'On the Reading Process: Notes on Critical

Literary   Philosophy   and   Pedagogical   Practice'
(<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/home/theory.html>), developed by Professors
Marcel Cornis-Pope and Ann Woodlief (*c*. 1993). The course envisions its
readerly engagement as an offshoot of reader-response theory grafted with
post-structuralism, new historicism, semiotics and feminism, and aims to
help students develop their own voices and interpretations. A three-phase
reading protocol is suggested:

1. the *pre-reading phase* should define the reader's horizon of expectations
by investigating:

- the reader's assumptions about the text: familiarity with the author's
  other works, with the contemporary rules of genre, theme, character
  creation, etc.;
- the reader's feelings about the reading ahead of her/him, relative to
  the social context of reading and personal reading skills;

2. the *first reading* is meant to disrupt the usual linear progress of reading
and to foster a critical awareness about the various operations performed
during reading as the reader tries to make sense of a literary text; these goals
are achieved by identifying:

- details of plot or character that are emphasized in the text or that
  strike you as significant;
- narrative sequences, their role in foreshadowing and building
  thematic coherence;
- words or clusters of images that stick in your memory, and your
  immediate response to these textual sequences;
- associations, connections, fantasies triggered by the text's situations;
  specific insights they offer about text and reader;
- 'gaps', contradictions, unresolved questions in the story's plot,
  characterization or overall structure;
- what seems to carry forward the flow of reading, or, on the contrary,
  obstruct it;
- narratorial voices, their authority and trustworthiness;
- expectations upon opening this story and how these are
  fulfilled/thwarted by the text;
- your overall reactions to the story, aspects you found challenging or
  hard to accept.

3. the *re-reading phase* is more self-conscious, explorative, reformulative in
bent than the first reading; it closely examines the 'presentational aspect'
(rhetoric, literary strategies, cultural implications) in the text and its effects
on readers. At this stage you will retrace and analyze your first reading
responses, relating them back to the text's generic and cultural features, but
also to the assumptions, biases and experiences that you bring to the text.
Here is an example of a second-reading questionnaire developed by Cornis-
Pope and Woodlief (*c*. 1993):

- how did the story's general purport and orientation change after second reading?
- what aspects of the story have you 'misremembered' (viz. adapted) to conform to your first reading?
- what possibilities of the text have you ignored (viz. not accounted for) during earlier reading?
- what 'mysteries' or 'gaps' in the narrative have you tried to settle and how successfully?
- what aspects in the story are still unresolved, what questions unanswered?
- who did you identify with during first reading, and how did this identification affect your understanding of the story?
- have your generic or thematic expectations about the story changed?
- is the story more or less satisfying after second reading, and why?
- as you begin to sort out the textual 'evidence' in support of an interpretation of the story, which details do you find useful, and which seem difficult to resolve with your interpretation?
- has this approach to reading given you more confidence in your judgements and helped you understand the intricate details of the text better?

As Cornis-Pope and Woodlief (*c*. 1993) note, while 'ideally the reader should pursue an uninterrupted interpretative process, with an active, transformative rereading already implied in first reading…, in common practice, or in some of the current psychological and semiotic theories of interpretation, first and second reading are perceived as separate, even conflicting'. Whereas 'first reading depends primarily on the expectation of pleasure (of a vicarious or hermeneutic kind)', rereading draws on 'critical (self)awareness…, refocus[ing] the reader's attention on the work as an elaborate structure of discourse, on the text's rhetoric and ideology usually missed in first reading'. Enjoyment in rereading 'involves the *transformation of experiential pleasure* into the *analogical pleasure of intellectual experiencing* which connects the reader to the broader contexts of his culture (Northrop Frye)' (Cornis-Pope and Woodlief *c*. 1993; my emphasis).

E. **Outcome**
It has been noticed approvingly that reader-response criticism is best qualified to help students of literature make sense of their own response to literary texts and, for those intent on teaching literature, it offers valuable ideas for classroom work. Broadly speaking, students grow aware of their own reading processes and how these relate not only to specific elements in the text – as it happens with other approaches – but also to their personal life experiences and likewise to the intellectual community or communities (Fish's 'interpretive community') they belong to. Furthermore, reader response criticism may arguably enhance the student's awareness that

reading is a purposive activity: merely changing its purpose will radically alter the text under scrutiny.

Cornis-Pope and Woodlief (*c*. 1993) identify several pedagogical implications of applying reader-oriented theory and the reading/rereading process in actual classes: the students learn to explore 'leading questions related to each genre/work in order to think critically about a text'; an *excessively subjective* bias is countered by undertaking the interpretive task collectively and comparatively, which fosters the students' gradual understanding of 'the strengths and weaknesses of their individual readings, when challenged by other readings and responses to their own reading', and so helps them 'learn to develop stronger and more persuasive interpretations'. Accordingly, the teacher's role is 'more of a coach and collegial reader than the authoritative establisher of interpretation': s/he is to participate 'as a more knowledgeable rereader but still another reader in the class whose interpretation should be comparatively muted' (Cornis-Pope and Woodlief *c*. 1993).

The Approach through Socio-Cultural Context

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

The approach through socio-cultural and historical context includes three major schools of literary criticism: Marxism, new historicism, and cultural materialism. This type of analysis does not have its origin in Marx, but rather in the historical criticism of the nineteenth century, best represented by Hippolyte Taine; another source would be Hegel, Marx himself being influenced by Hegel's dialectical model. Marxist approaches to literature attempt to provide an understanding of the text as a complex reworking of socially marked discourses, and for both new historicists and cultural materialists the text is the site where cultural meanings become accessible to the reader.

New historicism and cultural materialism, like Marxism before, are concerned with understanding texts in a social and historical context: in Pope's (2002: 105) succinct description, they grasp language functionally, viz. for what it does, not what it is, and treat literature as a problematic, even suspect, category, given its allegedly natural and universal claims (which actually mask its privileging of clearly positioned, often elitist, views of society). All three focus, with different emphases and explicit aims, on broadly cultural and specifically political issues, by treating culture as an arena of conflict as well as consensus, wherein access (or its denial) to certain modes of communication is of paramount importance.

Pope (2002: 106) classifies Marxist informed approaches to literary texts into three distinct but interrelated categories:
1. 'socialist realism', primarily associated with Georg Lukács (1885-1971);
2. 'socialist post/modernism', primarily associated with Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956);
3. 'democratic multiculturalism', primarily associated with new historicism and cultural materialism, and distinguished by its attention to cultural differences and power.

Traditional ('old') Marxist approaches to literature and culture tend to elaborate on the 19th-century political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, thus focusing on modes of literary/cultural production and distribution (viz. technologies and social relations, e.g. publishing, releasing, advertising cultural goods, etc.), relations between the economic base and ideological superstructure (viz. the reciprocal influences between economic organizations of labour and institutions, e.g. the state, the law, the media, education, hence relations between poverty and illiteracy, control of the media and access to political power), and the interplay of power, powerlessness and empowerment that transpires in cultural goods. Recently, neo-Marxist critics (e.g. Fredric Jameson in the US) have moved more into

studying the politics of power relations in texts at the expense of the old Marxist interest in modes of production.

1. New Historicism

A. Brief history

New historicism emerged in the US in the late 1970s; its name was coined by Stephen Greenblatt[80] to suggest the cultural stakes of this new critical approach, viz. that it was an *orientation* in Renaissance studies developed *in response to* what its pioneer practitioners perceived as the shortcomings of a certain application of historical studies, henceforward known as 'old historicism'. The latter label is *now* applied to traditional studies of the historical and socio-cultural background to a certain literary work (or any work of art) and its author, which purport to reveal the one-way influence of the historical context on the work under scrutiny: literature is analyzed either as reflecting topical events or as embodying the worldview of its contemporary culture.[81] 'Old historicism' dominated literary scholarship up until the 1940s; after World War II, it was successfully replaced by the *now* so-called 'New Criticism', the American counterpart to Russian formalism, which fostered a concern with the means by which the work of art ensured its autonomy: in the case of literary studies, this can be revealed in the process of a close reading that detaches the text from its historical and socio-cultural context. However, in the aftermath of political developments in the 1960s and the emergence of poststructuralist thought, New Criticism's tendency to treat works of literature in a historical vacuum did no longer appeal to some American scholars, who were now interested in a 'return to history' as well as a leaning on anthropology, politics and economics, in literary studies for a better understanding of how literature and society influence each other. By the early 1980s Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher and Louis Montrose published articles that challenged and problematized the then current view not only of history but also of fictional texts and their interdisciplinary study. Simply stated, new historicists propose the notion that literature is one discourse or system of representation – hence also the title chosen for their journal,

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[80] Quite in line with the anecdotal strain of the method itself, the name was coined by Greenblatt as an *aside* in his introduction to a special issue of *Genre* in 1982.

[81] Given the interest of new historicists in Renaissance studies, two cases in point are Ernest Peter Kuhl's *Studies in Chaucer and Shakespeare* (1971, Festschrift edition by Elizabeth Kuhl Belting) and E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943); the latter describes the set of conservative mental attitudes to society and the universe alike that the 20th-century scholar saw as encapsulating the Elizabethan outlook as 'reflected' in Shakespeare's dramaturgy.

Representations[82] – that co-exists and has dynamic exchanges with many others in a given culture at any historical moment, rather than subscribing to the early proposition of literature as a reflection of society.

The importance new historicism attaches to representation derives from the combined impact of contemporary theoretical insights on its practitioners: poststructuralism has been a major influence, from Foucault's analysis of 'power/knowledge' to Derrida's deconstruction of language and philosophical discourse. Equally important has been the application of the technique of 'thick description' initiated by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (*Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973) in conjunction with an interest in retrieving the marginals' *petites histoires* (cf. Lyotard's *petits récits*) as pioneered by the French historians affiliated with the *Annales* school. This interest in the marginals is also shared in common with feminist studies, and benefits from the psychoanalytic theorization of repression and the unconscious. Furthermore, it should be noted that new historicism is as much a reaction against Marxism as a continuation of it, or rather of the edgy Marxism of the Frankfurt School, especially of Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno: according to Catherine Gallagher, good criticism embodies no necessary politics, but is constitutively driven by fierce debate and contest (Veeser 1989: xi). The overall result has been a new awareness of the archival policies of historiography, from fact recording to the historian's ulterior interpretation. Hence the new historical claim that all histories are but subjective interpretation of the data available to the historian only in textual, narrativized form, e.g. policies, procedures, events, attitudes recorded in texts underpinned by or that appear to resist the rhetoric of the discursive formation that produced them.

Stephen Greenblatt's studies of English Renaissance, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988) and *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991), have laid out some of the theoretical bases of new historicism: he argues for a 'cultural poetics' whose goal is to study the social and cultural negotiations, transactions and exchanges that underlie the making of a literary work. His approach destabilizes the text by shifting the focus of

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[82] The journal *Representations*, founded by Catherine Gallagher, Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Benn Michaels and others, was meant from its inception to consolidate new historicism as a set of practices, themes, preoccupations and attitudes rather than as a doctrine – as Greenblatt emphasizes (1989: 1). Some of the major themes are the idea that autonomous self and text are mere effects produced by intersecting institutions, and moreover that they are defined by their relation to hostile others (e.g. Blacks, Indians, Jews) and disciplinary power (e.g. the king, religion, masculinity), or that a critique of worship of culture should not substitute its own grand narrative but rather 'perform a differential analysis of local conflicts engendered in individual authors and local discourses' (Veeser 1989: xiii).

interest on its neglected (*un*represented), *under*represented or *mis*represented margins, the locus of cultural interchange with contemporary discourses. Thus, Greenblatt grafts the Derridean interest in textual gaps and silences (the textual unconscious) on the Marxist one in the circumstances of the text's material production and interrelations sieved through Foucault's critique of discursive formations.

As Veeser (1989: xiii) argues, the approach Greenblatt advocates 'can make a valid claim to have established new ways of studying history and a new awareness of how history and culture define each other'. On the other hand, his new 'cultural poetics' has not been entirely unprecedented: the concerns of the English Wartburg-Courtauld Institute of Art may be said to have primed the studies of Stephen Orgel, Roy Strong and D. J. Gordon, whose concern is precisely with the connections between cultural codes and political power in Renaissance texts.

The new historical method of studying in parallel a canonical literary text and non-literary ones from the same period (its co-texts), without, in theory, privileging the former,[83] deconstructs the hierarchical opposition between history (traditionally conceived as factual) and literature (fictional). This professed commitment derives from its practitioners' combined interest in 'the textuality of history' and 'the historicity of text' (Montrose 1989: 23), and in its heyday earned them the reputation of leftist destroyers of the humanistic disciplines (Montrose 1989 *passim*; Veeser 1989: ix-x).[84] Typically, the new historicists juxtapose a literary text (originally Renaissance, later also Romantic or otherwise) with historical evidence that documents its contemporary discourse and practices, whose policy of 'the marginalization and dehumanizing of suppressed Others' (Grady, qtd. in Barry 1995: 173) can also be traced in the literary text. Often, this juxtaposition occurs from the very beginning: a historical document (previously of non-canonical importance, now accorded new interest) is used anecdotally to introduce the topic in an oblique, though striking, way, viz. by means of what appears to be lived experience. The literary text is thus closely read within an 'archival continuum' (Wilson and Dutton, qtd. in Barry 1995: 173) where the main emphasis is on *history as text*, not as

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[83] Greenblatt explicitly claims that the new historical method involves an intensified willingness to read *all* of the *textual traces of the past* with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts.

[84] While some critics suspect new historicism of virtually incapacitating the 'scholarly armature of proof and evidence', others on the left 'distrust the culturalism and textualism' that new historicism appears to nourish (Veeser 1989: x). Interestingly, Veeser's reader (1989) collects together papers by recognized practitioners of new historicism (e.g. Catherine Gallagher, Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Joel Fineman) alongside those by scholars who would locate themselves outside the group (e.g. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Hayden White, Stanley Fish, Frank Lentricchia).

irrecoverably lost 'events'. In fact, under the influence of deconstruction, new historicism claims that the past can only be known to us as thrice processed: (1) through *its* contemporary discursive practices (the ideology or worldview), (2) through *ours*, and (3) through the deflections and distortions engendered by language itself. Accordingly, a new historical reading of the past-as-text will re-situate it by means of interpretation.

In brief, for all its acknowledged heterogeneity, new historical analyses share some common assumptions, which I quote from Veeser (1989: xi):
1. every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. 'literary' and 'non-literary' texts circulate inseparably;
4. no discourse, imaginary or archival, gives access to unchanging truths, nor expresses inalterable human nature;
5. a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

B. **Major representatives**
Stephen Greenblatt (1943–): American Renaissance scholar, one of the founders of new historicism. Taking his clue from Foucault, Greenblatt, unlike cultural materialists, is sceptical of the subversive possibilities of literary texts: he argues that texts are ultimately used to reinforce power, since they are themselves situated within, not without, the purview of power. Major studies: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980); *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988); *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990); *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991); *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (1992); *Practicing New Historicism*, co-authored with Catherine Gallagher (2000); *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004).
Catherine Gallagher (1945–): American new historicist literary critic and Victorianist; major studies: *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-67* (1985); *Nobody's Story. The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (1994); *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (2005).
Louis Adrian Montrose: American Renaissance scholar; major studies: *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (1996); *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (2006).

Joel Fineman (1947-89): American Shakespearean scholar; major studies: *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (1986); *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition: Essays Toward the Release of Shakespeare's Will* (1991).

C. **Key terms**

- **Circulation** (Greenblatt): power (in Foucauldian terms) does not reside with institutions, e.g. the law, the police, etc., but rather follows a principle of circulation (cf. Derrida): 'the systematic organization of ordinary life and consciousness generates the pattern of boundary making and breaking' (Greenblatt 1989: 8). Accordingly, all levels of society share in the circulation of power through the production and distribution of the most elementary social and cultural 'texts', from money to knowledge to 'prestige' (cf. Bourdieu's 'cultural capital'), e.g. taste, masculinity, etc. The latter, subsumable as 'social assets', 'circulate as a form of material currency that tends to go unnoticed precisely because it cannot be crudely translated into liquid assets' (Veeser 1989: xiv).

- **Exchange**: the vehicle by which *power* (in Foucauldian terms) *circulates* to and from all social levels, at all times; what can be exchanged are (1) *material goods* (e.g. through the trade business of buying and selling or bartering, but also through taxation, charity, gambling, theft, etc.), (2) *people* (e.g. through the institutions of marriage, adoption, kidnapping, slavery, etc.) and (3) *ideas* (through various cultural discourses).

- **Negotiation** (Greenblatt): the *dynamic interchange* between a *creator* (or class of creators) equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions and the *social institutions and practices of society*, *whose product is the work of art*. In order to achieve the negotiation, artists need to create a *currency* (viz. the systematic adjustments, symbolizations and lines of credit) that is valid for a meaningful, mutually profitable *exchange*, which typically entails that the artist earns money and prestige (the society's dominant currencies), in exchange for enticing society's pleasure for and arousing its interest in the work of art and/or the artist.

- **Discourse** (in Foucauldian terms): a *social language* created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, which articulates a particular *worldview* (or understanding of human experience), e.g. the discourse of modern science, the discourses of various religions, the discourses of literary criticism (e.g. structuralist, feminist, etc.), etc. It can be used interchangeably with *ideology*, but, unlike the latter term, *discourse* draws attention to the role of language as a vehicle. Drawing as it does on various poststructuralist theories,

new historicism does not entertain the possibility of a totalizing explanatory discourse or of its permanence; on the contrary, it is committed to studying the dynamic interplay among discourses and how a discourse wields power for those in charge yet can also engender opposition.

- **Representation**: new historicism attempts to debunk the traditional notion that literary texts are autonomous aesthetic artefacts mimetic of reality (viz. they reflect reality mirror-like): new historicists contend, instead, that literary representation traditionally understood as mimesis is itself a social relation of production: it is connected to status hierarchies, resistances and conflicts elsewhere in the culture. Texts both represent (reveal) a society's behaviour patterns and perpetuate, shape, or alter that culture's dominant codes; thus, *representation is reflective as well as productive of power*. The task of the new historicist is, accordingly, to trace out the 'representational exchanges, encodings and refigurings of social energy and cultural imagery' – not reducible to the terms of economic determinism or referential reflection – that ensure the connections between historical realms (Ryan 1999: 130).
- **Textuality of history** (Montrose): a notion inspired by the works of Derrida, Foucault and Hayden White (who analyzes the rhetoric of historiography as 'narrative'), the *textuality of history* is posited as the correlative of the *historicity of texts* (viz. the cultural specificity and the social embedment of all modes of writing, including the explanatory ones). Montrose construes textuality at two levels: all that we can have access to from the lived material existence of the past is always already mediated by the surviving *textual traces* of that society; furthermore, those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the *documents* upon which historians ground their own texts, *histories*.
- **Con-text / co-text**: like cultural materialists, new historicists reject the New Critical precept that texts are autonomous units and argue that texts are always intimately connected to their historical and social context, especially the repressed contemporary co-texts documenting social history and its practices, mentality, etc., that have survived from the past.
- **Anecdote**: in a new historical analysis, a document (e.g. an official document, private paper, newspaper clippings, etc.) that is transferred from one discursive sphere to another to illuminate a certain aspect of social history and mentality also underlying the literary text it introduces, accompanies, and puts into perspective – hence its virtual status as 'the smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact' (Fineman 1989: 56). This spectacular feature of new historical reading practice, viz. tracing in seemingly trivial anecdotes the codes, beliefs and strategies that organize an entire society, comes from Greenblatt's Geertzian informed belief that every social action is embedded in a

system of public signification. However, Joel Fineman (1989) describes the anecdote as an event that is actually neither fiction nor history but incongruously privileged as being both: 'the anecdote, however literary, is nevertheless directly pointed towards or rooted in the real'. The anecdote, according to Fineman (1989: 61), 'produces an effect of the real': perceived as an 'occurrence of contingency' that punctures the teleological, timeless narration, the anecdote 'establish[es] an event as an event within it [the narration] and yet without the framing context of historical successivity'. In other words, the anecdote's narration both compromises and refracts the narration it reports: while anecdotes leave a *trace* of the real within historical texts, they themselves are *not* the real nor do they expose the real.

- **Self-positioning**: the new historicists' professed methodological self-consciousness that their interpretation of texts is unavoidably subjective and biased, both psychologically and ideologically. Thus, they attempt to sensitize their readers to the human lens through which history is represented (mediated), i.e. to demystify the traditional view of historical studies as objective, by stressing the 'partly unconscious and partly calculating negotiation of disciplinary, institutional, and societal demands and expectations' at work in the scholarly enterprise (Montrose 1989: 30). Montrose explicitly identifies this self-positioning as a personal '*investment*' in the subject of study: the scholar *chooses* to foreground, say, gender politics, the contestation of cultural constraints, etc., in her/his readings of canonical texts; this (political) *engagement*, Montrose argues, concerns not only a necessary and continuous *re-invention* of a past culture, but also its contribution to the *reformation* of the present.

- **Thick description** (anthropologist Clifford Geertz): a term adopted from philosopher Gilbert Ryle and originally applied by Geertz to describe his own ethnographic/ anthropological method (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973), *thick description* is now used in a variety of fields (from the social sciences to the French *Annales* school of the history of mentalities and to new historicism) to denote a *contextual* search for meanings. Unlike the merely descriptive *thin description*, *thick description* starts off by a close reading of a given cultural production pertaining to the personal side of history (e.g. ritual ceremonies and practices, games, penal codes, works of art) to discover the meanings it had for the members of the community and to reveal the social conventions, cultural codes and worldview (viz. discourses) that made it meaningful. The result is a history of family dynamics, of sexual practices, of child-rearing customs, etc. in replacement of the traditional history of outstanding (historic) events and figures.

- **Cultural poetics / poetics of culture** (Greenblatt): the name chosen by Greenblatt for his project to supersede his initial label 'new historicism'

(including in the naming of his classes); its specific perspective is given by an 'emphasis on a dynamic temporal model of culture and ideology' (Montrose 1989: 22-3).

D. **Application**

New historicism has evolved a method of describing culture in action which draws upon the works of Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner and other cultural anthropologists. Typically, in reading a literary texts new historicists bring to the forefront a 'minor' historical event, anecdotal in appearance (e.g. a marginal note in a manuscript, a dream recorded in a diary, etc.) and re-read it so as to reveal the behavioural codes, logics and motive forces controlling a whole society (Veeser 1989: xi) that also inform the literary text under scrutiny.

The new historicists' emphasis on the simultaneous historicization of literary texts and textualization of history entails a close reading of both types of texts. Some important steps in applying the new historicist method to literature, for which I am relying in great measure on Barry (1995: 179), are as follows:

1. *establish the corpus* for analysis: select a canonical literary text and its contemporary historical texts (often anecdotal and thus very personal in nature): you can identify the latter either in the library with the aid of Patterson's *Literary Research Guide* or on the Internet with the aid of a search engine after you have considered a dimension of the work that interests you; in effect, the deeper you get engrossed in research of co-texts, the more connections will become apparent;

2. *defamiliarize the literary text* by detaching it from any previous literary scholarship and embedding it in its contemporary historical co-texts: juxtapose the literary and non-literary texts for a close reading of the former in the light of the latter;

3. *identify how the literary text was shaped by culture and has shaped in turn collective fantasies*: bring poststructuralist theory to bear on your close reading (e.g. Derrida's notion of text and trace, Foucault's view of 'discursive practices', 'power/knowledge' and the construction of normative identity through the identification and marginalization or repression of 'deviancy'), so as to focus in both text and co-texts on issues of power relations (e.g. state power, patriarchal structures, the process of colonization or of identity construction) and how they are created and maintained through engendering a mindset.

E. **Outcome**

New historicism provides, from the outset, fascinating and more easily readable analyses than other approaches to literature often do. While its interpretations of texts can be challenged, this is in fact a built-in possibility of new historicism, given its poststructuralist twofold premise that there is

no one correct and accurately representable truth, and that each and every interpretation is subjective, because of the reader's situatedness. Unlike 'old' Marxism, new historicism is 'less overtly polemical and more willing to allow the historical evidence its own voice' (Barry 1995: 178), as well as maintaining a poststructuralist distance from the notion of definitive answers or solutions to the problems identified. From a totally different theoretical premise and by deploying different strategies and methods, new historicism, like reader-response criticism, is interested in the interpreter, only that it formulates its concern in terms of the text's embeddedness in and transactions with other cultural discourses rather than in terms of the reader's self-awareness during reading. Thus, the focus in new historicism is on how a particular event has been interpreted and what such interpretations reveal about the interpreters' cultural *formation*.

2. **Cultural Materialism**

A. **Brief history**

Cultural materialism can be described as 'a politicised form of historiography' (Graham Holderness, qtd. in Barry 1995: 182), viz. it studies historical documents (literature included) within a politicized framework that should highlight such texts' bearing on the shaping of the present too. Cultural materialism and new historicism share many assumptions in common: both are interdisciplinary or even anti-disciplinary approaches, view human history and culture as a complex arena of dynamic forces of which only a subjective and partial view can be constructed, and argue that selfhood develops in an exchange type of relationship with its cultural milieu (Tyson 1999: 292-3).

The term itself, though inspired by the work of Raymond Williams, gained currency only with the publication of *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), a collection of essays edited by British theorists Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. The term they have appropriated for their subtitle emphasizes the uncommon extent of the method (Dollimore and Sinfield 1994: vii-viii): in sound Marxist tradition, *materialism* stands as the opposite of 'idealism' in traditional criticism (e.g. the material forces and relations of production); its purview leaves no *form of culture* outside, whether previously deemed 'high' or 'low' (e.g. canonical art forms as well as popular culture), and 'includes work on the cultures of subordinate and marginalised groups' (e.g. schoolchildren and skinheads).

Dollimore and Sinfield define cultural materialism as a politically committed critical method that 'studies the implication of literary texts in history' (1994: viii) and focuses on four characteristics at once: historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis (1994: vii). Here is a more elaborate presentation of the four points:

1. *historical context*: the aim is to allow the literary text to 'recover its histories', viz. the contextual elements that habitually go unrepresented (e.g. state power and resistance to it), thus 'undermin[ing] the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text' (1994: vii); cultural materialism focuses more than new historicism on the relevance of history from the moment of the work's production all the way to its present-day reproduction and interpretation (e.g. the institutions through which, say, a Shakespearean play is now brought to the public, from theatrical companies and film producers to publishers and to curricula);
2. *theoretical method*: in the aftermath of structuralism and poststructuralism, cultural materialism breaks with the tradition of liberal humanism, faulted by Dollimore and Sinfield for being 'immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it [the work's ideology] in its own terms' (1994: vii);
3. *political commitment*: unlike new historicism, cultural materialism is more openly committed to highlighting the political dimension of texts, especially given its Marxist roots (as mediated through the work of Raymond Williams) and feminist commitments too;
4. *textual analysis*: 'locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored' (1994: vii); like new historicism, cultural materialism typically applies the close reading technique to canonical texts to debunk their allegedly timeless and apolitical stance as posited by traditional criticism of the liberal humanist or formalist sort.

Dollimore (Dollimore and Sinfield 1994: 2-3) identifies from the outset the theories that inform cultural materialism: from Raymond Williams' work and the 'convergence of history, sociology and English in cultural studies', to major developments in feminism as well as continental Marxist-structuralist and poststructuralist theory, especially Althusser, Macherey, Gramsci and Foucault. Combined, these theoretical affinities explain the cultural materialist interest in the operations of power as they surface in literary texts.

The differences between British cultural materialism and its American counterpart, new historicism, are worth noting, yet they should be understood in a didactic context rather than as uniform and predictable criteria. Resulting as they do, to a large degree, from the theorists' different intellectual frameworks, e.g. the new historicists' indebtedness to Foucault and Derrida, the differences between the two approaches are perhaps most obvious in their respective political outlook (Barry 1995: 185-6):
1. in Marxist tradition, cultural materialist critics tend to seek the interventions whereby people make their own history, whereas new historicists focus more on the circumstances of this process, viz. the power and ideological structures that restrain them – hence the political optimism of the former and the political pessimism of the latter;

2. cultural materialists often fault new historicists for accepting the sceptical strain of poststructuralism as regards the possibility of attaining secure knowledge, hence the impossibility of overt political implications of new historical criticism;

3. while new historicists tend to focus on the co-texts contemporary with the moment of the literary text's production, hence they situate the literary text in the political situation of its day, cultural materialists, by resorting to any historical co-text that has appeared ever since, situate it within that of ours: they cite programme notes for various theatrical productions of a certain Shakespearean play, quotations from it by ordinary people or outstanding figures in various circumstances, or pronouncements on education by a minister, etc.

B. **Major representatives**

   Jonathan Dollimore (1948–): British sociologist and social theorist in Renaissance literature as well as cultural theory, and gender and queer studies; major studies: *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, co-edited with Alan Sinfield (1985, 1994); *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (1984); *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991); *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (1998); *Sex, Literature, and Censorship* (2001).

   Alan Sinfield (1941–): British Shakespeare scholar and theorist in gender and queer studies, and cultural theory; major studies: *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992); *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (1994); *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (3rd ed. 2004); *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading* (2nd ed. 2004); *On Sexuality and Power* (2004); *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (2006).

   Catherine Belsey: one of Britain's foremost literary theorists and Renaissance scholars; major studies: *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985); *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (1988); *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994); *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden* (1999); *The Feminist Reader*, co-edited with Jane Moore (1989, 1997); *Critical Practice* (1980, 2002); *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (2002); *Culture and the Real* (2005).

C. **Key terms**

▪ **Hegemony** (Louis Althusser; a notion also shared with various historians of social sciences): the processes by which dominant culture maintains its dominant position, e.g. the use of institutions to formalize power and the employment of a bureaucracy to make power seem abstract; the ideals of the hegemonic group are inculcated in the

populace through education, advertising, publication, etc., or, in an overtly coercive manner, through the mobilization of police force to repress opposition.

- **Ideology** (Jonathan Dollimore): a notion that can be deployed in 'trac[ing] the cultural connections between signification and legitimation: the way that beliefs, practices and institutions legitimate the dominant social order or *status quo* – the existing relations of domination and subordination', e.g. 'the representation of sectional interests [white, middle-class, male] as universal ones'. Through *legitimation* the existing social order is *naturalized*, thus 'appearing to have the unalterable character of natural law' (Dollimore and Sinfield 1994: 6-7). Cultural materialism figures prominently three aspects of historical and cultural process: (1) *consolidation* ('the ideological means whereby a dominant order seeks to perpetuate itself'), (2) the *subversion* of the dominant order, and (3) 'the *containment* of ostensibly subversive pressures' (1994: 10). Dollimore takes up Greenblatt's working definition of (radical) subversiveness as 'not merely the attempt to seize existing authority, but as a challenge to the principles upon which authority is based', and elaborates on it by emphasizing the 'context of its articulation' (1994: 13).

- **Appropriation**: literally, 'making something one's own by taking or using it forcefully or without permission'. According to Dollimore, the power structure is made up of different, often competing elements which *produce culture* precisely *through appropriations*, viz. processes of '*making* or *transforming*'. In the case of subversion-containment, appropriation can work in either direction: although subversion may be appropriated by authority for its own purposes, 'once installed it can be used against authority as well as by it'; conversely, 'subordinate, dissident or marginal elements could appropriate dominant discourses and likewise transform them in the process' (Dollimore and Sinfield 1994: 12).

- **Culture**: a process (lived experience) rather than a product, it has been defined as a *collection of interactive cultures*, each of which is growing and changing, being constituted at any given moment in time by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, occupation, etc.; all these factors together contribute to the experiences of culture's members (Tyson 1999: 294).

- **Cultural work**: the ways in which all cultural productions shape human experience by transmitting or transforming ideologies, viz. their role in the circulation of power: e.g. the dominant class distinguishes between 'high' and 'low' culture so as to reinforce its own image of superiority and thus its own power (Tyson 1999: 293-4).

- **Structures of feeling** (Raymond Williams): 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt' (qtd. in Barry 1995: 184), characteristically found

in literature, and which often oppose both explicit systems of values or beliefs and the dominant (hegemonic) ideologies within a society.

D. **Application**

In what follows I am relying on the suggestions offered by Barry (1995: 187). Cultural materialist critics read a canonical literary text, often a Renaissance play, so as to 'recover its histories', specifically the context of exploitation from which it emerged, and highlight those elements in the work's present transmission and contextualizing which caused those histories to be lost, e.g. the notion of Shakespeare as the national bard or a cultural icon. The method they resort to attain this twofold goal blends, in fact, a Marxist informed strategy with elements from feminist approaches, which also permits them to 'fracture the previous dominance of conservative social, political and religious assumptions in Shakespeare criticism in particular' (Barry). At the same time, however, cultural materialists deploy the traditional close reading, yet primed with structuralist and poststructuralist techniques, to better equip their analysis to mark a break with the traditional ahistorical understanding of texts and their cultural and social assumptions. Some of the cultural materialists' preference for a canonical text is motivated by its political implication: they argue that the analysis of such a text, rather than a more obscure one, can contribute much more significantly to the debate about national identity or school curriculum – a stance particularly at odds with that of feminist criticism.

In Pope (2002: 110-112) you can find an extensive presentation of Marxist approaches to literary texts, which usefully blends insights from both new historicism and cultural materialism.

E. **Outcome**

The political commitment of cultural materialism entails using the past to read the present, thus contributing not only a new reading method of literary texts but also 'revealing the politics of our own society by what we choose to emphasise or suppress of the past' (Barry 1995: 184). Like new historicism, cultural materialism can help the readers see 'the ways in which the circulation of discourses *is* the circulation of political/social/ intellectual/economic power' and likewise understand how one's own cultural positioning influences one's interpretation of literary and non-literary texts (Tyson 1999: 298).

The Approach through Gender

Feminist Approaches

A. Brief history

Feminist thought had, at its inception, a political orientation which soon shifted from individual works to a movement aimed at the *emancipation of women*, i.e. first of all for getting universal suffrage. This early stage, the offshoot of *liberalism* in the UK, was in full swing in the 19th century on both sides of the Atlantic; in America, it went hand in hand with the *abolitionist* movement. In both cases, however, the entire 19th-century women's rights movement was a white, middle-class, educated women's affair that paid little heed to the condition of women who did not benefit from either leisure or education, or whose race had made them doubly oppressed. It was only in the 20th century, with the attainment of their major political goal,[85] that feminists of various persuasions could afford to take the time not only to fight for and debate various other socio-political and economic rights for women (including whether or not the vexed question of equality between the sexes can indeed provide an answer to various societal and ideological issues concerning women), but also to broach less *obviously* political issues, e.g. the relationship between women's oppression and the arts (literature included) and sciences, or differences among women (on account of class, race, ethnicity, educational-professional accomplishment, sexual orientation, etc.).

Possibly one of the most critical issues nowadays is the very name and definition. The term 'feminism' has often come to be used either in the plural or in some phrase implicating the idea of plurality (e.g. 'feminist thought'). Either way, however, terminology may be conducive to false assumptions about what feminism is or is not, all the more so as the feminists themselves have been debating the appropriateness of various terms. While labels such as 'liberal', 'radical (libertarian and cultural)', 'Marxist-socialist', 'psychoanalytic and gender/cultural', 'existentialist', 'postmodern', 'multicultural and global', 'ecological', to quote one modern attempt at classification (Putnam Tong 1998), suggest a variety of feminist approaches over time, hence also a history of feminism, there is a danger of

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[85] In 1918 British Parliament enfranchised all women householders, householders' wives and female university graduates over thirty years of age; in 1928 women's voting age was lowered to twenty-one, thus giving them complete political equality with men. On 18 August 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, specifically intended to extend suffrage to women, was ratified: it stipulated that 'The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex'. Thirty-five states had ratified the amendment already in 1919 or before 18 August 1920.

mistaking didactic classification for the 'real thing', on the one hand, and of suggesting the idea of 'schools' of feminist thought, on the other. Furthermore, such classifications obscure not just the intertwining between various persuasions but also the feminist authors' openness to and propensity for new approaches, which makes their work hardly classifiable under just one rubric.

Equally crucial is to see the meaning of 'feminism' and 'feminist' in relation to words such as 'femininity' and 'female' or 'femaleness'. Toril Moi (1997: 116) insists that such terms should be understood as 'labels' or *operational categories* for readers and critics, *not* as 'essences', and moreover as provisional and open to debate. In Moi's (1997: 104) succinct definition, 'feminism'/'feminist' is a political position, 'femaleness' a matter of biology, and 'femininity' a set of culturally defined characteristics; the last two are often paired off as 'sex/gender'. As Moi aptly remarks (1997: 106), one's sex does not perforce make one's theoretical leanings and critical discourse supportive of the gender identity and roles traditionally associated with that sex, hence a female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily feminist and the other way round. Nevertheless, some feminists have mistaken female experience for a representative experience, blissfully oblivious of the fact that any experience is open to conflicting political interpretations (Moi 1997: 107).

The terms *feminism/feminist* are '*political* labels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s' (Moi 1997: 104; my emphasis). Accordingly, *feminist criticism* is 'a specific kind of political discourse: a *critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism*, not simply a concern for gender in literature', i.e. it must be 'relevant to the study of the social, institutional and personal *power relations between the sexes*' (ibid.; my emphasis). Feminist criticism has taken its clue from Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), which argues that 'patriarchy' – understood at its simplest, viz. 'male dominance over females' – constitutes 'perhaps the most pervasive ideology if our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power' (Miller, qtd. in Moi 1997: 104). In this sense, feminist criticism has *politicized existing critical methods*: a key practice is *appropriation* (cf. Michel de Certeau's 'poaching') as creative transformation, e.g. the postmodern French feminists' deployment of Derrida's deconstruction to turn psychoanalysis on its head so as to make it reveal sexual difference and the patriarchal construction of gender.

Feminist theorists have addressed the patriarchal construction of femininity and its imposition of certain *social standards* – through conditioning or programming ('nurture') – on all biological women, while passing them off as natural ('in one's nature'). In this vein, patriarchy has fostered the belief in *biologism* or *essentialism*, viz. the notion that there is such a thing as a *given* female (or male) *nature*, and this 'essence is

biologically given'. However, essentialism also lurks behind the notion of gender understood as 'a historically or socially given female essence' (Moi 1997: 108-09). Feminism is crucially concerned with the moot point of whether femininity is to be defined at all, since such an attempt would actually deploy the very patriarchal mechanism of oppression to create a new form of normative, essentialist confinement.

Feminist theories are often labelled with geographical names, which may result in unrealistic grouping (Barry 124-5): thus, the divide between the 'Anglo-American' and the 'French' version of feminism (or the 'Franco-American' divide) may have been suggested so as to account both for the language of the theoretical writings and for the primarily critical vs. theoretical concerns of the two groups, but it tends to level off differences within each group. Not all 'members' of the Anglo-American group are British or American, and though they focus primarily on close reading of literary texts, seemingly accepting the traditional conventions of literary realism, they do address critical political issues of representation, e.g. Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. On the other hand, British feminist criticism tends to be socialist feminist in orientation (e.g. Terry Lovell, Julia Swindells, Cora Kaplan, Catherine Belsey), aligned with cultural materialism (the offshoot of Marxism in matters cultural), hence more theoretical than its American counterpart. 'French' feminism is again a misleading label, in so far as some of its major representatives are not French at all, but émigrés to France, yet their pre-eminence has obscured the work of some of their French colleagues. This is, for instance, the case of Catherine Clément, the French author of *Les fils de Freud sont fatigués* (1978) / *The Weary Sons of Freud* (1987), *Vies et légendes de Jacques Lacan* (1981) / *The lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan* (1983), and with whom Hélène Cixous has co-authored *La jeune née* (1975) / *The Newly Born Woman* (1986) and Julia Kristeva *Le féminin et le sacré* (1998) / *The Feminine and the Sacred* (2001).

For the sake of a didactically comprehensible systematization, in what follows I will resort to the classification of feminist thought advanced by Rosemary Putnam Tong (1998), then I will focus more specifically on feminist criticism in its application on women writers.

1. **Liberal feminism**

Much of contemporary feminist theory defines itself in reaction against traditional liberal feminism, whose classic formulation appeared in Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759-1797) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), John Stuart Mill's (1806-1873) *Subjection of Women* (1869) and Harriet Taylor-Mill's *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), and which was carried out in practice in the 19th-century woman's suffrage movement. Liberal feminism (including contemporary groups, e.g. NOW = the National Organization for Women) views female subordination as rooted in a set of

customary and legal constraints blocking women's entrance to and success in the *public* world. This *policy of women's exclusion* from politics, economy and higher education rests on the false belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men.

One of the controversial topics on the liberal feminist agenda of *women's rights groups* in the 20th century was whether women and men should be treated the same or differently. It is quite revealing to notice Betty Friedan's change of heart from *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), where she claims that the error in the feminine mystique was that it *overvalued* the institutions of marriage and motherhood, to *The Second Stage* (1981), which notices that the 1980s 'superwomen' were no less oppressed than their 1960s 'stay-at-home' mothers, and advocates an androgynous society, to *The Fountain of Age* (1993), where she moves to a more traditional humanist agenda.

2. Radical feminism

The dual-ontological argument of women's inferiority to men, American radical feminism has claimed since the mid-1960s, was bolstered at various times in patriarchal society though its institutions and their discourses, ranging from legal and political structures to social and cultural institutions (especially the family, the church and the academe). Often organized in *women's liberation groups*, radical feminists have had as their common goal consciousness-raising and have been revolutionary-minded: they contend that the patriarchal system is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition; since it cannot be reformed, it must be uprooted in order to achieve women's liberation. In Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg's interpretation, women's oppression can be addressed from several perspectives: historical (the first oppressed group), geographical (the most widespread), social (the hardest form of oppression to eradicate), psychological (it causes the most suffering to its victims, although it may often go unrecognized), and heuristic (it provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression).

Radical feminists claim that the 'sex/gender system' (Gayle Rubin) is the fundamental cause of women's oppression. Rubin, a radical-libertarian feminist, defines the sex/gender system as a 'set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity'. Thus, patriarchal society uses certain facts about male and female physiology as the basis for constructing a set of 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities and behaviours that serve to empower men and disempower women. Furthermore, patriarchal society manages to pass off its cultural constructions as 'natural' – a process known as *naturalization*; accordingly, one's 'normality' depends on one's ability to display the gender identities and behaviours that society culturally links with one's biological sex.

Some radical feminists (the '*radical-libertarian feminists*', in Putnam's phrase) advocate *androgyny* (viz. they encourage people to exhibit a full range of masculine and feminine qualities for achieving a sense of wholeness), women's sexual experimentation (in the form of autoeroticism, lesbianism and heterosexuality) and free use of reproduction-controlling technologies and reproduction-assisting technologies on their own (i.e. individual women's) terms. Others (the '*radical-cultural feminists*') are anti-androgynists who affirm women's essential 'femaleness': they identify the problem of women as either the *low value* patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities (and the high value it assigns to masculine qualities) or *femininity* itself (in so far as it has been constructed by men for patriarchal purposes). If the latter is the case, then, in order to be liberated, women must give new gynocentric meanings to femininity – rather than accepting its patriarchal definition as what deviates from masculinity – so as to construe it as a way of being that needs no external reference point. Furthermore, radical-cultural feminists regard biological motherhood as the ultimate source of woman's power, hence their exhortation to women to guard and celebrate it.

Radical-libertarian feminist Kate Millett argues in *Sexual Politics* (1969) that sex is political primarily because the male/female relationship is the paradigm for all power relationships. Another radical-libertarian feminist, Shulamith Firestone, identifies in *Dialectic of Sex* (1970) the material basis for the *sexual/political ideology* of female submission and male domination as rooted in the *reproductive roles*, since adults have been socialized to view biological reproduction as life's *raison d'être*.

In *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1985), radical-cultural feminist Marilyn French attributes male/female differences more to biology (nature) than to socialization (nurture), and, like Millet and Firestone, contends that sexism is the model for all other -isms (including racism and classism), sustained as it is by the ideology of 'power-over' (viz. the desire to destroy). French couches women's lib. in terms of the ideology of '*pleasure-with*' (viz. the ability of one group or person to affirm all others); she advocates *androgyny* as a balance not between 'pleasure-with' and 'power-over' but between 'pleasure-with' and a *feminized* version of 'power-over' that she calls '*power-to*' (viz. the desire to create). Radical-cultural feminist Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973) denigrates traditional masculine traits while valuing the traditional feminine ones. Daly's study reappraises God as the paradigm for all patriarchs, whose 'power-over complex' manifest as 'separation-from' (transcendence) results in dual thinking (viz. in terms of I/it, subject/object) or self/other relationships.

3. **Marxist and socialist feminism**

Marxist and socialist feminists were influenced by 19th-century thinkers (mainly Marx and Engels), the former, and by 20th-century thinkers

(e.g. Louis Althusser and Jürgen Habermas), the latter. They claim that it is impossible for women to achieve true freedom in a class-based society, and explain women's oppression as originating in the introduction of private property owned by relatively few persons, originally all male. The source of women's oppression is seen by socialist feminists to be capitalism (a point where they agree with Marxist feminists), yet also patriarchy (cf. radical feminists).

Some Marxist feminists have advocated the socialization of domestic work as key to woman's liberation (Margaret Benston, 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation', 1969), others have launched the wages-for-housework campaign (Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, 'Women and the Subversion of the Community', 1972), and still others have pleaded for an assessment of the value of work and the feminization of poverty (the *comparable-worth movement*).

Socialist feminism may be seen as the result of Marxist feminists' dissatisfaction with the essentially gender-blind character of Marxist thought, hence the combination of an economic account of capitalism with a largely ideological account of patriarchy in the works of Juliet Mitchell (*Woman's Estate*, 1971; *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 1974), Iris Young ('Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory', 1981) or Alison Jaggar (*Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, 1983).

4. **Existentialist feminism**

In *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) / *The Second Sex* (1953), Simone de Beauvoir, the pioneer philosopher[86] of existentialist feminism, argues – in accordance with the existentialist precept that *existence precedes essence* – that one is not born a woman, but becomes one.[87] De Beauvoir understands woman' oppression as deriving from her confected, viz. *man*-made, '*otherness*', which can be revealed at play in the man/woman polar hierarchy: 'man' is the free, self-determining being intent on defining the

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[86] Simone de Beauvoir considered herself the 'midwife of Sartre's existential ethics rather than a thinker in her own right' (Bergoffen 2004), which, to some of the guardians of the realm of philosophy has been as good as her very consent to being excluded from any such candidacy. Furthermore, her belated admission into the ranks of philosophers has also been argued as 'a matter of sexism on two counts. The first concerns the fact that Beauvoir was a woman. Her philosophical writings were read as echoes of Sartre rather than explored for their own contributions because it was only "natural" to think of a woman as a disciple of her male companion. The second concerns the fact that she wrote about women. *The Second Sex*, recognized as one of the hundred most important works of the twentieth century, would not be counted as philosophy because it dealt with sex, hardly a burning philosophical issue' (Bergoffen 2004).
[87] Judith Butler (1986: 35) contends that, by 'suggest[ing] that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired', de Beauvoir' formulation ultimately adumbrates the feminist distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'.

meaning of his existence; by way of consequence, he is the one also to define 'woman' as 'not-man', hence the 'other', the object whose meaning is determined for her. Accordingly, de Beauvoir sees woman's way to emancipation – viz. to become a self, a subject, like man – as possible only through transcending the definitions, labels and essences, but primarily her body, that limit her existence as 'immanence'.

5. Postmodern French feminism

Postmodern feminism was initially referred to by Anglo-American feminists as 'French feminism' because many of its exponents were women living in France, especially Paris. However, particularly with the aid of translations, Anglo-American critics came to realize that the French feminists' common denominator was their philosophical, postmodern perspective. The term 'feminism' too has caused a lot of misunderstanding: French theorists and practitioners use it to refer to a specific political movement in France. Accordingly, when the French 'feminists' refuse to be identified as such, this is, at first glance, a rejection of the French feminist movement, which appears to them to engage in and merely replicate oppressive bourgeois strategies for gaining power. Nonetheless, the most significant rejection of the term 'feminist' on the part of the French postmodern thinkers derives from their rejection of what Lyotard calls 'grand narratives': they shy away from classifying words (-isms) whose 'phallogocentric drive is to stabilise, organise and rationalise our conceptual universe' (Moi 1997: 115).

Thus, postmodern feminists, like all postmodernists, seek to avoid in their writings any re-instantiations of phallogocentric thought (viz. ideas ordered around an absolute word, *logos* or Truth, that is male, or phallic, in style). They tend to be suspicious of any grand feminist narratives aiming to provide an overarching explanation for women's oppression or a solution for women's liberation. Some postmodern feminists go so far as to reject traditional feminist thought altogether. While such postmodern stance poses major problems for feminist theory, it nevertheless does address the feminist concern with plurality, multiplicity and difference, in so far as postmodern feminists do not embrace any one feminist position to extol its unique merits.

There are enormous political differences among postmodern feminists: while some write primarily to motivate women to change their attitudes and activity, others are more theoretically inclined, which has made many Anglo-American feminists dismiss such postmodern feminist texts as academic treatises addressed only to the highly educated women and excluding the vast majority.

To a considerable degree such postmodern feminists as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva take their intellectual cues from, without, however, necessarily also espousing the politics of, existentialist Simone de Beauvoir (who focuses on woman's 'otherness'),

deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (who attacks the notions of authorship, identity and selfhood in his critique of western essentialism and dualistic-hierarchical thinking), and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (who interprets traditionally Freudian thought iconoclastically, thus also suggesting an 'excluded feminine'). Postmodern feminists have appropriated but turned on its head de Beauvoir's negative view of woman's otherness. Rather than interpreting this condition as something to be transcended, they contend that woman's otherness is an advantage: it *enables* individual women to maintain the critical distance necessary for deconstructing the norms, values and practices that the dominant male culture seeks to impose on everyone, particularly those who live on its periphery.

In a manner of speaking, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have each an ironically postmodern, problematic relationship to the French language and western grand narratives. Cixous was born and brought up in French-occupied Algeria: as the daughter of a French father and an Austro-German mother, both Jewish, she was a German-speaking exile in her own country; she studied English literature in France, and her doctoral dissertation focused on another exile figure, James Joyce. Irigaray was born and educated in Belgium, but earned masters degrees both there and in France (an MA in psychology and a PhD in linguistics); her second doctoral dissertation, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (*Speculum of the Other Woman*), 1974, criticizing as it does the phallocentrism of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, gained her recognition but also ostracism, as well as relieving Irigaray of her teaching post at the University of Vincennes. Kristeva was born and educated in Bulgaria; in the 1960s she went to France to further her studies and stayed there as an exile from Bulgarian-Soviet communism: a trained linguist, Kristeva also trained in psychoanalysis in the 1970s, so that her work attempts to give a psychoanalytic inflection to poststructuralist criticism.

6.   **Multicultural and global feminism**

Multicultural and global feminists agree with postmodern feminists that the so-called self is divided or even fragmented, but identify the roots of this fragmentation as cultural, racial and ethnic rather than sexual, psychological and literary: the dominant culture sets the basic parameters for an ethnic woman's survival as one of its minority members. Most importantly, they challenge female essentialism and disavow female chauvinism (viz. the tendency of some women, privileged on account of their race or class, to presume to speak on behalf of all women).

Multicultural feminism[88] is based on the insight that even in one nation all women are not created or constructed equal: in the US, for instance,

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[88] Multicultural feminism draws upon the ideology of *multiculturalism*, a social-intellectual movement currently highly popular in the US that promotes the value of

depending on her race, class, sexual preference, age, religion, education attainment, occupation, marital status, health condition, etc., a woman will experience her oppression differently. Black feminists have been among the first to voice their dissatisfaction with 'white' feminism systematically and extensively: one of the most outstanding contributions in this respect has been Gloria Watkins' (aka bell hooks). In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990), bell hooks' central claim concerns the 'interlocking systems of oppression', viz. the inseparability of the structures and systems of gender, race and culture, which poses 'multiple jeopardy' once a member of some group is defined as other, deviant, inferior or wrong.

Global feminists view the local as global and the global as local: thus, they add to the insights of multicultural feminists, emphasizing the interconnections among the various kinds of oppression each woman faces in her own life, and likewise highlighting the links among the various kinds of oppression women in all parts of the world experience. They stress that a woman will experience oppression differently, as a citizen of a nation that is First World or Third World, formerly colonialist or colonized. Critical as they are of the oppressive results of colonial and nationalist policies and practices dividing the world, global feminists argue that no woman is free until the conditions of oppression of women are eliminated everywhere. Many Third-World women are far more concerned about political and economic than sexual issues, claiming that their oppression as women is not nearly so bad as their oppression as Third-World people. Hence, many of them reject the label 'feminist' in favour of Alice Walker's term *womanist* (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1983), viz. a black feminist or woman of colour committed to the survival and wholeness of all people, male and female alike.

Despite their sometimes divergent interests from other strands of feminism, multicultural and global feminists have suggested women two major ways to achieve unity in diversity: either by working towards *sisterhood or friendship*, e.g. Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Global* (1984), or by working towards *sisterhood of political* (rather than personal) *solidarity*, e.g. bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Iris Young.

7. Ecofeminism (or ecological feminism)

Ecofeminism is a social and political movement which merges feminism with environmentalism; the name was coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. Ecofeminists offer the broadest conception of the self's relationship to the other: human beings are connected not only to each other but also to the nonhuman world, but unfortunately often act in a destructive way, though self-deludingly identified as control of nature and self-

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diversity as a core principle and insists that all cultural groups be treated with respect and as equals.

enhancement, hence the ecofeminist criticism of contemporary western lifestyle choices. There are different schools of feminist thought and activism that relate to the analysis of the environment, e.g. liberal, poststructuralist, etc., in so far as feminists of various persuasions (e.g. Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich) have shown an interest in the connectedness between feminist and environmentalist issues.

In ecofeminist studies, women's oppression is addressed not only in relation with the degradation of nature but also with racism and other -isms characteristic of social inequality. Accordingly, one of the self-appointed missions of ecofeminism (Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva) is to redefine how societies regard productivity and activity of both women and nature, so as no longer to perpetuate their abuse. Ecofeminists, like other scholars, have noted the linguistic encodation of the twofold oppression of women and land, from the originally mythical equation nature/woman rendered as Gaia (Earth Mother) or Mother Nature, to seeing women as 'wild' and 'untamed', to violent, often sexual, imagery of the relationship between man (sic!) and nature, e.g. 'to reap nature's bounty', 'to tame nature', 'to penetrate wilderness' or the downright abusive 'to rape the land'.

8. Psychoanalytic and gender feminism

While feminists of the categories identified above have a 'macro' view of the sources of women's oppression, viz. as identifiable in relation to society (e.g. patriarchy or capitalism), psychoanalytic and gender feminists have a 'micro' perspective: they endeavour to unearth the roots of women's oppression in the human psyche. *Psychoanalytic feminists* tend to focus on Freudian theory, viz. the Oedipal and especially pre-Oedipal stages of psychosexual development (e.g. Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow and Sherry Ortner). Some have attempted to debunk Freud's contention that the Oedipus complex is the root of patriarchy by claiming that this explanation is but a product of men's imagination, hence a psychic trap to escape from. Others advocate an acceptance of some version of the Oedipus complex lest humanity re-enters into a chaotic state of nature. However, they are against accepting the Freudian version with its privileging of 'male' attributes (e.g. autonomy, universalism and authority) over 'female' ones (dependence, particularism and love); such dichotomous labels are not essential to the Oedipus complex, but simply derive from children's actual experience with men and women.

In *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (1977), Dorothy Dinnerstein argues that a *mis*shapen set of six gender arrangements serve as a paradigm for destructive human relations in general; they are the direct result of women's traditional nearly exclusive role in child-rearing and our subsequent tendency to blame women for everything wrong about ourselves. Dinnerstein describes the transition from infancy to adulthood as a slow and painful process of rejecting the mother,

hence of devaluing women and all things female; *separation* from the mother affords the yardstick in measuring of difference between males and females. Her solution to the scapegoating of women is to propose a *dual parenting system*. The same solution is also put forward in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), where Nancy Chodorow studies the social implications of the psychosexual development of boys and girls. Unlike Dinnerstein, Chodorow views the measure of difference between males and females in how *connected* they are to their mothers, since she argues that the infant's connection with his/her mother is not precipitously shattered, but gradually eroded, especially for girls. Accordingly, the boy's separateness from his mother will cause his limited ability to relate deeply to others, thus preparing him well for work in the public sphere; on the other hand, the girl's connectedness to her mother will foster her ability to relate to others, thus priming her for the private sphere rather than for the public world.

Gender feminists do not emphasize children's psycho-*sexual* but psycho-*moral* development: they believe that there may be biological as well as psychological or cultural explanations for men's masculinity and women's femininity. Gender feminists tend to focus on the virtues and values associated with femininity, which they regard as morally better than those associated with masculinity. Hence their belief that a new *feminine ethics of care* should replace the old masculine ethics of justice, as advocated by Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (1982), and Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984) and *Women and Evil* (1989). It has been objected by other feminists, though, that an ethics of care too is fraught with problems: Sarah Lucia Hoagland views dependency relationships (underlying such an ethics) as ethically problematic, and unequal relationships as often working against the totality of the interests of the one caring as well as those of the cared-for. Sheila Mullett has identified 'distortions of caring': a person cannot truly care for someone if she is economically, socially or psychologically forced to do so, viz. fully authentic caring cannot occur under patriarchal conditions characterized by male domination and female subordination.

Women's writing

There have been many attempts at tracing the history of women's writing. One of them is Elaine Showalter's in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), where she discerns three partly *overlapping phases* in the shaping of black, Jewish, Canadian, Anglo-Indian or even American female 'literary subcultures':

1. 1840s-1880:[89] *feminine*, i.e. 'a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles';
2. 1880-1920:[90] *feminist*, i.e. 'a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, including a demand for autonomy';
3. 1920 onward: *female*, i.e. 'a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity' (Showalter 1993: 274; her emphasis).[91]

The notion of women's *subculture* is critical, not only controversial: it is often construed in negative terms as '*custodial culture*' (Cynthia Ozick), viz. as a set of opinions, prejudices, tastes and values prescribed for a subordinate group to perpetuate its subordination. Nonetheless, as some feminists argue, it should also be seen as a thriving and positive entity that engenders feelings of female solidarity, particularly in the graft of gender roles (e.g. nurturing) on specifically female physical experience (e.g. motherhood). Nancy Cott views

> women's group consciousness as a subculture uniquely divided against itself by ties to the dominant culture. While [these] ties… are the informing and restricting ones, they provoke within the subculture certain strengths as well as weaknesses, enduring values as well as accommodations.
>
> (Cott, qtd. in Showalter 1993: 274)

Such a consciousness of female solidarity was already apparent in Victorian women novelists' awareness of their bond with their female audience, e.g. Sarah Ellis, Dinah Mulock Craik.

Showalter (1993: 277-8) identifies in the *feminine phase* of 19th-century women writers an understanding of the job of novelist as a recognizable profession denied to women by virtue of their gender identity and roles. Hence, the appearance of the male pseudonym marked a historical shift in women's efforts to enter into mainstream literary culture. Victorian novelists, e.g. the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, paralleled in the literary sphere the efforts of their contemporaries Florence Nightingale or Mary Carpenter at securing women a professional status, yet their novels pointed to the woman's 'proper' sphere, viz. domesticity. Not surprisingly, such writers found themselves in a 'double bind' (Showalter 1993: 278): on the one hand, they felt humiliated

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[89] From the appearance of the male pseudonym to the death of George Sand.

[90] 1920: the enfranchisement of women in the US.

[91] Showalter's (1993) labelling system follows Toril Moi's (1997: 115): Moi defines as *feminine*, 'writing which seems to be marginalised (repressed, silenced) by the ruling social/linguistic order', as *feminist*, 'writing which takes a discernible anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position', and as *female*, 'writing by women', yet without addressing its 'nature'.

by the condescension of the male critical establishment towards what they believed to be their vocation, transcending prescribed gender identity; on the other, they were anxious not to appear unwomanly, hence their professed antifeminism and likewise their stylistic and dramatic self-censorship so as to make their literary output acceptable (the 'natural' outcome of the Victorian policy of conditioning the girls in repression). What women's literary repression could result in was ostracism of originality, verbal force and wit, hence a reduction of women's prose to pastoral flatness and the creation of a 'feminized language' of 'delicacy and verbal fastidiousness' (Showalter 1993: 281) that precluded a genuine expression of passion. Where assertive feminine characters did appear, they would be punished, and their ambition was usually transferred to successful male characters, thus extending the woman writer's male role-playing beyond pseudonym-taking to imaginative content (Showalter 1993: 281-2).

The *feminist phase* entailed a 'confrontation with male society that elevated Victorian stereotypes into a cult': women writers 'challenged many of the restrictions on women's self-expression, denounced the gospel of self-sacrifice, attacked patriarchal religion, and constructed a theoretical model of female oppression', yet their fiction fell into the trap of oversimplification and emotionalism (Showalter 1993: 282). Some writers could go as radical as to assume proud pseudonyms, e.g. Sarah Grand (a writer of powerful studies of female psychology), express their revulsion from sexuality, and advocate 'the sexual separatism of Amazon utopias and suffragette sisterhoods' (ibid.). Their projection of many personal experiences onto successful male characters not only reiterated the strategy of their predecessors, but was also consonant with their contemporary male novelists' tendency to create 'masculine' independent women. The 'feminist' writers may not have been important artistically, according to Showalter, but their insistence on exploring and defining womanhood, and likewise their challenges to the monopoly of the male establishment (e.g. exclusively male publishers), ranked as 'a declaration of independence in the female tradition' (1993: 283).

The *phase* of deliberate *female aestheticism* forged by Victorian women writers born between 1880 and 1900 was still marked by the 'double legacy of feminine self-hatred and feminist withdrawal': its 'separatist literature of *inner space*' (whose roots could be traced back to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, 1847) was psychologically rather than socially focused, and came to symbolize in 'the enclosed and secret room' the very womb (Showalter 1993: 284). Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield or Virginia Woolf 'transformed the feminine code of self-sacrifice into an annihilation of the narrative self, and applied the cultural analysis of the feminists to words, sentences, and structures of language in the novel', in a 'version of modernism' that 'respond[ed] to the material culture of male Edwardian writers'. (Showalter 1993: 284). Their vision of the world as

mystically polarized by sex gave a sacred tinge to this articulation of female sensibility; through its professed androgyny it could be aesthetically appealing, though it may have ranked as a self-destructive rite. Nonetheless, it was at one remove from exploring the physical experience of women: in Woolf's famous trope of 'a room of one's own', it insisted on *artistic autonomy* in a way that implied a 'disengagement from social and sexual involvement' (Showalter 1993: 285).

Since the 1960's, however, the 'female novel' has entered a dynamic stage, also influenced by the international women's movements. Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, A. S. Byatt, Beryl Bainbridge have brought about 'a renaissance in women's writing that responds to the demands… for an authentically female literature, providing "woman's view of life, woman's experience"' (Showalter 1993: 285): their fiction accepts 'anger and sexuality… as sources of female creative power' (ibid.).

Showalter's 1977 (1993) study strove, in its day, for a reappraisal of the figures included in the literary canon. One of its enduring merits is its reassessment of 'literary history' as a 'record of choices' (Louise Bernikov, qtd. in Showalter 1993: 286) that would account for women's writing, whether magnificently accomplished or not so much, in terms of personal *choice*.

Feminist criticism

In its turn, the position of specifically feminist criticism has been a matter of hot debate. Elaine Showalter's survey 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1981) addresses it in the context of what critics like Matthew Arnold and Geoffrey Hartman have called 'wilderness', the wild territory which the critic as pioneer is called to tame or civilize. As she remarks, the topos may have some merit, but it obviates the fact that is has been an exclusively masculine domain. One of the deterrents against establishing a tradition of feminist criticism has been the want of a theoretical basis, all the more necessary as applying the masculine array of critical theory only reveals the degree to which literary writing, whether authored by women or men, conforms to the standards of the male critical establishment in an androcentric world of value and power: 'a concept of creativity, literary history, or literary interpretation based entirely on male experience and put forward as universal' (Showalter 1988: 334). Moreover, importing these male standards means further neglecting the writing concerns of black or Third-World women authors.

Showalter identifies several stages in the emerging tradition of feminist criticism. For some feminists in the tradition of Virginia Woolf's anti-theoretical position, e.g. Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich and Marguerite Duras, this lack of a theoretical basis for feminist criticism should rather be

celebrated as a fortunate exclusion from the 'patriarchal methodolatry' and 'sterile narcissism of male scholarship', which, by 'reassert[ing] the authority of experience' can mount an 'act of resistance to theory' (Showalter 1988: 332). In universities, however, this initial stage has given way to a stage characterized by 'anxiety about the isolation of feminist criticism from a critical community increasingly theoretical in its interests and indifferent to women's writing' (ibid.).

According to Showalter, there are two distinct modes of feminist criticism: (1) an 'ideological' mode concerned with the feminist as *reader*, which offers feminist readings of texts, and (2) the study of women as *writers*, whose concerns are the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women.

The first mode, which Showalter calls *feminist reading* or *the feminist critique*, addresses 'the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems' (Showalter 1988: 333). There is often a 'revisionary imperative' (as voiced by Sandra Gilbert) attached to this mode of criticism, which, at its most ambitious, 'wants to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority' (Gilbert, qtd. in Showalter 1988: 334). However, this revisionism, built as it is upon existing models, keeps feminist literary critics dependent upon male critical theory, thus 'retard[ing] our progress in solving our own theoretical problems' (Showalter 1988: 334).

Showalter (1988: 335) calls the second mode *gynocritics*, with a term she has coined in order to highlight the *difference* of women's writing. The shift in emphasis from an androcentric to a gynocentric feminist criticism, already apparent to Patricia Meyer Spacks in her discussion of the scarce attention feminists theorists had accorded women's writing (*The Female Imagination*, 1975), features most prominently in the writings of French postmodern feminists, particularly Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Their concern with *écriture feminine*, viz. the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text, may appear a utopian project rather than actual literary practice, but as a concept it permits addressing women's writing so as to 'reassert the *value* of the feminine and identify[y] the theoretical project of feminist criticism as the analysis of difference' (Showalter 1988: 336; her emphasis). Showalter identifies the main emphasis of gynocritics in the late 1970s as being oppression, in the case of Marxist-bent English feminist criticism, repression, for French psychoanalytic critics, and expression in the case of an essentially textual American feminist criticism.

What the diverse critical theories of women's writing deploy in their respective constructs of difference are biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural models, each one also representing a school of gynocentric

criticism whose texts, styles and methods may overlap but are roughly sequential: each incorporates the one before. Showalter identifies these schools as (1) feminist biocriticism, (2) linguistic and textual feminist theories, (3) psychoanalytic feminist criticism and (4) cultural feminist criticism.

1. **Feminist biocriticism** (also: **organic** or **biological criticism**)

Showalter (1988: 336-7) regards *organic* or *biological criticism* as 'the most extreme statement of gender difference, of a text indelibly marked by the body: anatomy is textuality'. It runs the risk of a 'return to the crude essentialism, the phallic and ovarian theories of art, that oppressed women in the past' (ibid.): despite the feminist critics' flat rejection of any attribution of literal biological inferiority, some theorists appear to accept the metaphorical implications of female biological difference in writing. It is here that Showalter classifies *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), where Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine the anxiety of women's difference: lacking as they do phallic authority, women are thereby excluded from discussions concerning the traditional metaphor of literary paternity.[92] What other feminist critics have pointed out in regard to such metaphors is the 'even more oppressive equation between literary creativity and childbirth' (Auerbach, qtd. in Showalter 1988: 337). There are voices, e.g. Adrienne Rich (*Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 1976) and Alicia Ostriker, who celebrate sexual differentiation and the body as a source of literary imagery that refuses transcendence, once it is not longer envisaged in accordance with patriarchal thought of biology. Biological criticism itself tries to emerge from the body: it is intimate, confessional and often innovative in style. However, if can also be 'cruelly prescriptive': there is 'a sense in which the exhibition of bloody wounds becomes an initiation

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[92] In 'Literary Paternity' (1979/1986), Sandra Gilbert examines literary history from the point of view of the male authors' metaphoric equation between pen and penis: they attribute their creative capacity directly to their bodily configuration. Gilbert convincingly argues that this metaphor, one of the dominant metaphors of creativity in western culture for both male and female writers, in fact shapes how the process of writing and creativity in general are conceptualized. As a creative act, writing has been appropriated by male authors, in biological terms, as their way of giving birth to 'brainchildren' of an immortal nature (e.g. ideas, works of art), viz. as a process rooted in the body, though exclusively *male*. The more obvious version of biological 'creativity', indelibly inscribed in the female body (viz. the potential for giving birth), however, has been deprecated throughout western cultural history, and women have been confined solely to this role, deemed hardly creative. Unfortunately, many women have internalized the pen-penis metaphor: this exclusion of women, Gilbert argues, has led them to searching for alternate methods of writing. Accordingly, Gilbert urges, women's writing should be sought in places and using instruments not traditionally associated with writing, because those traditions are defined by male authors.

ritual quite separate and disconnected from critical insight' (Showalter 1988: 338). What Showalter (ibid.) and other feminist critics object to is biological criticism's neglect to address the difference of woman's literary practice, for no expression of the body goes unmediated by linguistic, social and literary structures.

2. **Linguistic and textual feminist theories**

Such critical theories broach the question of 'whether men and women use language differently; whether sex differences in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked' (Showalter 1988: 339). All these concerns arise from the realization that male-centred categorizations predominate in a language, which will subtly shape its speakers' understanding and perception of reality. Hence, some French feminists advocate a revolutionary linguism beyond being just not oppressive, one that 'does not leave speechless' but that positively 'loosens the tongue' (Leclerc, qtd. in Showalter 1988: 339) – which precisely undoes the Pauline injunction against women's voice in the church and generally in society, viz. one of the authority sources of the patriarchal muting of women. However, such an issue on the feminist critics' agenda as creating a women's language that is both theoretical and working inside the academe, is vulnerable on two counts, as some have already noticed (e.g. Xavière Gauthier): it either renders women incomprehensible,[93] hence still outside the historical process, or makes them imitate men's writing style, so that they will enter history subdued and alienated. In principle, the solution to this quandary would be, as Mary Jacobus proposes, to encourage in women's writing a deconstruction of the male discourse within which it works. It can well start from a hint of Virginia Woolf regarding repressed language, so as to undertake a thorough analysis of the ideological and cultural determinants of expression that shape women's access to language.

3. **Psychoanalytic feminist criticism**

Feminist critics of psychoanalytic persuasion attempt to locate the difference of women's writing, quite predictably, in their psyche and in the

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[93] As Showalter (1988: 340) wryly remarks, ritualized and unintelligible female languages have already had a long history, from ethnographic evidence of women, more often than men, speaking in tongues, to the Euro-American 'witch craze' of the 16th-17th centuries, where female 'witches' were burnt at the stake accused of diabolic practices but tacitly also suspected of esoteric knowledge – traditionally, the province of men – and feared for possessing speech. She also draws a telling parallel between the feminist politics of ensuring women's language and that of choosing the official language in former colonies between the mother tongue and the wide-currency language of the former colonizer.

'relation of gender to the creative process'; they do so by 'incorporat[ing] the biological and linguistic models of gender difference in a theory of the female psyche or self, shaped by the body, by the development of language, and by sex-role socialization' (Showalter 1988: 342). Such pursuits have spilt over into literary criticism, for instance in a new interest in the mother/daughter relation as a source of creativity: according to Elizabeth Abel, in the 'triadic female pattern' the Oedipal relation to the male paradigm is balanced by the woman writer's pre-Oedipal relation to the female tradition, which requires a 'theory of [literary influence] attuned to female psychology and to women's dual position in literary history' (Abel, qtd. in Showalter 1988: 344).

4. **Cultural feminist criticism**

Showalter believes a theory based on a model of women's culture can be more completely equipped to investigate the specificity and difference of women's writing, since it 'incorporates ideas about women's body, language and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur' (1988: 345). The notion of women's culture has first been developed in anthropology, sociology and social history; it often operates a distinction between the gender identity and roles prescribed for women (e.g. the *man*-made 'woman's sphere' in the Victorian Age), on the one hand, and the activities, behaviours and functions actually observed in women's lives, on the other. A seminal contribution to the discussion of women's culture comes from English anthropologist Edwin Ardener. In 'Belief and the Problem of Women' (1968), enlarged in 'The "Problem" Revisited' (1975),[94] Ardener advances the notion of *muted group* (e.g. women, the youth) to designate a social group's condition of scant or non-existing *discursive self-representation*, as part of the general picture of how social groups express or represent themselves through *voice* and *visibility*. It characteristically links to forms of *subordination*, and is defined in contrast with the 'articulateness' of the dominant (male) group. Ardener argues that women fall outside the definitions of social systems made by men, hence they tend to be *invisible* and thus *unreadable* by anthropologists (whose assumptions, for both men or women, are informed by patriarchal views of what counts as critical anthropological data). In its day, Ardener's argument raised crucial issues of language and power, as well as of standpoint and positionality that adumbrated not only critiques of anthropology's traditional stance of neutrality but also, and more topical here, ways of broaching the erasure of women's voice without recourse to political texts.

The crucial point in Ardener's theory is that though both dominant and muted groups generate beliefs and ordering ideas at the unconscious level,

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[94] His writings were published with the assistance of his anthropologist wife Shirley Ardener.

these can be articulated at the conscious level only in terms and structures controlled by the dominant group. What is ineligible for articulate expression will fall outside the dominant boundary, in the 'wild' (Ardener) – a wild zone that some feminist critics also name 'female space' and which they deem the subject matter of women-centred criticism as well as the place for the revolutionary women's language (e.g. Hélène Cixous' 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 1976; Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, 1973). A version of the wild zone also appears in some radical feminists' mythology of women's closeness to nature, e.g. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), which promotes the ideal of the *wild female* or *natural woman* who dwells beyond masculinity and femininity by flying free of the man-made women and therefore of the power of patriarchal language and values. This topos finds its parallel in women writers' Amazon utopias, e.g. Elizabeth Gaskell's (1810-1865) *Cranford* (1853), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's (1860-1935) *Herland* (1979), or Joanna Russ' (1937-) Whileaway in *The Female Man* (1975). Discussions of women's writing as situated in the wild zone, however, should not overlook the fact that such writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' which 'embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant' (Susan Lanser and Evelyn Torton Beck, qtd. in Showalter 1988: 348).

According to Showalter,

> the first task of a gynocentric criticism must be to plot the precise cultural locus of female literary identity and to describe the forces that intersect an individual woman writer's cultural field. A gynocentric criticism would also situate women writers with respect to the variables of literary culture, such as modes of production and distribution, relations of author and audience, relations of high to popular art, and hierarchies of genre.
>
> (Showalter 1988: 349)

Showalter's description of the tasks of gynocentric criticism resonates with anthropologist Clifford Geertz's 'thick description', which seeks to understand the meaning of cultural phenomena and products by 'sorting out the structures of signification... and determining their social ground and import' (qtd. in Showalter 1988: 350). Accordingly, she claims, 'a genuinely "thick" description of women's writing would insist upon gender and upon a female literary tradition among the multiple strata that make up the force of meaning in a text' (Showalter 1988: 350).

What women's culture model could contribute to gynocentric criticism, then, is a reappraisal of the female literary tradition as both 'a positive source of strength and solidarity' and 'a negative source of powerlessness', rather than continuing to devalue it as 'the obverse of the male tradition' (Showalter 1988: 350). In effect, this female literary tradition should be analyzed precisely in terms of its double-voice, or 'palimpsest'

structure (Gilbert and Gubar), whose dominant and muted stories need to be kept simultaneously in view.

B. **Major representatives**
Hélène Cixous (1937–)
Hélène Cixous regards herself primarily as a *poet* (and playwright), and only secondarily as a philosopher and literary critic. She doesn't favour the label 'feminist', though she is the one to have fought to set up (1974) the *Centre d'Etudes Féminines* at the University of Paris VIII at Vincennes, the first one in France to offer an interdisciplinary PhD programme in feminist studies.

In 'Sorties' (1975) Cixous critiques masculine thinking and writing because they are cast in binary oppositions, operative only in as much as they are premised on destruction. 'Death-dealing binary thought' (Cixous) means that privileging one term (concept) of the polar opposition over the other can only occur with the repression of the latter. Furthermore, she contends, all binary oppositions replicate the premier dyad, man/woman, where the second term is conceived as a deviation from the first:

> Activity/Passivity
> Sun/Moon
> Culture/Nature
> Day/Night
> Speaking/Writing
> Parole/Écriture
> High/Low
> Thought has always worked through opposition
> Through dual, hierarchical oppositions.
>
> (Cixous 1988: 287)

Cixous's deconstruction of the masculine/feminine opposition shows that, should feminists still dwell in binary thought, their theoretical output will be counter-intuitive as still entangled in patriarchal metaphysics.

Cixous is primarily recognized in the Anglo-American world for developing the Derridean inspired concept of *l'écriture féminine* ('feminine writing'), a method of dealing with subjective difference in writing and social theory, which is devised to overcome the limits of western logocentrism. Since the western history of writing is synonymous with the history of reasoning, it entails the separation of the body from the text, hence the exclusion of women from writing (and speaking). Should the (female) body enter the text, it will disrupt the masculine economy of superimposed linearity and tyranny: the feminine will contribute a margin of excess eroticism and free-play at odds with the fixed hierarchies of masculinity. With *l'écriture féminine*, addressed most famously in 'Le Rire de la Méduse' (1975) / 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976), Cixous ultimately advocates an

ethical writing style, which women in particular, but also men, can access: through a phonetic inscription of the woman's body, it will open up and embrace the difference of the other.

According to Cixous, writing is to be understood psychoanalytically as rooted in sexuality. Since man's genital and libidinal economy is phallocentric and singular, masculine writing (*littérature*) is 'phallogocentric and boring': men write the same old things with their 'little pocket signifier' (viz. the trio of penis/phallus/pen). Fearing the multiplicity and chaos that exist outside their symbolic order, men always write in *black ink*, carefully containing their thoughts in unified, self-centred, sharply defined and rigidly structured writing. By contrast, female sexuality is 'infinite and mobile', hence feminine writing (*l'écriture féminine*) is open and multiple, varied and rhythmic, full of pleasures and possibilities, yet ultimately not to be defined and thus circumscribed, in phallogocentric fashion, but only 'conceived of' (literally and metaphorically): a woman writes in *white ink* (maternal milk is finally revalued as creative in every respect), 'without ever inscribing or discerning contours.... Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible'. Cixous ultimately urges women to show men 'our *sexts*', a term she has coined by combining 'sex' and 'texts' to convey her idea of female sexuality as a new form of writing. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' describes how women might write, breaking from the myth and rhetoric that have kept them from participating in the public sphere. It is a key text as regards her view of the transformation of subjectivity, since Cixous develops a theory of writing based on the libidinal economy of the feminine and calls for a re-examination of bisexuality. Cixous conceives of *bisexuality* as the *location within oneself of difference, of both sexes*; she contends that we are all bisexual, but our primary bisexuality is perverted by phallocentric culture. By way of consequence, writing should ultimately not be masculine or feminine but in-between, bisexual. (Unlike her, Irigaray construes bisexuality as the two sexes engaging with their difference in discourse.) Cixous' post-Lacanian discourse, however, has been charged that it supports patriarchal and psychoanalytic norms, viz. on the assumption of an 'essential' femininity in texts, the identifiable quality that allows feminine discourse to be named as such in relation to Oedipus (Ann Rosalind Jones). Conversely, it has been suggested that the case against *l'écriture féminine* results from a desire to locate it within a definite category, to co-opt into a literary theory that which always *exceeds* it (Anu Aneja).

Luce Irigaray (1932–)

Unlike Cixous, Irigaray emphatically claims the status of *philosopher*, rather than of 'writer' or 'psychoanalyst', let alone of feminist,[95] and insists

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[95] Irigaray shies away from being regarded as a feminist, which is related, to a large extent, to her critique of the mainstream 'feminism of equality'. This she faults for

that her works are primarily *philosophical* texts, viz. interventions into the specific canon of thought 'by means of which values are defined'. In doing so, Irigaray inverts the traditional downplaying of women's place and importance in western culture. Aware of the primacy of the philosophical within culture generally, viz. in the historical production of knowledge, meaning, subjectivity, power, Irigaray attempts to counter precisely philosophy's historical and historic exclusion of women from its precincts.

One of Irigaray's major philosophical themes is the critical issue of perspective, vision, specularity and speculation: it is compellingly posed from the very title of *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974) / *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a), her provocative doctoral thesis, as is their relation to the traditionally male prerogative of knowing and defining woman. The 'speculum' of the title is the Latin word for 'mirror' no less than the name of a medical instrument which enables the investigation, for diagnostic purposes, of inner cavities otherwise impossible to visualize. Ironically, the term most likely evokes to a general public the vaginal specula, viz. a gynaecological instrument devised by *male* doctors to enable them to hold open the vagina for examination. Irigaray takes issue with the unacknowledged intent of this apparently innocuous attempt at knowledge: the speculum permits the eye to 'penetrate the *interior.* So that the eye can enter, to see, notably with speculative intent' (1985a: 144) This ocular rapt as rape[96] implicated by Irigaray (as she immediately remarks 'man's eye – understood as substitute for the penis') is ostensibly done for furthering knowledge, hence speculation too, viz. reasoning or opinion (based, however, on incomplete information), yet it is informed by the specular (viz. mirroring) logic of the one-sex model. In Irigaray's rueful and sarcastic commentary, woman is now granted the status of an 'object' worthy of investigation ('to be explicitly granted consideration', 145), and thereby accedes to theory, or rather to being theorized upon, 'included in the theory' (145). '[W]hat there is to be *seen* of female sexuality' will replace the erstwhile central subject of speculation ('metaphysics'), viz. 'some divinity or other transcendence invisible as such' (145). Irigaray doesn't, however, miss the essential link in the equation speculum– eye–penis–vagina:

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pursuing a politics of equality yet failing to interrogate its own categories of thought, which makes it relatively well accommodated by patriarchy. Irigaray favours a 'feminism of difference' that strives to develop 'an autonomous politics' of the feminine, yet which cannot but meet with the same resistance as a woman's doing philosophy.

[96] The adjective *rapt* ('fascinated by, or concentrating on something to the exclusion of everything else') derives from the same Latin *raptus* ('seized'), the past participle of *rapere*, which gave the English word *rape* ('sex forced on an unwilling partner', and figuratively 'violent, destructive or abusive treatment of something').

> Yes, man's eye – understood as substitute for the penis – will be able to *prospect* woman's sexual parts, seek there new sources of *profit*. Which are equally theoretical. By doing so he further *fetishizes* (his) desire. But the desire of the mystery remains, however large a public has been recruited of late for '*hysteroscopy.*' For even if the place of origin, the original dwelling, even if not only the woman but the mother can be unveiled to his sight, what will he make of the *exploration* of this *mine*? Except *usurp even more the right to look at everything...* .
>
> (Irigaray 1985a: 145; my emphasis)

Man's exploration of the (maternal) uterus[97] is at once that of a dark (not golden) mine open*ed* (not 'open') for theoretical profit (viz. gaining knowledge about the hidden essence of woman, *hustera*/*hysteria*), and an even darker legitimation of the self-appointed male right to scopophilic penetration couched in scientific terms.

In both the *Speculum* and her second major work, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (1977) / *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b), Irigaray's self-appointed philosophic goal is to uncover the absence of a female *subject position*, the relegation of all things feminine to nature (matter) and ultimately the absence of true sexual difference in western culture. Her method to achieve such a demanding goal is to work from her woman's position (traditionally serving as man's Unconscious or the Other) both inside and outside the philosophical system in order to *deconstruct* its hierarchy. To this end Irigaray deploys *double-mimesis*: she often reproduces a text, fragmenting it by adding her mimetic reflections of the text, thus dramatizing the place of the Other that philosophy has assigned to woman yet using it in order to reflect a distorted and disruptive image of the Subject of philosophy. This is the strategy of 'Cosi Fan Tutti' (playfully quoting Mozart's play)[98] in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Here Irigaray plays with Lacan's Seminar XX on feminine sexuality by repeatedly quoting Lacan without invoking his name – ironically, the name of the very theorist of 'the Name of the Father'. She

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[97] The English word *uterus* ('womb') derives from the Greek *hustera*, which is also the source of English *hysteria*, misconceived as *the* typical female disease in the Victorian Age and never publicly combated by Freud, though he had identified cases of male hysteria (already a misnomer, now replaced by 'conversion disorder').

[98] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Così fan tutte* ossia *La scuola degli amanti* (*They're All Like That*, or *The School for Lovers*) dramatizes the late 18th-century male view of women in – typically for western culture – essentialist and either/or terms (viz. as either paragons of virtue or the very opposite), and reaches its conclusion in terms of the old (sage) man proving to the young (inexperienced) men women's true character (fickleness). Irigaray's postmodern irony is to deconstruct one of the 'fathers' of psychoanalysis under a resonant title borrowed from an opera that reaches and 'teaches' the male truth about women by means of a trick (*sic*!) devised by an old cynical man and carried out with the aid of a treacherous maidservant (in line with the imperatives of 'custodial culture').

turns his very words against him, sometimes spicing her commentary with 'naïve', 'womanish' questions:

> '[O]n the subject of female sexuality our lady psychoanalyst colleagues tell us…not everything. It's quite remarkable. They haven't made the slightest progress on the question of female sexuality. There must be an internal reason for this, connected with the structure of the pleasure mechanism.'
>
> The question whether, in his logic, they can articulate anything at all, whether they can be heard, is not even raised….
>
> And to make sure this does not come up, the right to experience pleasure is awarded to a statue. 'Just go look at Bernini's statue in Rome, you'll see right away that St. Theresa is coming, there's no doubt about it.'
>
> In Rome? So far away? To look? At a statue? Of a saint? Sculpted by a man? What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure?…
>
> (Irigaray 1985b: 90-91; her emphasis)

In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray's reading of Freud's definition of female sexuality in oppositional relation to male sexuality comes up with the binary opposition 'penis/nothing'. Since the Freudian phallogocentric model of sexuality is *scopophilic*, the kind of sexuality that gets privileged is one based on *looking* because the sexual organ that matters to him, the penis, is *visible* and unique. Freud conceives of female desire as the desire for a penis to fill her constitutive lack or nothingness, hence female pleasure is closely linked with woman's reproductive capabilities, and sex becomes merely a reproductive act whose finality is childbirth and child rearing. Woman, in Freud's view, can and does gain pleasure from sexual intercourse, since the child is a penis substitute. Irigaray wonders what female desire really is and what it looks like, if it looks like anything at all, and attempts to divorce female pleasure from a woman's reproductive capacities. She is rightly sceptical of the Freudian one-sex model of biology, which renders woman the opposite, and defective duplicate, of man. Unsurprisingly, Irigaray invites caution in reappraising women's pleasures and desires, since, after all, in the sexual imaginary of western culture they have always been but a male fantasy. According to Irigaray, at present anything known about woman, including her sexual desire, is based on the male point of view, hence the woman thus known is the 'masculine feminine' or the 'phallic feminine', instead of being the 'feminine feminine', viz. woman as women see themselves. Nonetheless, Irigaray shuns defining the 'feminine feminine' lest the 'phallic' feminine might be recreated in the process. She therefore proposes another system, one that privileges the feminine as much as the masculine and that is based on the *multiplicity* of female sexuality, already alluded to in her title: this sex which is not [just] one – although the suggestion of multiplicity collapses with that of *otherness* and *nothingness*.

Irigaray urges that women should endeavour to escape the male imaginary[99] and search for a female imaginary. Problematic though it may be, she advocates to this end 'speaking (*as*) woman' (*parler femme*), viz. the creation of a women's language beyond the traditional categories of the patriarchal linguistic order ('speaking *like* a woman'). Patriarchy has imposed on women a position of non-mastery and non-assertiveness: 'speaking like a *woman*' contrasts with 'speaking like a *man*' (whatever one's sex); the latter assumes a male stance that entails precisely being assertive and dogmatic, viz. making claims about being in control or in possession of knowledge or truth. 'Speaking (*as*) woman' (*parler femme*), unlike 'speaking *like* a woman', entails first and foremost occupying the *subject position* as much in enunciation as in the realm of the symbolic (in Lacanian terms), as the *maker* of reality. Irigaray conceives of *parler femme* as the paradoxical endeavour to articulate an unconscious unable to speak itself yet trying to make itself heard, based in pluralities and shunning unique or proper meanings, viz. allowing meaning to be fluid and shifting.

Julia Kristeva (1941–)

Julia Kristeva's work has inspired a lot of discussion and debate in Anglo-American feminist theory and criticism. Her theory of abjection deployed in explaining oppression and discrimination, but particularly her focus on the body and the significance of the maternal and pre-Oedipal (the 'semiotic') in the constitution of subjectivity have engendered further scholarly elaboration. However, in so far as she appears to equate the female body with motherhood, Kristeva has been suspected of patriarchal essentialism.

In 'Women's Time' (1979/1997), an overview of the 'generations' or waves of feminist movement, Kristeva advocates a deconstructive approach that rejects the man/woman dichotomy as metaphysical (1997: 214-15), and therefore challenges the very notion of (sexual) identity. Furthermore, she sees 'aesthetic practices' as the only ones 'able to demystify the identity of the symbolic bond itself, therefore, the *community* of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalises and equalises' (Kristeva: 1997: 216; her emphasis). While, in (1997: 113) view, Kristeva's deconstruction is politically irrelevant for feminism, it nevertheless 'radically transforms our awareness of the nature of that struggle' Moi's.

Kristeva argues that 'femininity' should not be defined, but rather located – which is still an attempt at a definition, only this time a *relational* one: femininity is a position, specifically 'that which is marginalised by the

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[99] In Lacanian terms, the *imaginary order* is rooted in the mirror stage of identity (ego) formation. It is male in the sense that Lacan generalizes the male infant's experience to account for the female infant's as well. This generalization can be accounted for by the fact that Lacan's imaginary is structured by the *symbolic order*, viz. patriarchal 'the Law of the Father'.

patriarchal symbolic order' (Kristeva, qtd. in Moi 1997: 111). Her notion of marginality explains the patriarchal repression of the feminine in terms of woman as the limit of the 'symbolic order', yet regarded as neither fully outside and unknown nor fully inside and known. Once woman is positioned on the margin, she can be seen either as the representative of a higher and purer nature, hence her praise and worship, or as the representative of chaos, hence her vilification and demonization. Yet neither 'the virgin' nor 'the whore' stereotype, though advertised by patriarchy as the 'true' nature of woman, can even glimpse at the truth. Such a relational definition as Kristeva's, shifting as it does with the various forms of patriarchy, has the merit of being historically attuned, and of identifying the patriarchal construction of its marginality, a marginality which can also include men (e.g. the 'unmanly' effeminate man, the avant-garde artist, or the homosexual). Nonetheless, as Moi (1997: 112) remarks, once it has eradicated the 'female', 'femininity' defined not as an essence but as positionality fails to have any political meaning on a feminist agenda.

Kristeva's writings on the connection between mind (psyche) and body, culture and nature, matter and representation have brought to the fore the import of theories of the body for feminist thought. Historically, western ideology has associated the body with the feminine, the female or woman (the terms being used interchangeably), and devalued both as weak, immoral, unclean (viz. symbolically polluted), or a terrifying *memento mori*. Kristeva, however, counters that the logic of signification is already operating in the body. The following overview of Kristeva's major works draws on Oliver (1998).

Given her training and interest in linguistics (plus poetics) and psychoanalysis, it should come as no surprise that in her early work (*Desire in Language*; *Revolution in Poetic Language*; *Powers of Horror*)[100] Kristeva develops a distinction between the Lacanian 'symbolic' and her own 'semiotic' (the pre-symbolic or pre-Oedipal), the interplay of which underlies all signification. She defines the *semiotic* element of signification as the bodily drive discharged in signification, viz. the rhythms, tones and movement of signifying practices, and thereby associates it with the *maternal body*, the first source of rhythms. The *symbolic* element is associated with the *grammar and structure of signification*, hence it is what makes signification and reference possible. They should be regarded as mutually constitutive: the semiotic gives life to meaning, while the symbolic precludes babble or delirium.

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[100] *Séméiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969) / *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980); *La Révolution du langage poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (1974) / *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984); *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (1980) / *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982).

At the same time, however, as bodily drives are discharged into signification, the logic of signification is already prefigured within the materiality of the body, operating as it does through identification and differentiation, viz. the body's incorporations and expulsions. In *Histoires d'amour* (1984) / *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva argues that since the maternal body regulates these bodily operations both before birth and during infancy, this ranks as a maternal law prefiguring the paternal law. Following Melanie Klein, Kristeva thus emphasizes the role of the maternal function in the development of subjectivity and access to the symbolic order – quite at odds with the traditional Freudian and Lacanian emphasis solely on the paternal function. Unsurprisingly, she decries western culture's lack of adequate *discourses of maternity*, the only ones available being those of religion and of science, viz. of exaltation and objectification, respectively. However, since in patriarchy women have been reduced to the maternal function and since it is necessary to abject the maternal function in order to become a subject, misplaced abjection is one cause of women's oppression.

Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* develops a theory of abjection[101] very useful in diagnosing the dynamics of oppression: abjection is the psychic operation through which subjective (and group) identity is constituted by excluding anything that threats one's own (or the group's) borders; since the main threat to the constitution of the subject is his/her dependence upon the maternal body, abjection is fundamentally related to the maternal function and results in woman's marginalization in the symbolic order.

Kristeva defines *abjection* as a powerful and irrational reaction of dread, horror of, or repulsion for *the abject*, that anomalous and undefinable 'thing' which predates ego-formation and is opposed to 'I' (in psychoanalytic terms). She insists that it is '*not lack of cleanliness or health* that causes abjection but *what disturbs identity, system, order*. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. *The in-between*, *the ambiguous*, *the composite*' (Kristeva 1982: 4; my emphasis).[102] The 'quality' of abject is bestowed upon this 'insignifiable' instance by the ego during the act of self-constitution, i.e. as an attempt to achieve separation–individuation and autonomy and thereby enter the symbolic. Pertaining as it does to the semiotic mode of subjectivity, the abject confounds the symbolic, which will

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[101] Kristeva's theory of abjection is indebted to Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966), a study where the British anthropologist addresses the import of notions of and practices against *symbolic pollution* for creating and maintaining collective identity.

[102] Kristeva (1982: 2-4) explains the abjection of filth, waste, dung, certain items of food and uppermost of cadavers showing signs of incontinence *in articulo mortis*, as an attempt to withstand defilement in life by erecting and maintaining borders between *'I' within its clearly defined place* and *the place where 'I' is not* (where bodily waste goes) and accordingly permits 'I' to be.

attempt to repress, but can never annihilate, it.[103] Once conceived of as undefinable and inassimilable, the abject can subsequently be 'ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable' as that which 'emanate[s] from an *exorbitant outside or inside*' (Kristeva 1982: 1; my emphasis): this is precisely the work of abjection. However, the virtual return of the repressed abject threatens, at one and the same time, the 'integrity of the bodily boundaries of the ego… in the sense of possessing a singular, stable identity' and 'the symbolic inasmuch as it promises to compromise or violate the social and linguistic structuring systems of the subject, prohibitions, laws, meanings' (Hook 2003: 54).

Like her relational definition of femininity, Kristeva's complex work is highly valuable and inspiring to feminist studies, as well as being the grounds for contestation, particularly when viewed in relation to the work of Cixous and Irigaray.

Judith Butler (1956–): highly influential American post-structuralist philosopher whose writings address major issues in feminism, queer theory, political philosophy and ethics. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), she advances the (Foucauldian inspired) idea that gender (along with sex and sexuality) is *performative*, viz. it is culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized acts in time. The performance of gender, sex, or sexuality is, however, naturalized as an ontological 'core': thus, Butler reconceives the sexed body as itself culturally constructed by regulative discourse as male or female; from this construction of binary *sex* as natural proceeds the construction of the binary *gender* and heterosexuality as natural too. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) looks back on *Gender Trouble* so as to clear up any misprision of performativity by emphasizing the role of repetition. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) surveys the problems of hate speech and

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[103] It is precisely in relation to this last aspect that the notion of *the abjection of self* assumes its meaning:

> The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language or desire is founded…. But if one imagines… the experience of *want* itself as logically preliminary to being and object… then one understands that abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is its only signified.
>
> (Kristeva 1982: 5; her emphasis)

The self (as a demarcation of the 'I' or subject from exterior objects via language) can only be erected on the repudiation (rejection) of the abject, hence on *want* (as lack, and implicitly desire).

censorship. *Undoing Gender* (2004) addresses issues such as gender, sex and sexuality as performativity, psychoanalysis and the medical treatment of intersex, in an approach geared for a more general readership than previously. Some critics (e.g. Susan Bordo) have criticized Butler for reducing gender to language, thus challenging Butler's conception of gender as performed, and have moreover argued (e.g. Nancy Fraser) that Butler's focus on language makes her work difficult to be applied to real-life situations.

Susan Bordo (1947–): feminist philosopher whose particular focus in feminist and cultural studies is on the body. In *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (1987), Bordo explores major issues in philosophical discourse (e.g. rationality, objectivity, Cartesian dualism) to reflect on the situation of the body within culture historically. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993) studies the impact of popular culture in shaping both an ideal (viz. normative) female body – hardly ever attainable, despite the plethora of practices aimed at the body, e.g. cosmetic surgery, physical training and obsessive dieting – and typical female disorders (e.g. anorexia nervosa and bulimia), which Bordo regards as 'complex crystallizations of culture'. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (1999) furthers Bordo's study of anxieties over bodily form and beauty, this time by looking at the male body from a female perspective. *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* (1997) studies the saturation of cultural images within contemporary culture. Commentators (e.g. Susan Hekman, Vincent B. Leitch) have often remarked that unlike Judith Butler, Bordo is primary concerned with the materiality and locatedness of bodies within western culture, and suggests that knowledge is 'embodied' (viz. produced from a 'standpoint' by a body that is located as a material entity among other material entities).

C. **Key terms**
7. **Womanist** (Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1983): a Black feminist or woman of colour committed to the survival and wholeness of all people, male and female alike; term preferred by Third-World women to the white, First-World label *feminist*.
8. **Patriarchy**: literally, 'the rule of the father', viz. the male monopoly on power, and the correlative disempowerment of women, in all fields, from the economic and socio-political to the ideological (e.g. ontological definitions); a term introduced to distinguish the forces maintaining sexism from other social forces, e.g. capitalism. Gayle Rubin ('The Traffic in Women') notices, however, that the generalized use of 'patriarchy' (e.g. Kate Millett's notion that 'every avenue of power within the society… is entirely in male hands') obscures other distinctions, as happens with the generalized use of 'capitalism' to refer

to all modes of production. Sometimes 'patriarchy' is used interchangeably with the 'sex/gender system' because 'it appropriately captures the notion of hierarchy and male dominance which we see as central to the present system' (Hartman 2003: 213). Heidi Hartman proposes the following definition of patriarchy: 'a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women' (2003: 211). The hierarchy of patriarchy, she argues, subsists on the arrangement whereby 'all men, whatever their rank in the patriarchy, are bought off [by men at higher levels] by being able to control at least some women' (Hartman 2003: 212). 'The material base of patriarchy is men's control over women's labor power': this control is maintained by 'excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women's sexuality' (Hartman 2003: 214).

9. **Sex/gender system** (Gayle Rubin): 'gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes' (2006: 94). Rubin posits a dynamic system through which the *biological* specificities of *sex* (male/female) are transformed into the *social* particularities of *gender* (masculine/ feminine): 'the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied' (2006: 88). In Judith Butler's (1986: 35) succinct definition, 'sex is… the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, whereas gender is the cultural meanings and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation'.

Furthermore, in the sex/gender system sexuality is to be understood as a by-product of system-produced gender, which regulates the direction of sexual desire towards the other sex (viz. compulsory heterosexuality).

> [The sex/gender system refers to] the set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be. …
> [T]he idea that men and women are two mutually exclusive categories must arise out of something other than a non-existent 'natural' opposition. Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of 'feminine' traits; in women, of the local version of 'masculine' traits.
>
> (Rubin 2006: 90, 94-5)

As Judith Butler aptly remarks, the sex/gender distinction, already prefigured in de Beauvoir's 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', has been used by feminists 'to debunk the claim that anatomy

is destiny': 'with the distinction intact, it is no longer possible to attribute the values or social functions of women to biological necessity, and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behavior: all gender is, by definition, unnatural' (Butler 1986: 35). By drawing the logical conclusion to the explanation quoted above, Butler argues radically that 'if the distinction is consistently applied, it becomes unclear whether being a given sex has any necessary consequence for becoming a given gender'; hence, 'the presumption of a causal or mimetic relation between sex and gender is undermined': 'at its limit, the sex/gender distinction implies a radical heteronomy of natural bodies and constructed genders with the consequence that "being" female and "being" a woman are two very different sorts of being' (ibid.).

10. **Female**, **feminine**: see 'sex/gender system'.

11. **Naturalization**: to present as natural fact something which is in fact an ideological construction, e.g. gender identity and roles as following of necessity from one's biological sex (in the sex/gender system).

12. **Muted** (Edwin Ardener): women's condition of scant or non-existing *discursive self-representation*, as part of the general picture of how social groups express or represent themselves (viz. through *voice* and *visibility*), linked to forms of *subordination*.

13. **Custodial culture** (Cynthia Ozick): a set of opinions, prejudices, tastes and values prescribed for a subordinate group to perpetuate its subordination. A typical case worldwide would be that of mothers bringing up their girls to conform to traditional gender expectations such as doing various household chores (e.g. laying and clearing the table) and teaching them that housework is the 'natural' province of women, a notion to be passed down to the next generation.

14. **Phallogocentrism** (Cixous; Irigaray): coinage that blends the words *logocentric* (Derrida's description of western culture as organized around the idea of speech/the word as truth) and *phallocentric* (to suggest that the structure of language is male, viz. centred by the phallus), intended to articulate the feminist insight that western cultural thought and structures are based on the primacy of certain terms (valued in relation to masculinity), which appear as the first term in a series of binary oppositions, e.g. male/female, order/chaos, language/silence, presence/absence, good/evil.

15. **Gendered language** (**sexist language**): the condition of language in patriarchy, viz. its mirroring of the male standards and primacy in the creation of words that are 'unmarked' for men-as-the-norm, but 'marked' for women-as-deviant-from-the-norm, most compellingly visible in the use of the so-called inclusive *he* to refer to 'humankind' (male *and* female), e.g. '*man* is the measure of all things' (Protagoras, *c.* 490-420 BCE), 'another specifically *human* faculty is *man*'s suggestibility' (Erich Fromm, 'The Nature of Violence', *Collier's Year*

Book, 1969).[104] Some of the most obvious instances refer to names of jobs and office titles, in the past unthinkable as 'suitable' for women – or for men. Feminist movements and changes in the professional status of women alike have triggered a political awareness of gender biased language that has resulted in attempts at replacing such occurrences with gender neutral language: e.g. 'chairman' (now retained only when the office holder is indeed male, otherwise replaced by 'chairwoman', when the office holder is female, or the neutral 'chairperson', 'chair'), 'fireman' (replaced by 'fire-fighter'), 'stewardess' (replaced by 'flight-attendant'). An interesting, though infrequent, case is the creation of marked male terms from unmarked female ones to refer to newly created employment opportunities for men: 'male nurse', 'male prostitute'. However, deeply entrenched sexist language, symptomatic of patriarchal sexism, cannot be erased overnight. After all, in many cultures some sort of primacy may be accorded to the 'mother tongue' (there is no counterpart to this noun in the languages that have it), but the child bears the 'surname' (literally, 'the sire's name', viz. the father's) as 'family name', and women, but not men, are traditionally addressed depending on their marital status ('Miss' vs. 'Mrs'). This last item has been revised through some women's adoption of 'Ms' as neutral between the two, yet it is maligned by some as referring to a 'feminist'. Some nouns, especially when paired off to have male/female reference, reveal an underlying positive/negative valorization: 'stud' (masculine, approving) vs. 'slut' (feminine, disapproving), for 'a person having several sexual partners', 'master'/'mistress' (originally a pair to refer to the married couple in their relation to the servants, like in the Latin *dominus*/*domina*); other words change their valorization depending on their male/female reference in the context: 'professional' (approving, if it refers to a man; disapproving, 'prostitute', of a woman); 'ambitious' (traditionally, approving, if it refers to a man, but disapproving, to a woman).

16. **Gender neutral language**: politically correct, non-sexist way of mentioning human beings without using an inclusive word, otherwise strictly denoting men, to refer to both men and women; hence the substitutions: 'mankind' > 'humankind', *inclusive* 'he' > 'he or she', 'he/she', 's/he' or 'they', 'man-made' > 'artificial', 'man-to-man' > 'person-to-person' or 'personally'. However, language still retains

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[104] A problematic occurrence of 'man', attributable only in part to the text's status as a translation of the third degree (viz. from Hebrew into Greek, then into Latin, then into the vernacular) appears in the Old Testament, the Hebrew book incorporated into the Christian Bible; in one of the *two* versions of the story of creation, 'God said, "Let Us make *man* in Our image, according to Our likeness…." So God created *man* in His own image; in the image of God He created *them*; *male and female* He created them' (NKJV, Genesis 1.26-27).

gender biased structures assuming male pre-eminence, e.g. the compulsory word order in an idiomatic structure like 'man and women' (yet somehow tacitly accepted as having a counterpart in the polite address 'ladies and gentlemen'), 'the man in the street'. Moreover, the general structure of an argument may betray a sexist inclination despite the political correctness of individual words and phrases.

17. **Gendered**: the assumption of a position deemed neutral, universal and objective, but which is in fact male, viz. it articulates men's perspective and experience as meaningful, and thereby excludes women from meaningful positionality.

18. **Gender-blind** (vs. **gender-sighted**): a category, notion, etc. that is oblivious to the issue of gender, viz. it assumes there is a neutral, universal, objective position from which to conceptualize and use it, when in fact this is a covert male position.

19. **Stereotype**: a belief or idea of what a particular type of person or thing is like (e.g. racial, sexual, cultural stereotypes; racist stereotypes; stereotypes of woman as good mother and cook; stereotypes about the elderly). They are often appraised in positive terms as the first link one is provided in the 'encounter' with reality: stereotypes ground the unfamiliar into the familiar, thus helping make sense of novelty and likewise reducing its perceived threat. However, one always runs the risk of taking stereotypes at face value and thus being blind not only to categorical diversity but also to the mechanism of self-conceptualization, which requires the other as a foil yet unfortunately tends to denigrate it.

20. *Écriture feminine* (Cixous): ethical writing style, which women in particular can access, that is able, through a phonetic inscription of the feminine body, its pulsions and flows, to embrace the difference of the other rather than reducing it, as *écriture masculine* does.

21. *Parler femme* / **speaking (as) woman** (Irigaray): a pun in French, *parler femme* – which sounds like *par le femmes* ('by women') – refers to a language of women created by themselves and situated beyond the categories of language and femininity imposed by patriarchy. Irigaray contrasts the traditional 'speaking *like* a woman' with 'speaking (*as*) woman': the former assumes the patriarchally imposed woman-position, viz. one that is not in control nor in possession of knowledge or truth – the very opposite to 'speaking like a *man*' (whatever one's sex), whose male stance entails precisely being assertive and dogmatic, making claims. Conversely, *parler femme* entails first and foremost occupying the *subject position* as much in enunciation as in social practices, as the *maker* of cultural and political reality.

22. **Gynotext** vs. **androtext** (Elaine Showalter): a text/book written by a woman vs. a text/book written by a man.

23. **Gynocritics** (Elaine Showalter): a mode of feminist criticism that studies women as *writers*, and whose concerns are the history, styles,

themes, genres and structures of writing by women. Showalter (1988: 335) has coined the term *gynocritics* to highlight the *difference* of women's writing. Marxist-bent English feminist criticism tends to emphasize oppression, French psychoanalytic criticism repression and American feminist criticism expression.

D. **Application**

Since feminism emphasizes the *constructedness of femininity*, reading a literary text through one feminist lens or another entails an awareness of images and representations of femininity in literature and culture, as well as an interest in revealing the mechanism of their production and influence. Barry (1995: 134) suggests the following checklist of feminist critical concerns (here sometimes followed by my suggestions). Feminists

1. 'rethink the canon, aiming at the rediscovery of texts written by women'. As a trainee, you can study critical texts about the emergence of a feminist counter-canon, and compare the traditional approach by male/female critics to 'androtexts'.
2. 'revalue women's experience'.
3. 'examine representations of women in literature by men and women'. Do it critically, by checking your findings against the periodization put forward by Elaine Showalter (1997: 274): does your text belong to the *feminine* (1840s-1880), *feminist* (1880-1920), or *female* (1920 onward) *phase*, viz. (1) does it betray an *internalization* of the patriarchal standards of art and its views on social roles, (2) does it *protest* against these standards and values, or (3) is it a phase of *self-discovery*?
4. 'challenge representations of women as "Other", as "lack", as part of "nature"'.
5. 'examine power relations which obtain in texts and in life, with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as a political act, and showing the extent of patriarchy'. Power relations may be represented quite overtly, e.g. male decision-taking, woman battering, rape, or in more covert ways, e.g. the male character's manifest lack of interest in his female partner's expressed/perceptible feelings, desires, concerns, etc.
6. 'recognise the role of language in making what is social and constructed seem transparent and "natural"'. Think over the examples given under the rubric 'Key terms' under 'Gendered language' and 'Gender neutral language' before proceeding. Remember that more often than not the 'sex' of the narrator coincides with that of the author: consider the importance of such gendered perspective on how things 'are seen' and articulated in the text.
7. 'raise the question of whether men and women are "essentially" different because of biology, or are socially constructed as different'. This is an issue for you to ponder and read about.

8. 'explore the question of whether there is a female language, an *écriture féminine* [or a means of *parler femme*], and whether this is also available to men'. Here you can study more of Cixous', Irigaray's and Kristeva's critical readings of literature, especially of the modernist avant-garde.
9. '"re-read" psychoanalysis to further explore the issues of female and male identity'. Again, start by studying more of Cixous', Irigaray's and Kristeva's critical commentaries on staple psychoanalytic propositions, e.g. Freud's view of the Oedipal constitution of the feminine in terms of 'penis-envy'.
10. 'question the popular notion of the death of the author [Barthes, Foucault], asking whether there are only "subject positions… constructed in discourse", or, on the contrary, the experience (e.g. of a black or lesbian writer) is central'.
11. 'make clear the ideological base of supposedly "neutral" or "mainstream" literary interpretations'.

Here are further suggestions for a feminist approach to the literary text (Tyson 1999: 101-102), again organized as a summary of feminist positions, and which can be addressed in whatever combination a reader deems suitable to the particular literary work under scrutiny:

1. 'What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy? How are women portrayed? How do these portrayals relate to the gender issues of the period in which the novel was written or is set? In other words, does the work reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology?'
2. 'What does the work imply about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy and/or about the ways in which women's situations in the world – economic, political, social, or psychological – might be improved?'
3. 'What does the work suggest about the ways in which race, class, and/or other cultural factors intersect with gender in producing women's experience?'
4. 'What does the work suggest about women's creativity?' This is a matter of gynocritics and requires research on or familiarity with the author's biography and the historical/cultural background of the work.
5. 'What might an examination of the author's style contribute to the ongoing efforts to delineate a specifically feminine form of writing (*écriture féminine*)?' This is a matter of gynocritics which requires familiarity with both women writers' various styles relative to each other and to men writers', and with Cixous' and Irigaray's notions of a specifically feminine form of writing.
6. 'What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operations of patriarchy? Has the literary work been ignored or neglected in the past? Why? Or, if recognized in the past, is the work ignored or neglected now? Why?'

7. 'What role does the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition?'

E. **Outcome**

Feminist criticism should be seen not as an offshoot of feminism at one remove from the political movement, but rather as 'one of its most practical ways of influencing everyday conduct and attitudes' (Barry 1995: 122), viz. a form of consciousness raising through critical reading of literary texts. This will entail realizing 'the ways in which patriarchal ideology blinds us to our own participation in, or at least complicity with, sexist agendas' (Tyson 1999: 102). Furthermore, 'simply' as criticism, it can yield a new understanding of literary texts, no less than enabling a reconfiguration of the literary canon through its advocacy of a counter-canon of women writers.

Literature and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic Approaches to Literature

A. Brief history

At first sight, nothing would be less germane to studying theoretical approaches to literature than psychoanalysis: if one adopts a working definition like the one provided by Pope (2002: 96), psychoanalysis is the study of mental and emotional processes in individual people; given its family links with both psychology and psychiatry, to attempt to deploy it in reading literature may seem excessively pedantic, counter-productive or unwarranted, as some critics have objected. Nonetheless, as Tyson (1999: 29-32) argues, psychoanalysis attempts to explain principles of human behaviour whose universality (though challenged by some theorists) may be revealing for the author's unconscious no less than the reader's or society's. Furthermore, practising a psychoanalytic reading of literary texts is not a gratuitous intellectual exercise but a way to learn how to use the theory.

Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as modern scientific practices owe their existence to Sigmund Freud's work at the turn of the 20th century. However, the interest in the human psyche as well as in mental and emotional disorders and their treatment has a long history, at times tinged with the poetic, in the originary, positive view of madness (or lunacy) as divinely inspired and creative,[105] and at times stigmatized, as Foucault suggests in his history of madness in the classical age of 'the great confinement'. **Freudianism**, as the form of psychoanalysis he initiated came to be called – in the aftermath of various 'schisms' within the psychoanalytic camp – emphasizes the *indirect expression of unconscious material*. After World War II, Freudianism was increasingly displaced by **object relations theory**, an adaptation of psychoanalytic theory, whose basic assumption is that the psychological life of the human being is created in and through relations with other human beings. Object relations theory emphasizes the *internalization of relations to others as a formative force that creates the self*. Accordingly, it puts a high premium on the need to establish boundaries between oneself and others, and focuses on various such realizations, from the affective dimensions of boundaries to the cognitive quality of mental representations (as ways to posit a subject/object split), a process in which language is most instrumental. **Jacques Lacan**'s work in the latter half of

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[105] In William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (mid-1590s), Theseus famously points to Hipollyta the trinity of the lunatic, the lover and the poet: 'Lovers and madmen have such seething brains, / Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends. / The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact' (V.1.4-8).

the 20th century has brought Freud back to centre stage by reinterpreting his *psychoanalytic theory in structuralist terms* inspired, among others, by Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropology and Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan stresses the importance of the socio-cultural context to the formation of the individual.

Freud and Freudianism

A highly original thinker, Freud was nevertheless deeply influenced by both medical practitioners (Jean-Martin Charcot and Joseph Breuer) and diverse factors, first and foremost his family life. In fact, he developed psychoanalysis sometimes in the form of self-analysis originating in moments of emotional crisis, as is the case with the core of *The Interpretation of Dreams*; his own life conflicts thus became the personal, though by no means exclusive, basis for his theory of the Oedipus complex. Needless to say, Freud's contemporary scientific climate (Thornton 2006) had a powerful impact on his thinking too, from Charles Darwin's evolutionary doctrine (that treated the human being as an object of *scientific* investigation) to Helmholz's principle of the conservation of energy. The latter could conduce to the notion of 'dynamic physiology', which Freud eagerly embraced at the University of Vienna. At one remove, Freud posited the notion of 'psychic energy', whose conversions within the personality shape and determine it.

Psychic energy is the very cornerstone of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, most typically familiar to the non-specialist public, however, in terms of the discovery of *the unconscious*, a theory that subsumes his views of sexuality, and to which I will soon revert. What has been perceived as the scandal at the heart of Freudian theory resides – for his contemporaries and perhaps for some of his posterity too – in its *erotocentrism*, viz. the centrality Freud accords to sexual energy (*libido*) in human life ever since infancy. Freud's theory actually operates a crucial redefinition of the term *sexuality* so as to make it cover *any form of pleasure* which is or can be *derived from the body* (Thornton 2006). In brief, Freud posits the *drives*[106] as the principal motivating forces in the mental realm; yet, despite their indefinitely large number, he claims they can be grouped into two broad generic categories: *Eros* (the *life drive*), which covers all the self-preserving and erotic drives, and *Thanatos* (the *death drive*), which covers all the drives towards aggression, self-destruction and cruelty. Freud maintains that Thanatos actually tends to override Eros, in that the death drive is fundamental to any living thing, yet at the same time, manifest as it is in the repetition compulsion, it is, paradoxically, the most powerful life force.

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[106] Freud regards the drives as extremely flexible forces, unlike the 'fixed' biological instinct: thus, their objects are contingent and replaceable, and one drive can substitute for another.

Though rooted in Joseph Breuer's earlier discovery that traumatic childhood events could have devastating effects upon the adult individual, outside the academic and psychoanalytic circles the *theory of infantile sexuality* is often credited to Freud alone. Freud developed his account of the drives to its logical, and rather mechanical, conclusion: since from the moment of birth the infant is driven in its actions by a natural tendency to satisfy its biologically determined *needs* for food, shelter and warmth yet their satisfaction is both practical and a way to release mental energy, such needs ultimately evolve as a desire for sexual (bodily) pleasure. Freud describes this process of *normal* psycho-sexual development as the gradual organization of the *libidinal drives* centred on the child's body, which undergoes three (partly overlapping) stages:

1. in the *oral stage* sexual pleasure is derived through the act of sucking: it associates the drive to incorporate objects through the mouth with the discovery of the mouth as an *erotogenic zone*;

2. the *anal stage* has as its locus of pleasure the anus: in the act of defecation the child *sadistically* takes delight in expulsion and destruction, as well as associating it with the desire for retention and possessive *control* (as in 'granting or withholding' the faeces).[107]

3. the *phallic* (or *Oedipal*) *stage* brings about the *gendered subject*: it is characterized by the young child's interest in her/his sexual organs as a site of pleasure combined with a deep sexual attraction for the parent of the opposite sex and a hatred of the parent of the same sex (the 'Oedipus complex').

Under normal circumstances, the Oedipal stage engenders socially derived feelings of guilt in the child, who recognizes that s/he can never supplant the stronger parent. Both the initial attraction for the mother and the hatred for the father are usually *repressed*, and the child normally resolves the conflict of the Oedipus complex by coming to identify with the parent of the same sex at the age of five. After a 'latency' period, at puberty the individual enters a mature genital development where the libidinal drive refocuses around the genital area.

Freud attempts to distinguish between the boy's and the girl's different responses to the Oedipal conflict, yet unproblematically takes male infant sexuality as the norm: accordingly, he both derives the female infant sexuality from the male model and deems it deviant. Thus, he contends that the boy will repress the sexual attraction for his mother, lest he may be punished by the father, specifically through *castration*, for breaking the *incest taboo*. This *castration anxiety* is engendered by the boy's prior

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[107] The libidinal drives of infantile sexuality during the first two stages map out the child's body as something to be taken erotic delight in (*autoeroticism*), even though the child cannot view its body as a complete object or as gendered. Later on in life, the individual will be able to take as an object of desire one's body or ego *as a whole* (*narcissism*).

'encounter' with the female genitalia: he has already noticed their difference from his own genitals and has construed this in terms of 'lack'. The girl, who has originally derived sexual pleasure from her clitoris (deemed by Freud the female counterpart to the penis) and has herself been attached to the mother's body, will now also forswear her primary love-object but will 'switch' instead to the father to 'seduce' him: she too has noticed the male genitalia as different from hers and thus accounts for her 'lack' in terms of the *castration complex*, translatable socially as the *inferiority complex*. The girl will have therefore to distance herself from her 'inferior' (castrated) mother and get attached to her 'superior' father; when this fails, she will return to her mother to embrace her feminine 'destiny'. However, she still experiences *penis envy*, which engenders an unconscious desire to have her father's baby: later in life, her own baby by her husband will substitute for the one she couldn't have by her father.

Freud needs this particularly complicated psychodrama, with details at times unaccounted for or downright implausible, so as to have the girl evolve *normal*, vaginal sexuality, from what was originally a homosexual drive towards the mother – unlike the boy's 'natural' heterosexuality from the outset. *Socially* compulsory heterosexuality is thus *naturalized* by Freud as the successful resolution of the developmental process of psycho-sexual conflicts where the boy's sexuality is ultimately coterminous with his father's, yet the girl's has to be radically transmuted so as to become coterminous with her mother's. This scenario allows Freud to trace many mental illnesses (particularly hysteria) and homosexuality alike back to unresolved conflicts experienced at the Oedipal stage, or to events which otherwise disrupt the normal pattern of infantile development.

Freud's has been critiqued as a deeply patriarchal explanation of human sexuality that attempts to naturalize socially coerced and parentally controlled heterosexuality. Especially feminists (e.g. Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman) have faulted Freud for failing to stress and extol *female infant bisexuality* as the true model of human sexuality, i.e. what in Derridean terms could be deconstructed as 'archi-woman' (Culler 1982: 171).

As to Freud's ground-breaking *grand récit*, the *theory of the unconscious*, it is – unsurprisingly, considering the nature of 19th-century science – highly *deterministic*, though also systematic. Briefly, he argues that there is no one-to-one correspondence between mind and consciousness as previously assumed, and that the broad spectrum of human behaviour is explicable only in terms of the mental processes or states which determine it in a cause-and-effect type of interrelation.[108] Hence the significance Freud attributes to slips of the tongue or pen, obsessive behaviour and dreams, all

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[108] Thornton (2006) spells out the importance of deterministic thinking for Freud: the postulate that there are such things as unconscious mental states is required by the principle of causality, for it is evident that frequently nothing in the conscious mind can be said to cause neurotic or other abnormal behaviour.

determined by unconscious mental processes and therefore able to reveal in covert form – and yield themselves to psychoanalytic interpretation – what would otherwise remain unbeknown.

The Freudian view of the unconscious is now generally discussed with respect to his 1923 *tripartite* conceptual model[109] of the structure of the mind or personality: positing permanent interchanges between the *id*, *ego* and *super-ego* allows Freud to construe the mind as a dynamic energy-system. Briefly,

- the *id* is the locus of the *unconscious drives* which require instant gratification (the *pleasure principle*);
- the *super-ego* is the locus of the moral 'conscience', viz. socially-acquired standards of right/wrong behaviour, whose first mediators are the parents or caregivers; once internalized, they work as an *unconscious screening-mechanism* which seeks to limit the pleasure-seeking drives of the *id* by the imposition of restrictive rules;
- the *ego* is the *conscious* self created by the dynamic tensions and interactions between the *id* and the *super-ego*, whose task is to arbitrate between their conflicting demands and reconcile them with the requirements of external reality (the *reality principle*).

Freud defines psychological well-being or mental health as the establishment of a harmonious relationship between these three 'components'. However, if the *id*'s pleasure drives are either thwarted by the external world or their satisfaction transgresses the moral sanctions laid down by the *super-ego*, then an inner conflict occurs in the mind between its constituent parts, which, if unresolved, can lead to later neurosis. Freudianism posits the existence of '*defence mechanisms*' – several types of reactions which were identified during and after Anna Freud's time – to account for how healthy persons normally use different psychological strategies throughout their life to prevent conflicts from becoming too acute, and thereby to cope with reality and to maintain self-image.[110]

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[109] There is some debate, though, as to how literally Freud intended this *theoretical* model to be taken: he appears to have taken it extremely literally himself, viz. as a *frame of reference* to explain the link between early childhood experience and the mature adult (normal or dysfunctional) personality (Thornton 2006).

[110] In the wake of Freud's and Anna Freud's pioneering studies, Freudians have worked out various classification schemes of defence mechanisms, sometimes attempting to connect them to psycho-sexual development and mental condition: at certain ages such defence mechanisms can lessen distress and anxiety, yet at others and if overused they verge on the (severely) pathological. Thus, in a four-level classification, the *predominance* of some defence mechanisms announces overt *psychosis* (the 'psychotic' defences of *denial*, *distortion* and *delusional projection* – though otherwise healthy mechanisms in dreams and throughout childhood); others announce *depression* and *personality disorders* (the 'immature' defences normal in adolescents and often present in adults, e.g. *fantasy*, *projection*, *idealization*), while others still characterize *neurosis* ('neurotic' defences are fairly common in adults:

Freud deems *repression* the most important defence mechanism, for it pushes back into the unconscious an instinctual impulse that the *super-ego* deems reprehensible: the *ego* has thereby successfully avoided internal conflict and pain as well as reconciling reality with the demands of both *id* and *super-ego*. Repression works from early infancy as a completely normal and integral part of the developmental process to adulthood: as we have seen, Freud posits that the first major – and obligatory – repression is central to the Oedipal conflict. However, since any drive is an energy-form, it cannot be destroyed when it is repressed in the unconscious: it continues to exist intact and moreover to exert a determining force upon the conscious mind, which can give rise to the dysfunctional behaviour characteristic of neuroses.[111] This is 'the *return of the repressed*', also to be glimpsed in dreams, when a relaxation in the vigilance of the *super-ego* permits the repressed drives to resurface to the conscious mind in a *transmuted* form.

Positing that the *super-ego* functions less effectively in sleep enabled Freud to argue that the *dream* we remember upon waking, the *manifest* content, is merely the surface: this expresses symbolically the concealed or *latent* content of the dream, viz. its real object and cause alike are unconscious, repressed desires or wishes. The manifest dream has been arrived at through *dream work* (or *dream distortion*): the latent dream-thoughts are re-worked by the 'dream-censor' (repression) so as to lessen their frightening potential, thus forcing them to assume toned-down, distorted or even unrecognizable forms, by way of displacement and/or condensation.[112] This is the *primary revision* which occurs during the dream

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repression, displacement, dissociation, isolation, etc.) or simply healthy adult life (the defences that enhance pleasure and feelings of mastery: *sublimation*, *suppression*, *identification* and *introjection*).

[111] The difference between 'normal' and 'neurotic' repression is one of *degree*, not of kind. Psychoanalysis as both theory and clinical treatment seeks to identify the repressions which are causing the neurotic symptoms: given its deterministic premise, psychoanalysis purports to bring such unconscious repressions to the forefront of consciousness, which will allow the ego to confront them directly and thus to discharge them. Freud developed his method of treatment (the 'talking cure') from Breuer's earlier treatment of hysteria. The *analyst* encourages the patient (the *analysand*) to speak freely and uninhibitedly, thus relying on *free association* to conduce to a moderation of the screening mechanism of the *super-ego*, which will accordingly allow otherwise repressed (unconscious) material to filter through from the *id* to the conscious *ego*. Dreams are particularly important in psychoanalytic treatment, as are slips of all sorts.

[112] Dream *displacement* is a process whereby a safe stand-in (whether a person or an object or event) replaces a more threatening person, etc. so as to transfer elsewhere ('displace') the emotions ('affect') associated with the threat; accordingly, when awake we are surprised to note what apparently trivial elements in the manifest dream should have caused such incommensurately large distress. In *condensation*,

proper and which needs undoing through *dream interpretation* so as to recover the latent content. However, a *secondary revision* may also occur, *un*consciously, when we are awake (and conscious), which further protects us from the repressed content of the dream: in the process of fully remembering and thus interpreting the dream, we may forget parts of the manifest dream or alter their sequence, etc.

Given these two types of revision as well as one's particular psychological make-up (in terms of the interaction between personality and the cultural context), the symbols occurring in the manifest dream do not correspond to any stable meaning in the latent dream. The interpretation of dreams, therefore, rests on applying certain principles, e.g. that a dream character is actually a *projection* of the dreamer her-/himself, or that the dreamer's sexuality and attitudes towards her-/himself and others are symbolized through *male imagery* (phallic symbols of the 'stand-upright' or 'go-off' type, from towers to fireworks) or *female imagery* (womb symbols of the 'enclosure'/'container' type, breast symbols of the 'food' type to connote lack of emotional nurturing, or water imagery to connote anything from emotions to sexuality to the unconscious itself).

Dreams can be regarded as a relatively safe outlet for the return of the repressed. When the breakdown of one's defences is no longer temporary, however, then *trauma* has set in, as manifest in neurosis and more severe psychological conditions.

Thornton (2006) summarizes some of the challenges psychoanalysis has faced. The question of the therapeutic effectiveness of psychoanalysis remains an open and controversial one. Likewise, psychoanalysis as theory is, possibly with the sole exception of Darwin's evolutionism, virtually the most controversial one in the past two centuries, and has been regarded as anything from secular religion to a deeply misogynistic account.[113]

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multiple dream-thoughts are combined and amalgamated into a single element of the manifest dream. Usually both processes co-occur in the dream.

[113] Its coherence as a theory is, at the very least, questionable: serious critique has been adduced to the psychoanalytic explanation of the causal mechanism underlying psychological conditions as they are expressed in human behaviour, since nothing can be proved by way of demonstration, as the principle of causality implies. Furthermore, while the advocates of psychoanalysis strive to endorse Freud's claim to its scientificity, alleging that it is a *strong* scientific theory with the capacity to accommodate and explain every possible form of human behaviour means, paradoxically, undermining its very claim to scientific status, and surrendering it to the principle of *falsifiability* – Karl Popper's criterion of demarcation of a genuinely scientific theory. Freud has been faulted for substituting his theory of the unconscious for a genuine yet unpalatable discovery: his study of women hysterics actually proves the extreme prevalence of child sexual abuse, particularly of young girls, in the late 19th century. Yet the fierce animosity his early 'seduction theory' of neuroses was responded to made him withdraw it and replace it with descriptions about childhood fantasy (Masson, qtd. in Thornton 2006). The theory of the Oedipus

Jacques Lacan

With Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan's psychoanalytic work a new interest in re-reading Freud emerged in the 1960s, all the more so as his own theory was buttressed by the structuralist insights of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, and the phenomenology of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Martin Heidegger. In a manner of speaking, Lacan – originally a trained medical doctor and psychiatrist – opened up Freud's theory for textualization and deconstruction.

Lacan's first major theoretical publication was his piece 'On the Mirror Stage as Formative of the I' (1936); his 'mirror stage' theory has been as influential as Freud's 'Oedipus complex'. Only much later, however, did Lacan begin to challenge Freudian orthodoxy, first of all by famously urging specialists to go back to basics (1955), by which he meant a novel scrutiny of the implications of Freud's notion of the unconscious. While this soon brought about his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytic Association (1959), it paved the way for setting up the Parisian École Freudienne (1964): here he delivered his now famous seminars (viz. training sessions for graduate level students, not for undergraduate work), whose publication as *Écrits* (1966) constitutes the Lacanian corpus. It has often been noticed that his writing style – after all, the transcript of his improvisational and highly coded oral delivery – makes his ideas really obscure and difficult to come to grips with. The only way to attempt to understand Lacan is to read and re-read a text in piecemeal fashion, not all at once.

'The insistence of the letter in the unconscious' (also known as 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud') was delivered (1957) to an audience of philosophy students: it proposes the now famous notion that *the unconscious is structured like a language*, viz. as a network of differences (cf. Saussure). However, Lacan construes these differences not in Saussurean but rather Derridean terms, as *differences between signifiers*: there is no one-to-one correspondence between the signifier and the signified since the latter incessantly slides under the former, which makes meaning elusive.

Furthermore, if, according to Freud, the *dream* is 'the royal road to the unconscious', it becomes, for Lacan, a *text*: he pairs off the dream-work mechanisms identified by Freud, displacement and condensation, with the

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complex thus came to be generated, which, under the circumstances, begs the social issue Freud noticed in his contemporary Vienna – or represses it in the 'order' of theory rather than of the unconscious. Furthermore, as in actual practice thousands of people have emerged from analysis with 'recovered memories' of alleged childhood sexual abuse by their parents, hitherto repressed, Freud's concept of repression has been challenged as being noting short of a myth, which has subjected it to more widespread critical scrutiny than ever before.

metonymic and metaphoric poles of language identified by Roman Jakobson. Just as *metonymy* works by the logic of *pars pro toto* (literally, 'part [taken] for the whole'), so does *displacement* when it substitutes a safe stand-in (in the manifest dream) for the threatening repressed element (in the latent dream). Likewise, *metaphor* blends together two different images, as does *condensation* when it compresses several repressed elements into one symbol to surface in the manifest dream.

With an insight matching Derrida's, Lacan notes that the Freudian work on the importance of puns and slips of the tongue or pen (*parapraxis*) are in fact mechanisms which open a window onto the unconscious. Or, Lacan contends – *contra* the Cartesian tradition of western philosophy – that the essence of selfhood is the unconscious: 'I am where I think not' (Lacan), not 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes). What Freud merely hinted at, viz. the 'split' self (conscious/unconscious), amounts, in Lacan's structuralist-biased theorizing, to proposing 'the self-s radical ex-centricity to itself', which, as Barry (1995: 113) points out, deconstructs the self to show that it is merely a linguistic effect.

Another Freudian aspect that gets a novel interpretation in Lacan (and has been fruitfully appropriated in literary criticism) is the mechanism by which the young child emerges into consciousness. Lacan reworks the three stages of psychosexual development in terms of the three 'orders' (or realms) of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real – though not to match Freud's process.

1. The *Imaginary* (viz. an order of deceptive *images*) refers to an originary state of *indistinction* self/other, viz. the infant identifies with its mother by perceiving only a continuum of being, or plenitude. (This largely corresponds to Freud's *pre-Oedipal stage* and to Julia Kristeva's *semiotic*; Lacan draws his insight from Melanie Klein's psychoanalysis of children.)
    The *mirror stage* (from *c.* 6 months to 18 months of age) will prime the infant for entrance into the Symbolic order by introducing the split and yet producing the illusion of a coherent, unified being. The child is helped by its reflection in the 'mirror' (anything from the 'gaze of the mother' to an actual mirror) to begin to see (in both senses) and draw rudimentary *distinctions* between 'itself' and the 'mother', and moreover to conceive of its mirror reflection as in fact a true image of a genuinely unitary, ideal 'self'. Thus, the child *misrecognizes* itself in the image of a pleasing unity which it does not actually experience in its own body.

2. The *Symbolic* is the *socio-cultural realm* structured by/as *language*, where the mirror-stage separation between self and other evolves to a *linguistic separation* premised on the ability to name things as separate from self. However, the presence of the signifier indicates the absence of the thing, which accounts for the sense of lack that will be experienced henceforward. Lacan reformulates in linguistic terms Freud's theory of

the child's socialization through the resolution of its Oedipal complex in its fifth or sixth year. He substitutes the *phallus* for the penis in Freud's account, and states that it refers to the symbol of (patriarchal) power denied to women and men alike, not to the anatomical organ. The child perceives the phallus as what the mother desires because she lacks it, and given the child's own desire of the mother,[114] it will devote itself to trying to be the phallus for the mother – which the *symbolic* father must thwart. Lacan conceives of *castration* not as the threat of a physical event, but as the *renunciation* of the aspiration to be the phallus for the mother: both boys and girls are normally submitted to it, which thus marks the resolution of the Oedipal complex. This normalization of the child through the castration complex here consists in having the child perceive that what orders the desire of the mother is in fact a Law, not any visible feature of the biological father: he dubs it 'the Name of the Father' (*le nom du père*), punning on the French homonymy between *nom*, 'name', and *non*, the 'no' to incestuous union (Sharpe 2006). The father's intervention is decisively acknowledged: he acts in his capacity as the spokesperson of a body of social Law by which the mother, as a socialized being, also abides. The child's successful socialization (as the constitution of the self), then, entails complete submission to the Law (or the Name of the Father), or else the child risks marginalization in the Symbolic order, viz. having no voice. Yet this *norm*alization (viz. normality as measured up against socially enforced norms) comes at a price: lack (absence of the mother's body) and separation (difference in gender).

3. The *Real* is opposed to the Imaginary and also located outside the Symbolic: it intrudes and disrupts the child's imaginary pre-Oedipal harmony, yet, as it resists symbolization (in the sense of a play of differences, e.g. presence/absence), it is impossible to imagine and impossible to integrate into the Symbolic, hence its traumatic quality (Seminar XI).

It appears that the deconstructive bent that Culler (1982: 159-73) reads into Freud's major insights would have remained obscure without Lacan's prior reading. Freud's theory of the unconscious challenges the privilege of the conscious (in the scientific and popular discourse of his day) by positing ultimately that the conscious can only be constituted by repressing the unconscious. However, this still relies unproblematically on the knowability solely of the visible, which, in tandem with the centrality Freud accords to the male and the penis in his account of normal socialization, renders the female (and the feminine) the repressed other never acknowledged as constitutive. Lacan endeavours somehow to redress this, but he is too much

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[114] The French *désire de la mère* can translate both in the object and in the subject case, viz. 'desire for the mother' and 'the mother's desire'.

indebted to structuralism not to fall into the trap of taking certain categories for granted: after all, his entire Symbolic order is centred on the Name of the Father and the symbolic phallus is moulded entirely on the penis. No wonder Irigaray chose to entitle one of her studies so as to hint that women are the sex which is *not one* (at once nothing and a negation of the one/the masculine). In fact, feminist theorists (Madan 1993: 27-9) have paid a lot of attention to Lacan, some choosing to defend his ideas (Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva) against objections raised against them also from the ranks of the feminists (Dale Spender, Germaine Greer), while others maintain a critical distance (Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman, Jane Gallop).

Some of the most important texts for understanding both the Lacanian method and how it may be appropriated for reading literature are, apart from 'The insistence of the letter in the unconscious', the 'Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*' (E. A. Poe's story)[115] and 'Desire and the interpretation of desire in *Hamlet*' (from *Seminar VI – Desire and Its Interpretation*).

Barry (1995: 113-5) suggests the relevance of Lacan's theory to literary criticism: his Imaginary/Symbolic polarity has inspired various literary readings, French feminist critics being at the forefront – also for a very pragmatic reason: the linguistic accessibility of texts before their English translation was limited to a French-speaking public. They (e.g. Kristeva) have likened the Imaginary with poetic language and have opposed it to the Symbolic order and logic characteristic of prose or realist texts. In practical terms, a Lacanian reading of a text would reject the conventional view of characterization in literature and attempt instead to demonstrate that the character is merely a cluster of signifiers polarized around a proper name. Moreover, it would reject the possibility of realism in literature and the arts, since a split, linguistically organized 'self' standing for a character cannot but call forth other techniques of fragmentation and dissolution can be found in modernism and postmodernism. In brief, a Lacanian reading of a text is actually rooted in an entirely different set of literary preferences than other critical approaches are (the latter often do not even require a particular taste).

B. **Major representatives**

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): Austrian physiologist, medical doctor, psychologist and father of *psychoanalysis*, now generally recognized as one of the most influential and authoritative thinkers of the 20th century. Freud articulated the concepts of *the unconscious*, *infantile sexuality*, *repression*, and proposed a tripartite account of the mind's structure, all as part of a radically new conceptual and therapeutic

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[115] 'The Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*' (trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies* 48, 1972) is also available for online reading at Lacan.com <http://www.lacan.com/purloined.htm>.

frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of psychopathological conditions (Thornton 2006). His work's influence only began to be generally recognized when the first International Psychoanalytical Congress was held (Salzburg, 1908), and was given a boost by the invitation to give a course of lectures in the US (1909) – which were to form the basis of his *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916). From this point on Freud's reputation and fame grew enormously. Throughout his career Freud critically revised, or even made fundamental alterations to, his most basic principles if scientifically necessary, e.g. the completely new tripartite (*id*, *ego* and *super-ego*) model of the mind proposed in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). His outstanding followers Alfred Adler and Karl Jung were soon to found rival schools of psychoanalysis, thus giving rise to the first two of many schisms in the movement. Major works: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900); *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901); *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). His works are collected in English translation in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (1953-1964).

Anna Freud (1895-1982): Following her father Sigmund Freud's lead, Anna Freud developed an early interest in psychoanalysis, but her career flourished in England especially after his death in 1939. However, already with her influential study *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1935), published as the director of the Vienna Psychoanalytical Training Institute, Anna Freud's study of *defence mechanisms* moved away from the traditional bases of psychoanalytical thought in the drives: the book became a founding work of *ego psychology* and established her reputation as a pioneering theoretician. Though generally strictly adhering to the rules her father had set, she also expanded psychoanalytic work in the direction of *child psychoanalysis* (a relatively uncharted territory in the 1920s and 1930s), which she initiated along with Melanie Klein, though basing it on radically different assumptions. In 1947 Anna Freud and Kate Friedlaender established the Hampstead Child Therapy Courses: her training of English and American child therapists greatly expanded her influence in the field, as did from the 1950s onward her regular visits to the US to lecture and to teach. Other major works: *On Defence Mechanisms* (1936); *Normality and Pathology in Childhood* (1965).

Melanie Klein Trust (1882-1960): Austrian-born British child psychoanalyst whose pioneering work shed new light on the emotional life of infants and children, especially in the understanding and treatment of narcissistic disorders and the psychoses. Following World

War I, Melanie Klein developed the technique of *play therapy*, now used worldwide, as a substitute for Freud's free association (of which very young children are incapable), to uncover children's unconscious motivations: the way children play with toys reveal earlier infantile fantasies and anxieties, which affected a child's developing ego, superego and sexuality to bring about emotional disorders. Her ideas have been further developed by psychoanalysts, first of all the 'Kleinian' faction of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. Kleinian theory is still influential as a distinctive strain of psychoanalytic theory. Furthermore, the basics of Jacques Lacan's concept of the imaginary order of psychosexual development draw on Klein's studies. Major works: *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (1932); *Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, 1921-1945 (1948); *Narrative of a Child Analysis* (1961); *Our Adult World and Other Essays* (1963).

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961): among the co-founders of the psychoanalytic movement and the founder of *analytical psychology*, Jung was influential in countercultural movements in Europe and the US in the 1960s thanks to his emphasis on understanding the psyche through exploring the worlds of dreams, art, mythology, religion and philosophy. He is most familiar to the general public for the concept of *archetype*, which he has advanced as instrumental in analyzing personality, hence the personality types he analyzes. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* he defines the archetype as an element of the archaic common substratum of the mind, or collective unconscious mind, specifically the universal psychic dispositions that form the substrate from which the basic themes of human life emerge. His archetype theory has inspired both Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and Gilbert Durand's *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (1960/1999).

Alfred Adler (1870-1937): among the co-founders of the psychoanalytic movement and the founder of the school of *individual psychology*. In 1956 Adler developed a scheme of the so-called personality types, which he took solely as provisional or heuristic. Major works: *The Neurotic Character* (1912); *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* (1927); *Understanding Human Nature* (1927); *What Life Could Mean to You* (1931).

Jacques Lacan (1901-81): English translations: *Ecrits* (a selection of the French *Écrits*), 1977; *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (2006).

C. **Key terms**

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- **Drive** vs. **instinct**: Even though this is not a fundamental opposition in Freud's theory, he does distinguish between the two concepts and Lacan follows him: a drive (Germ. *Trieb*, Fr. *pulsion*) differs from biological needs (*Instinkt*, *instinct*) because it can never be satisfied and does not aim at an object but rather circles perpetually round it.
- **Electra complex**: a concept that attempts to address issues of female development, based largely on Freud's Oedipal complex. Freud referred to it as the 'feminine Oedipus attitude' in his own writings; it was later renamed the 'Electra complex' by Carl Jung, although Freud himself rejected the use of the term because it dangerously emphasized the analogy between the attitudes of the two sexes.
- **Repression** (Freud): a major 'defence mechanism' (see below) in both 'normal' and 'pathological' states, it concerns the hypothetical process of pushing psychologically harmful material (memories of events, etc.) away from the conscious ego into the unconscious, without however being able to delete it altogether from the psyche.
- **Return of the repressed** (Freud): bringing back into the conscious ego elements formerly repressed in the unconscious; it can be noticed at work in dreams or various pathological conditions.
- **Dream** (Freud): a process whereby elements otherwise repressed in the unconscious try to resurface to the conscious ego, though heavily disguised through *dream-work* (viz. censorship) so as to avoid any harmful effect.
- **Condensation** (Freud): multiple latent dream-thoughts are combined and amalgamated into a single element of the manifest dream.
- **Displacement** (Freud): the affect associated with a threatening repressed element is transferred elsewhere (displaced), yet to a relatively safer stand-in person, object, event.
- **Screen memory**: an unimportant memory substituted for, thus obliterating, a more consequential one, which thereby operates as a defence mechanism; *parapraxis* is one such instance.
- **Freudian slip** (**parapraxis**): an error in speech/writing (*slip of the tongue*/*pen*), in memory or physical action that is believed to be caused by the unconscious release of consciously repressed elements.
- **Defence mechanisms**: the 'ways and means by which the ego wards off unpleasure and anxiety' (Anna Freud). They can be classified in various ways, such as the following four-level scheme developed by George Eman Vaillant in *Adaptation to Life* (1977)[116]:
    1. '*psychotic*' defences (though healthy mechanisms in dreams and throughout childhood):

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[116] This classification is available under the heading 'Defense Mechanisms' in *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_ mechanism>.

- **Denial**: refusal to accept external reality because it is too threatening.
- **Distortion**: a gross reshaping of external reality to meet internal needs.
- **Delusional projection**: grossly frank delusions about external reality, usually of a persecutory nature.
2. '*immature*' defences more commonly present in adolescents (normal) and often present in adults, yet often overused in severe *depression* and *personality disorders*:
- **Projection**: reduces anxiety by allowing the unconscious expression of one's undesirable impulses or desires yet attributed to another.
- **Idealization**: perceiving another individual as having more positive qualities than they may actually have.
3. '*neurotic*' defences (fairly common in adults):
- **Repression**: pushing thoughts into the unconscious so as to prevent painful or dangerous thoughts from entering consciousness.
- **Displacement**: shifting sexual or aggressive drives to a more acceptable or less threatening target in order to avoid dealing directly with what is frightening or threatening.
- **Dissociation**: temporary drastic modification of one's personal identity or character to avoid emotional distress.
- **Isolation**: separation of feelings from ideas and events.
- **Intellectualization**: a form of isolation where concentrating on the intellectual components of a situations distances oneself from the associated anxiety-provoking emotions.
- **Reaction formation**: converting unconscious wishes or impulses that are perceived to be dangerous into their opposites.
4. '*mature*' defences, commonly found among emotionally healthy adults, that integrate conflicting emotions and thoughts while still remaining effective, which engenders pleasure and feelings of mastery; they are *often socially sanctioned as virtues*:
- **Sublimation**: channelling negative emotions or drives (e.g. the sexual drives) into positive actions, behaviour or emotion, manifest, for instance, as achieving socially acceptable goals in the arts and sciences.
- **Suppression**: the conscious process of pushing thoughts into the *preconscious*; later, uncomfortable or distressing emotions can be access and accepted.
- **Identification**: the unconscious modelling of one's self upon another *person*'s character and behaviour.
- **Introjection**: identifying with some *idea or object* so deeply that it becomes a part of that person.

- **Altruism**: constructive service to others that brings pleasure and personal satisfaction.
- **Anticipation**: realistic planning for future discomfort.

D. **Application**

Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature; its aim is to see which psychoanalytic concepts operate in the text and how identifying them enriches our understanding of the work. Bearing on the analysis of a literary text is the notion that its overt content is comparable to the conscious mind in its relation to the unconscious. Hence it is the unconscious of the text (always manifest indirectly) which needs to be attended to so as to reveal the unconscious motives and feelings as much of the characters as of the author. Moreover, in the case of a narrative text the psychoanalytic dimension is to be understood as the very driving force of the plot.

Here are some useful points to consider, in whatever combination you deem suitable, in practising psychoanalytic criticism. In structuring them I have drawn upon Tyson's (1999: 32-3), Barry's (1995: 105, 115) and Ryan's (1999: 38) suggestions:

1. Identify how the operations of *repression* structure or inform the work. Consider and try to explain:
   - what stages of psycho-sexual development are suggested in the main characters: look for unconscious motives (e.g. repressed wounds, fears, unresolved conflicts, guilty desires, etc.), manifest as conflictual moments or relations, dreams, slips of the tongue, etc.;
   - what core issues are thereby illustrated;
   - how these core issues structure or inform the text.
2. Identify any *family dynamics* (e.g. the Oedipal conflict) at work in the text. Consider:
   - whether it is possible to relate a character's patterns of adult behaviour to early family experiences as *represented* in the story;
   - how these patterns of behaviour and family dynamics operate: identify any issues of boundaries, separation, loss, fusion with others, the struggle to form a coherent self out of a damaging context or a traumatic personal history;
   - what they reveal, viz. how selves are being shaped.
3. Explain character behaviour, narrative events and/or images in psychoanalytic terms: defence mechanisms (e.g. regression, projection, sublimation, etc.), trauma, sexuality, fear of or fascination with death, etc. work as a primary indicator of *psychological identity* or the *operations of ego–id–super-ego*.
4. Identify if the *literary work is analogous to a dream*. Consider:

- symbols relevant to death, sexuality and the unconscious;
- how recurrent or striking dream symbols reveal the ways in which the narrator is projecting her/his unconscious or guilty desires, fears, repressed wounds, unresolved conflicts onto other characters, onto the setting, or onto events.

5. A *Lacanian approach* to a literary text studies its language as a means of playing out *the unconscious of the text*. Such a reading focuses on the centrality of the unconscious and the elusiveness of the signified (characteristic of unconscious processes). In practice, it resonates with the deconstructive technique: you look for contradictory undercurrents of meaning that actually inform the 'conscious' of the text. It can be applied to an avowedly anti-realist text, viz. one that overtly challenges the conventions of literary representation.

6. Explain what the work suggests about the *psychological make-up of its author*. Such psychoanalysis of the author (as still practised by critics writing psychobiographies) requires extensive research of the author's entire corpus plus personal documents (e.g. letters, diaries).

7. Identify what a given interpretation of a literary work suggests about the *psychological motives of the reader*, or a critical trend about a group of readers and society as a whole. As we have already seen, certain versions of reader-response theory focus on the psychology of the reader and drawing heavily on psychoanalytic insights.

E. **Outcome**

By an irony of fate, a *grand récit* such as psychoanalysis must acknowledge itself as the inheritor of literature just about as much as of medical pursuits: both literary creation (from major themes to character delineation) and metatexts ever since the Aristotelian *Poetics*'s misty *catharsis*, have continually adumbrated the psychoanalytic tenet of an unconscious structured like language. Furthermore, Freud took some of his major cues from literature itself, if one should recall only that some his studies revolve around literary characters, e.g. the biblical Moses (*Moses and Monotheism*), or that his most famous complex bears the name of a character, Oedipus, usually familiar from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (5th century BCE). This complex he then tests, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), on another famous character, Hamlet; this application is devoted an entire study, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), by British psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, and it also informs the famous psychoanalytical-autobiographical pastiche in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). The irony is complete only if we also recall the fact that American playwright Eugene O'Neill created his famous trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), specifically as an Oedipal drama (illustrating the Electra complex) inspired by *The Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus (525-456 BCE). It should come as no surprise that

critics have attempted to account for puzzling literary creations or characters therein in psychoanalytic terms, from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Harold Pinter's controversial *The Homecoming* (1965).

As I have already hinted, psychoanalytic criticism can help enrich our understanding of the text as well as ultimately of the working of the human mind (the author's and the reader's alike) – a point where it converges with reader-response theory. Even if psychoanalysis was developed to gauge the intricacies of the human psyche, its application to literary works, it has been argued in refutation to many objections, is no less warranted than the use of socially bent theories, e.g. feminist, Marxist or post-colonial studies, to address literature. There is always a danger, of course, to generalize one's findings in a text to the scale of literature or even of humanity, as virtually all theories, literary or otherwise, are prone to encourage. But this implicit danger cannot detract from the usefulness or relevance of psychoanalytic criticism any more than from that of any other critical approach to literature.

Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

A. **Brief history**

Poststructuralism[117]

Poststructuralism is, in many respects, a parricide figure, though one more paradoxical in nature than it might appear at first, at least because of the inherent ambiguity of the prefix *post-*. Some definitions capture the sense of succession (viz. poststructuralism follows, and elaborates on, some of the major insights of structuralism), others of supersession (viz. poststructuralism is a reaction to structuralism, which it supersedes). Either way, 'poststructuralism', in effect an umbrella term covering many practices, names a most consequential methodological shift away from explanation by origin, fixed or closed signification, to a concern with the plurality and instability of meaning, self-disruptive texts and the contingency of existence. It is now widely believed that poststructuralism was favoured to appear in the 1960s in France because of the watershed year 1968 with its radical and outspoken politics against the *establishment* (e.g. the student and worker riots in Paris in May), with which some of the French intelligentsia associated structuralism itself.

Possibly the most outstanding difference between the two critical approaches stems from their different theoretical allegiances: despite the fact that it too capitalises on the overarching import of language, poststructuralism plays up both its suspicion towards (hence its departure from) the foundational theory of structuralism, linguistics, and its various, sometimes tenuous and subversive, affiliations with and critique of philosophy, psychoanalysis, social sciences, etc.

Paul Ricoeur regarded structuralism as 'Kantianism without the transcendental subject' due to its search for structures of intelligibility located not in a subject but in cultural systems. In a similar vein, then, poststructuralism is a response to German post-Kantian philosophy, viz. to Hegel's emphasis on a total history,[118] in that it attempts to debunk the overarching epistemological claims of totalizing theories in general, and of structuralism in particular. Hence the poststructuralist coming of age with Jean-François Lyotard's *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, 1979[119] (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984): in a

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[117] You may find the term hyphenated in some of the entries in literary dictionaries and studies that address it.

[118] Likewise, Hegel's 20th-century follower Georg Lukács praises the 'organic work of art' of realist persuasion over avant-garde fragmentariness and montage.

[119] Lyotard's Report was commissioned by the Conseil des Universités of the Quebec government in order to frame the discussion of incorporating computers into higher education.

manner of speaking, poststructuralism as a critical approach has worked as a consciousness-raising device for what Lyotard calls the postmodern[120] 'incredulity towards meta-narratives' by challenging and ultimately breaking them up. The intertwining between the two has been captured in Sarup's concise definition, 'postmodernism is poststructuralism in the arts' (1993: 133).

Some of the early proponents of poststructuralism were initially among the leading figures of structuralism and semiotics, e.g. Roland Barthes, and their 'poststructuralist' bias is sometimes disputed, e.g. Michel Foucault. Others, however, e.g. Jacques Derrida, built their reputation

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[120] Here are brief definitions of some of the critical terms that are bound to pop up in this chapter, for which I have relied mainly on Madan Sarup (1993: 130-133). A word of caution from the outset: *-ity* ending nouns refer to historico-cultural periodizations, while *-ism* ending nouns refer to cultural movements and aesthetic styles.

- *Modernity* refers to 'the cluster of social, economic and political systems brought into being in the west from somewhere around the 18th century onwards'; it 'implies the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and differentiation of the modern world', e.g. 'the separation of fact from value, of the ethical from the theoretical spheres' (130).
- *Postmodernity* (as ambiguous a term as poststructuralism) 'suggests what came after modernity' (chronologically speaking) and 'refers to the incipient or actual dissolution of those social forms associated with modernity'. 'Instead of the certainty of progress, associated with "the Enlightenment project", there is now an awareness on contingency and ambivalence. … Puritan asceticism has given way to the pleasure principle' (130).
- *Modernism* 'concerns a particular set of cultural and aesthetic styles associated with the artistic movement which originated around the turn of the [20th] century and have dominated the various arts until recently'. It developed 'in conscious opposition to classicism' in its 19th century avatar, viz. realism, by emphasizing experimentation and aiming at 'finding an inner truth behind surface appearance', yet it is hard to reach a consensus on its 19th century exact beginnings (131). Many of the features of modernism also appear in definitions of postmodernism, e.g. aesthetic reflexivity and self-referentiality, fragmentation of narrative (chronological) structure and of the self/subject in favour of montage, quotation and pastiche.
- *Postmodernism* is 'the culture of postmodernity', viz. a 'movement in advanced capitalist culture, particularly in the arts' (131). Ever since Lyotard's seminal report, *The Postmodern Condition*, 'postmodern theory became identified with the critique of universal knowledge and foundationalism' (132). Some of the features of postmodernism include the blurring of boundaries and hierarchies between art and everyday life as well as between high and low art (quite likely also inspired by the ready-mades of modernist artist Marcel Duchamp), stylistic eclecticism and mixing of codes, parody, pastiche, irony and playfulness, and, in the wake of Foucault and Derrida, an inclination to 'textualize' everything, i.e. to treat history, philosophy, sociology, jurisprudence, etc. as 'kinds of writing' or discourses.

precisely on advocating from the outset a systematic dismantling of structuralist claims. However, poststructuralism also informs a host of other theories, e.g. the feminist approaches of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, which makes 'poststructuralism' not simply an umbrella term but also a mode of thought in its own right, just as structuralism is. A caveat is necessary at this point: poststructuralism has a built-in propensity for undecidability which structuralism not only lacks, but actually programmatically attempts to suppress or overcome.

Tel Quel, the Parisian avant-garde journal for literature founded by Philippe Sollers, acted as a catalyst for a poststructuralist direction of inquiry in French theory for as long as it was published (1960-1982). Its articles were signed, apart from Sollers, by Roland Barthes, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, Umberto Eco and others, some already distinguished structuralists and semioticians. One of the major areas of concern (for writers like Kristeva and Derrida) was to explore the signifying potential of language as a creative way to counteract traditional philosophy's and criticism's engagement with determining truth and meaning as stable, circumscribed by singular and unambiguous terms, and leading to, rather than being effects of, signification.

Poststructuralist writers have started to dismantle the western *ideology* (*largo sensu*, viz. a system of ideas) of reason, order and morality as mediated by various institutions (from systems of thought to state institutions). Likewise, they have challenged the assumption that the sciences describe a world of objective facts, viz. they both shun any subjective interference of the scientist and are not mere discourses that, as Foucault has proved, 'construct schematic orders of power/knowledge out of a flux of experience' (Ryan 1999: 68). Starting with *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, 1961 (*Madness and Civilization*),[121]

Michel Foucault did pioneering work in the social sciences, arguing that the outward rationality and civilization of western social life are underpinned by the disciplinary and carceral, themselves premised on the banishment of alternate modes of thought. His insights have provided a springboard for research in the genealogy of various academic disciplines, particularly in the social sciences, inspiring sociologists (Bryan S. Turner, Arthur W. Frank) and feminist philosophers (Judith Butler, Susan Bordo) alike. A number of feminists have attempted to prove that the normalizing institution of Oedipalized heterosexual family relationships (as posited by Freudian psychoanalysis) is symptomatic of the workings of patriarchy, (hetero)sexism and capitalism as a repressive mechanism for disciplining a

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[121] *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique. Folie et déraison* (1961) was first published in English in an abridged version, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965), and completely as *History of Madness* (2006).

multiplicity of desires, identities, sexual drives into compartmentalized and stable, hence predictable and more easily manageable, individual identities. An important train of poststructuralist thought has focused on the tenuous relationship between the 'real' and simulation: in the wake of Jean Baudrillard's studies of 'simulacra and simulations', arguing as they did that the West has reached the age of 'hyperreality', various theorists have considered the condition of the image in late 20th century life, and particularly the 'aestheticization of everyday life' (Featherstone 1991).

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that various poststructuralist tenets and directions of inquiry were completely unprecedented: German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is often mentioned as the most outstanding precursor, but other names too are important, e.g. French philosopher Georges Bataille. Nietzsche (1844-1900) famously challenged the universalist claims of western philosophy and of Christianity, both of which he accused of hegemonic dominance and freezing of thought ('petrifaction'), i.e. a reduction of the heterogeneous flux of life to orderly structures and moral segregation.[122] Confronted with philosophy's quest for truth, Nietzsche adopted an 'attitude of sceptical rigour' and argued that truth 'preserved itself simply by effacing the metaphors, or figurative discourse, which brought it into being' (Norris 1982: 57). Moreover, philosophy's tyrannizing imposition of reason destroyed the element of joy (the 'Dionysian' suppressed by classical Greek tragedy), hence life, in the enterprise of human understanding.

In short, Nietzsche's philosophical project reveals the need to problematize philosophy's taken-for-granted oppositions between metaphor and concept, body and mind, etc., and its leanings on the second term of each binary pair as symptomatic of the will to power. In his turn, Bataille (1897-1962) contends that the apparent homogeneity of western society, organized as it is around the project of rational utility and appropriation, comes from the repression of heterogeneity and the material totality of nature, and likewise of pure enjoyment and expenditure. Furthermore, Bataille construes society's 'perverts', the centrepiece of his inquiry, as explorers of the limits between nature and culture, whose undermining of the moral values of normative culture exposes the latter's repressive bias. Both philosophers thus adumbrated the poststructuralist twofold concern with the hegemonic discourse of reason in philosophy and sciences, with its subsequent suppression of heterogeneity, and the demonization of whosoever breaks the norms of rational normality (by recourse to the rhetoric of defamation).

Deconstruction

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[122] Hence his famous and often misprized cry that 'God is dead' (viz. God has been killed and petrified in sterile discourse).

Initiated by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)[123] in France in the late 1960s as a post-phenomenological and poststructuralist philosophical activity, deconstruction has been variously presented as a philosophical position, an intellectual or political strategy and a mode of reading. Once deconstruction was taken up in American academic circles as 'applied poststructuralism' (Barry 1995: 70), it attained widespread recognition thanks to Derrida's disseminators, disciples and/or translators, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Geoffrey Bennington, among many others. Some of them, e.g. Barbara Johnson,[124] not only applied deconstruction specifically to literary texts, but also attempted to spell it out as a reading technique, thus making Derrida's at times arcane theorizing more accessible to students of literature in particular, at a time when deconstruction had just begun to gain recognition in France.

Derrida's first three studies, all published in 1967, *De la grammatologie* (*Of Grammatology*, 1974), *L'écriture et la différence* (*Writing and Difference*, 1978) and *La Voix et le phénomène* (*Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 1973),[125] alongside the 1972 collection of lectures, *La Dissémination* (*Dissemination*, 1983), undertook a critique of major assumptions of 'western metaphysics'[126] (like Nietzsche and Heidegger before him), from Plato to J.J. Rousseau to Husserl's phenomenology, as well as of structuralism (Saussure's linguistics and Lévi-Strauss' anthropology) and Freud's psychoanalysis. Quite importantly, in all three 1967 books Derrida uses the word *déconstruction* in passing to describe his project. At this point, as remarks David Allison, the translator of *Speech and Phenomena*, 'deconstruction' signifies

> a project of critical thought whose task is to locate and 'take apart' those concepts which serve as the axioms or rules for a period of thought, those concepts which command the unfolding of an entire epoch of metaphysics. 'Deconstruction' is somewhat less negative than the Heideggerian or Nietzschean terms 'destruction' or 'reversal'; it suggests that certain foundational concepts of metaphysics will never be entirely eliminated, even if their importance may seem to be effectively diminished.

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[123] It has been remarked that Derrida's mixed and marginal (colonial) origin – as an Algerian-born Frenchman of Jewish stock – could account for the attacks deconstruction mounts on traditional western thought (which he calls *logocentrism*).

[124] Barbara Johnson is often associated with the 'Yale School' of academic literary criticism, alongside Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and Harold Bloom, although this last critic is anything but a deconstructor.

[125] The English edition of *La Voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* gathers together Derrida's texts, *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), 'Form and Meaning' (1967) and 'Différance' (1968).

[126] Derrida's 'western metaphysics' names philosophy as well as everyday thought and language.

(Allison, in Derrida 1973: xxxii n.1)

Quite importantly, though deconstruction purports to prove that meaning is ultimately impossible, it does not proceed, as the term might suggest at first glance, by 'textual vandalism' (Johnson, in Derrida 2004: xv).

Western metaphysics (*logocentrism*), according to Derrida, is predicated on hierarchically organized polar opposites (or dichotomies), e.g. nature/culture, good/evil, light/darkness, man/woman. The second term of the binary pair is in fact devalued as 'the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it' (Johnson, in Derrida 2004: viii). For instance, in the 'good vs. evil' dichotomy, the traditional Christian interpretation of 'evil' is 'the absence of good'; 'absence' is generally regarded as 'the lack of presence'.[127] Thus, what is ostensibly a mere *oppositional* pair (e.g. the 'A vs. B' dichotomy would be read in terms of Aristotelian logic as 'B is non-A') turns out to be *hierarchical*, with the first term privileged over the second, viz. given *priority* in both the temporal and qualitative sense; it achieved this status only by demoting the other element. This, Derrida contends, is an operation whereby certain concepts emerged as such by obliterating other elements, henceforward deemed the un-thought, even unthinkable, of western metaphysics.

According to Derrida, dichotomous and hierarchical thought provided the bedrock of the traditional criteria of certainty, truth and identity characteristic of *logocentrism*. As Crasnow cogently remarks in his entry on deconstruction, both aspects of this name – the fact of being *centred*, and the *logos as centre* – are significant (Fowler, ed. 1987: 54). The western philosophical concern with the centre is symptomatic of a mode of conceptualizing the world, but especially conceals its very workings, i.e. the operations of exclusion by which a self-appointed norm or standard is created and made the necessary manifestation of the centre. This goes hand in hand with the appointment of logos as the guarantor of the centrality of the centre, especially in view of the history of the concept of logos. The Greek term *logos* ('word'), with implications of rationality and wisdom (considering Platonic and post-Platonic philosophy in ancient Greece), was easy to reify as a cosmic intellectual principle and to dub divine *Sophia* ('wisdom') by certain early Christian thinkers, the Gnostics.

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[127] The 'man/woman' pair has traditionally been conducive to radical interpretations: e.g. 'The female is, as it were, a deformed male' (Aristotle's biologism); 'Distinguished women... are as exceptional as any monstrosity... for example a gorilla with two heads' (Le Bon, 1879, about accomplishments dependent on what is now termed gender identity and roles). Modern discourse (illustration included) about *human* anatomy conceives it in *male* terms, with female anatomy shown as different in certain respects; think of the illustration of the lungs and/or heart you are familiar with from school: the outline of the upper torso is likely to be male in most, if not all, anatomy books.

The concept of Sophia was in fact an augmentation of the first verses of the Gospel after John, equating God with the Word. Once construed as the originator of discourse (itself originary, truthful and creative), God, whom the Judaeo-Christian religion conceived at once as the only self-sufficient being and as disembodied creator, could therefore be invoked as the guarantor and model of human discourse (viz. the quest for truth) and creation. However, the attributes that the divinity is imagined with make the entire process of legitimation of human endeavour one divorced from immanence and the material, i.e. one premised on transcendence and the spiritual, thereby being deployed to justify hierarchical binary oppositions that malign corporeality and the material.

By the same token, positing the centrality of the (divine) Logos assumes an ostensibly unmediated form of *presence of the truth in the mind* as the unmistakable source of certainty, hence the western *metaphysics of presence*. It is precisely this need for positing a unified being as a self-knowing reflexive consciousness that could lead to the Cartesian *modus operandi*, doubt, famously formulated by Descartes as *dubito, ergo cogito... ergo sum* ('I doubt, therefore I think… therefore I exist'). As Derrida put it in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (originally a lecture delivered at the Johns Hopkins University in 1966 and subsequently included in *Writing and Difference*):

> the entire history of the concept of structure … must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the centre receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix ... is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word.
>
> (*Writing and Difference* 1978: 353)

Derrida has most famously critiqued the Saussurean model of the linguistic sign: there is no such thing as a unity called 'sign' simply joining a signifier and a signified, since there is no one-to-one set of correspondences between them. Hence, the sign is a *structure of difference* or, in Barbara Johnson's (in Derrida 1974: xvii) succinct formulation, 'such is the strange "being" of the sign: half of it always "not there", and the other half always "not that"'. That the signifier keeps transforming into signifieds can be proved by how any word is defined, viz. by means of other words which themselves need defining by recourse to yet other words, etc., so that no final signified can be reached which is not a signifier in itself. In the process, *the meaning is continually deferred*. The structure of the sign, then, is determined by the *trace* (which in French implies trace, track, footprint, imprint, mark) of the other which is forever absent. This chain of signifiers has led Derrida to posit the notion of *différance*, a coinage that puns, in French, on the meanings of the verb *différer* ('to differ' and 'to defer'), to

suggest the instability of language and signification. On the one hand, the 'meaning' of a signifier only emerges after reading the structure it belongs to, but it can be modified by subsequent signifiers. On the other hand, meaning is context-bound, so that a certain sign will never be the same in different contexts. In either case, the sign bears the trace of the signs preceding it and replaced by it, and of the signifieds excluded so as to make meaning in that context. Given this instability of signification, it is a fallacy, according to Derrida, to still subscribe to the western metaphysics of presence with its logocentric bias. Traditionally, philosophy has addressed the certainty of knowledge by recourse to the notion of immediate presence (e.g. positivism and phenomenology). Furthermore, spoken discourse is believed to capture the immediacy of presence through the voice, and to render it accurately as a true picture of one's thought (*phonocentrism*). Writing is traditionally deemed to be only a representation of speech:

> a secondary substitute devised for use only when speaking is impossible … a second-rate activity that tries to overcome distance by making use of it: the writer puts his thought on paper, distancing it from himself, transforming it into something that can be read … even after the writer's death. This inclusion of death, distance, and difference is thought to be a corruption of the self-presence of meaning….
>
> <div align="right">(Johnson, in Derrida 2004: ix)</div>

Once Derrida contends that signs mask an absence, that they only refer to other signs in an endless chain, there can be no question of any presence or 'now' in the discourse, and with this no originary plenitude of speech, hence the western tradition of prioritizing speech over writing is a gross self-deception.

Since writing is actually no more mediated or artificial than is speech itself, this dichotomy obscures an originary *arch-écriture* ('arche-writing'), which indeed makes the object of Derrida's early project: to elaborate a science of writing, *grammatology* – an impossible project under the auspices of Derrida's critique of logocentrism. What Derrida's conundrum highlights is precisely the inescapability of the categories of logocentrism: to show that hierarchical dichotomous thought is erroneous is also to show that it cannot be opposed without in fact repeating the very same erroneous operation.

Derrida's coinage, *arch-écriture*, refers to a more generalized notion of writing, wherein the written introduced an originary breach between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed. This breach – that afflicts everything, including the notion of self-presence – can be separated out to reveal two claims regarding spatial differing and temporal deferring, viz. *différance*. Writing is split, is different from itself (hence, *differed*), by the absence that makes it necessary, the empirical addressee: you write something down lest you should forget it or so as to communicate something to someone who is not there.

Deferral, also typical of the written, captures the notion that the meaning of a certain text is never entirely present, but constantly subject to postponement: the meaning is not realised even if you try and circumscribe the future by reference to a specific date or event, but it is subject to yet another future that can also never be present. Derrida's *arche-writing*, then, refers to the way in which the written is possible only on account of this originary deferral of meaning that ensures that meaning can never be definitively present, alongside its difference from itself.

In his early writings, Derrida describes the general strategy of deconstruction as comprised of two *phases*. First, it operates a *reversal* of the 'violent hierarchy' in a traditional Platonistic binary opposition (*Positions*, 1972)[128] – an operation which also exposes the decision that instituted the hierarchy at the beginning of the metaphysical tradition. Second, it *re-inscribes* the previously inferior term, e.g. *différance* (with a change in its spelling to indicate the change in its status) or *supplément*, as the 'origin' or 'resource' of the opposition and hierarchy itself into which metaphysics 'cut' in order to make its decision. Hence, the second phase operates 'a reversal of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system' (*Marges de la philosophie*, 1972, Derrida's emphasis; qtd. in Culler 1982: 85-6).

> To 'deconstruct' philosophy is thus to work through the structured genealogy of its concepts…, but at the same time to determine, from a certain external perspective…, what this history may have concealed or excluded, constituting itself as history through the repression in which it has a stake.
>
> (Derrida, *Positions*, qtd. in Culler 1982: 86).

Later in his career, Derrida moves to a more political definition of deconstruction: in 'Force de loi', 1989-90 ('The Force of Law', in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, 1992), he argues that deconstruction is practised in two *styles* – which, however, do not correspond to the earlier 'two-phase' definition. One, the *genealogical style* (recalling the history of a concept as practised in *Of Grammatology*), now concerns the history of justice; the other, a more formalistic or *structural style* of deconstruction, examines a-historical paradoxes or aporias (Lawlor 2006).

In 'Et cetera… (and so on, und so weiter, and so forth, et ainsi de suite, und so überall, etc.)', Derrida will formalize the principle of

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[128] 'In a traditional philosophical opposition we do not have a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is, above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy' (Derrida, *Positions*, qtd. in Culler 1982: 85).

deconstruction beyond these aporias, thus providing its third definition ('Et cetera', in *Deconstruction: a User's Guide*, 2000):

> Each time that I say 'deconstruction and X (regardless of the concept or the theme)', this is the prelude to a very singular division that turns this X into, or rather makes appear in this X, *an impossibility* that becomes its proper and sole possibility, with the result that between the X as possible and the 'same' X as impossible, there is nothing but a relation of homonymy, a relation for which we have to provide an account…. For example, here referring myself to demonstrations I have already attempted…, gift, hospitality, death itself (and therefore so many other things) can be possible only *as impossible*, as the im-possible, that is, unconditionally.
>
> <div align="right">(Derrida, qtd. in Lawlor 2006; Lawlor's emphasis)</div>

As Lawlor (2006) perceptively remarks, Derrida's attempts at defining deconstruction throughout his career suggest 'the kind of thinking' in which this practice engages: one 'that never finds itself at the end' because it is at once 'impossible' and therefore necessarily to be made 'possible in countless ways'. Barbara Johnson's work has been decisive in disseminating and explaining Derrida's theoretical insights. For a reader-friendly exposition of the major philosophical thrust of deconstruction I will quote her definition extensively:

> If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not meaning but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. … [D]econstruction is a form of what has long been called a *critique*. A critique of any theoretical system is not an examination of its flaws or imperfections. … It is an analysis that focuses on the grounds for that system's possibility. The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being what they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself. … Every theory starts somewhere; every critique exposes what that starting point conceals, and thereby displaces all the ideas that follow from it. The critique does not ask 'what does this statement *mean*?' but 'where is it being made from? What does it presuppose? Are its presuppositions compatible with, independent of, and anterior to the statement that seems to follow from them, or do they already follow from it, contradict it, or stand in a relation of mutual dependence such that neither can exist without positing that the other is prior to it?'
>
> <div align="right">(Johnson, in Derrida 2004: xv-xvi; her emphasis)</div>

In an oft-quoted definition from her introduction to *Dissemination*, which she reverted to time and again with minor alterations as below, Johnson argues that in the actual practice of reading (literary) texts

> [d]econstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction'. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo'…. The *deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself.*
>
> <div align="right">(Johnson 1980: 5, my italics)</div>

Here Johnson resorts to a metaphor of violence ('war'), somewhat echoing Derrida's, to spell out what he has attempted to render by coining *différance*: the reader's activity of 'teasing out' may suggest a form of benign structuralist optimism that the hidden may be successfully 'unravelled', yet the 'trace' of the other meaning of the verb ('to gently move hairs or threads that are stuck together so that they become loose or straight again') recalls the famous Derridean understanding of the *text as texture*.[129] Not only is signification *not* a 'given' of/in the text, and stable and unique at that, but it is also only to be glimpsed in the 'strife' ('war') between signifiers in their chain and likewise between the traces they carry. In Culler's (1982: 86) words, 'the practitioner of deconstruction works within the terms of the system but in order to breach it'. This may apply equally well, as Derrida's work demonstrates, to both philosophical and literary texts:

> to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise.
>
> <div align="right">(Culler 1982: 86)</div>

B. Major representatives

Poststructuralism
Roland Barthes (1915-1980). As I have already mentioned in the chapter on structuralism, 'La Mort de l'Auteur' (1968) / 'The Death of the Author' (1977)[130] may well be regarded as the watershed in Barthes' career,

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[129] A text's 'woven texture – a web that envelops a web' (*Dissemination* 63), which anticipates the hypertext of the Internet, makes a specific text a small part of a network of texts (all other texts): not only does intertextuality loom large (maybe too large for a structuralist), but 'meaning' itself is endlessly deferred from text to text in a chain of 'free floating signifiers' (in Fredric Jameson's phrase).

[130] Mention should also be made of the controversial successor of this Barthesian essay, Michel Foucault's 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?', 1969 ('What is an Author?', 1977b). For Foucault, the 'author' is merely a function of discourse, whose 'existence' is time-, culture- and discourse-bound rather than immanent, and comes about from a complex operation of projection symptomatic of 'our way of handling texts'. Thus, the traditional construct of the author refers to a rational entity that is 'assigned a "realistic" dimension as we speak of an individual's "profundity" or "creative" power, his intentions or the original inspiration manifested in writing'.

symptomatic as it is of his poststructuralist bias in later years: the essay posits that each text's plurality of meanings actively created by the reader through a process of textual analysis. In *Le plaisir du texte* (1973) / *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) he contends that although reading for pleasure is a kind of social act, it ultimately leads to the bliss (*jouissance*) in reading, i.e. a loss of self (or immersion) within the text. Other poststructuralist studies: *Image/Music/Text* (1977) and *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (1980) / *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1981).

Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) and **Félix Guattari** (1930-92). An expression of the political environment in France during May 1968, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) develop many of Deleuze's philosophical concerns, e.g. immanent ontology, the affirmation of difference over transcendental hierarchy, and the position of the social and political at the core of being.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-98). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, presents his initial and highly influential formulation of postmodernism as 'incredulity towards metanarratives', viz. those totalizing stories about history and the goals of the human race that ground and legitimize knowledges and cultural practices. With respect to them, modernity, defined as the age of metanarrative legitimation, is at odds with postmodernity as the age metanarrative bankruptcy. Though undertaken as a study of the status of knowledge in computerized societies (commissioned by the government of Quebec and published in 1979), Lyotard's Report addresses the focus of its concern, the variable in the status of knowledge, as a problem of *legitimation*, viz. a question of knowledge and power, the intertwining notions that also features prominently in Foucault's work.

Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007). French 'transdisciplinary theorist of the end of modernity' (Kellner 2007), less influential in France than in the English-speaking world, he moved from a Marxian informed critique of consumer society to a radical departure from traditional political economy. *L'Échange symbolique et la mort*, 1976 (*Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 1993), and *Simulacres et simulation*, 1981 (*Simulacra and Simulations*, 1994), articulate the principle of a fundamental rupture between modern and postmodern societies: if modern societies are organized around the *production* and *consumption of commodities*, the postmodern ones are organized around

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Nevertheless, according to Foucault, these aspects of the 'author' derive from the teleological operations for meaning creation that individual readers perform, viz. 'in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice'. It has been remarked that both Foucault and Barthes ultimately derive their ideas from Nietzsche's proposition of the death of God (*Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*), 1882; *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*), 1883-84/1892), critiquing the traditional idea of God as a source of a universal moral code or teleology and ultimately the idea of a cosmic order and absolute values.

simulation and the *play* of images and signs, i.e. codes, models and signs are the organizing forms of a new social order where simulation rules. *Symbolic Exchange and Death* argues that western societies have undergone a 'precession of simulacra', in the form of 'orders of simulacra', from (1) the era of *the original* to (2) *the counterfeit* to (3) *the mechanical copy* and finally to (4) the simulated '*third order of simulacra*', viz. signs of culture and media that create the perceived reality, whereby the copy has replaced the original. This insight he elaborates on in *Simulation and Simulacra*, where he addresses the interaction between reality, symbols and society up to the present day. Baudrillard claims that in postmodern society the human experience itself can be ranked as a simulation of reality rather than reality itself: the mode of simulation governs just as much identity construction, the individual's perception, social life, as culture, economics and politics. Accordingly, the postmodern world is characterized by *dedifferentiation* or *implosion*, i.e. the collapse of (the power of) previously important boundaries and distinctions (e.g. social classes, genders, political leanings) and the loss of power of the autonomous realms of society and culture. Baudrillard contends that postmodern universe is one of *hyperreality*: entertainment, information and communication technologies (e.g. Disneyland and amusement parks, malls and consumer fantasylands, media simulations of reality, etc.) provide not just the codes and models that structure everyday life but experiences more real, intense and involving than everyday life does, hence the models, images and codes of the hyperreal come to determine thought and behaviour. At a later stage in his thought Baudrillard proposes, in *Seduction* (1979/1990), a soft alternative to the bourgeois ideal of production. He advocates artifice, games with signs and a play with appearances as a challenge against the deadly serious labour of production, thus setting up seduction as a neo-aristocratic aestheticism, an 'order of sign and ritual' with its own rules, charms and snares.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984). French thinker variously identified as a historian of social sciences and a philosopher, Foucault has encouraged the postmodern reappraisal of the humanistic and social scientific disciplines as well as philosophy. According to Gutting (2003), 'almost all of Foucault's works can be fruitfully read as philosophical in either or both of two ways: as a carrying out of philosophy's traditional critical project in a new (historical) manner; and as a critical engagement with the thought of traditional philosophers'. French avant-garde literature, with its exploration of limit-experiences (especially Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot), alongside the French tradition of history and philosophy of science, with its anti-subjective standpoints also reinforced in Saussurean linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalysis, not only primed Foucault for a marginalization of the subject in his early, structuralist, historical critique, but also suggested him the 'archaeological' and then 'genealogical' methods of writing history. Originating as it does in his academic study of psychology and his work in a

Parisian mental hospital, Foucault's first 'archaeological'[131] work, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*,[132] is at once a study of the emergence of the modern concept of 'mental illness' in Europe and its critique as a social and ethical product. It was not so much with *Naissance de la clinique*[133] (a critique of modern clinical medicine) as with *Les mots et les choses*[134] (a complex and nuanced critique of the origins of the modern human sciences) that Foucault already raised controversies. *Surveiller et punir*[135] marks the transition to what is generally characterized as Foucault's 'genealogical'[136] period. If archaeology 'supported a historiography that did not rest on the primacy of the consciousness of individual subjects' (Gutting 2003), its critical force, however, was restricted to the comparison of the different discursive formations of different periods, thus alleging the contingency of a given way of thinking. Genealogy was intended to remedy this deficiency by investigating the causes of the transition from one way of thinking to another: 'The point of a genealogical analysis is to show that a given system of thought (itself uncovered in its essential structures by archaeology, which therefore remains part of Foucault's historiography) was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends' (Gutting 2003). In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault contends that imprisonment, the modern form of punishment replacing torture in the *ancien régime*, affords the blueprint for control of society at large, with factories, hospitals and schools modelled on the modern prison. Foucault's genealogical analysis 'shows how techniques and institutions, developed for different and often quite innocuous purposes, converged to create the modern system of disciplinary power' (Gutting 2003), with its three primary techniques of control: hierarchical observation (viz. hierarchically ordered

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[131] Foucault's structuralist leanings in his initial phase are formulated explicitly in *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969) / *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). "The premise of the archaeological method is that systems of thought and knowledge (*epistemes* or *discursive formations*, in Foucault's terminology) are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period' (Gutting 2003).

[132] *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique. Folie et déraison* (1961) / *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (trans. R. Howard, 1965) – abridged; *History of Madness* (trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, 2006) – unabridged.

[133] *Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical* (1963) / *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973).

[134] *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966) / *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970).

[135] *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (1975) / *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977).

[136] Foucault's term 'genealogy' was meant to evoke Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, particularly with its suggestion of complex, mundane, inglorious origins.

observers, so that observed data passes from lower to higher levels), normalizing judgement (viz. discipline through the imposition of precise norms) and the examination (viz. a control method that combines hierarchical observation with normative judgement, hence a prime example of 'power/knowledge'). Foucault's unfinished *Histoire de la sexualité*[137] was originally projected as a multi-volume work extending the genealogical approach of *Discipline and Punish* to the topic of sexuality, with the first volume intended as the introduction to a series of studies on particular aspects of modern sexuality (children, women, 'perverts', population, etc.). The project was meant to expose 'the various modern bodies of knowledge about sexuality (various "sciences of sexuality", including psychoanalysis) [as] hav[ing] an intimate association with the power structures of modern society', in that 'modern control of sexuality parallels modern control of criminality by making sex (like crime) an object of allegedly scientific disciplines, which simultaneously offer knowledge and domination of their objects' (Gutting 2003). Foucault meant to compare ancient pagan (*The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*) and Christian ethics (*The Confessions of the Flesh*, unpublished) through the test-case of sexuality and to trace the development of Christian ideas about sex (evil in itself) from the very different ideas of the ancients (good, natural and necessary, though subject to abuse).

Deconstruction
   Jacques Derrida (1930-2004).
Barbara Johnson (1947–). Any model of difference grounded on a polarized difference 'between entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence)' is necessarily founded upon 'a repression of differences within entities' (*The Critical Difference* 1980: x-xi). *A World of Difference* (1987) not only expands investigation beyond 'the white male Euro-American literary, philosophical, psychoanalytical, and critical canon' then dominant in the academe (p. 2) but also questions the 'sameness' of this white Euro-American literary and critical tradition through a thorough interrogation of its boundaries. Johnson's inclusion of black and/or women writers in her 'canon' of *A World of Difference* gets a theoretical correlative in *The Feminist Difference* (1998), a critique of key feminist terms that examines feminism in terms of the differences within and between various orientations.
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942–). Indian-born postcolonial theorist who describes herself as a 'para-disciplinary, ethical philosopher', Spivak debuted with the translation of and preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*

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[137] *Histoire de la sexualité. Vol. I: La Volonté de savoir* (1976), *Vol. II: L'Usage des plaisirs* (1984), *Vol. III: Le Souci de soi* (1984) / *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I: An Introduction* (1978), *Vol. II: The Use of Pleasure* (1985), *Vol. III: The Care of the Self* (1986).

(1976). She has since been instrumental in disseminating deconstruction in the US: her applied deconstruction strategies cover anything from textual analyses to various theoretical engagements, e.g. poststructuralist literary criticism, feminism ('Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', 1983), Marxism ('Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', 1985) and postcolonialism (*The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, 1990; *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, 1999). As she argues in *The Spivak Reader* (1996), her intellectual pursuits concern 'the margins at which disciplinary discourses break down and enter the world of political agency': like Derrida's before, Spivak's deconstructive interrogations come from a marginal perspective (viz. the 'outside' of a third-world *woman*) while maintaining the prerogatives of a professional position of privilege in the American academe (*In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 1987; *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 1993). Hence her notion that the centre is also a margin, with the subsequent reconfiguring of the position and status of both the 'centre' and 'margins'.

Paul de Man (1919-1983). A member of the 'Yale School' of deconstruction, de Man elaborated a distinct form of deconstruction in his philosophically-oriented literary criticism of English and German Romanticism. There is continuity between his criticism and theoretical essays in the 1960s and his deconstructive work in the 1970s once he posits a break between the sign and its meaning. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971) critiques the formalist and New Criticist assumption that poetry is an organic, atemporal totality of meaning freed from the intentionalist and affective fallacies brought to bear on it by readers/critics. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (1979) further elaborates on this critique by analyzing passages in philosophy and fiction alike, whose metalinguistic function or metacritical implications best evince the dependency of figural language on classical philosophical oppositions central to western discourse. *The Resistance to Theory* (1986), in preparatory form at the time of his death and ultimately unfinished, re-examines the work of other theorists (M. Bakhtin and W. Benjamin) so as to 'determine what about the theoretical enterprise itself blinds it to the radicalness of reading and… to disengage this principle of blindness' or resistance (Godzich in de Man 1986: xi). The introductory essay, which gives the title to the collection, addresses the figural dimension of language and the way in which figurative meaning undoes the work performed by the literal meaning of the words:

> The resistance to theory is a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language, a dimension which is perhaps more explicitly in the foreground in literature (broadly conceived) than in other verbal manifestations or- to be somewhat less vague- which can be revealed

in any verbal event when it is read textually. Since grammar as well as figuration is an integral part of reading, it follows that reading will be a negative process in which the grammatical cognition is undone, at all times, by its rhetorical displacement

(de Man 1986: 17)

J. Hillis Miller (1928–). A member of the 'Yale School', Miller is often introduced to undergraduate students, courtesy of many readers of 20th century theory, virtually as the author of one text: 'The Critic as Host' (originally presented at a session of the MLA in 1976, and expanded in 1979). This influential essay deconstructs the very notoriety of deconstruction as parasitical on univocal reading; it achieves its critique by playing upon the etymological history of key terms (parasite, host, guest) so as to highlight the ultimate indeterminacy of signification as exposed by deconstruction.

Geoffrey Hartman (1929–). A member of the 'Yale School', Hartman argues in *Beyond Formalism* (1970) that despite the period's exhaustion of the New Critical model of reading and need for an engagement with socially more relevant criticism, ultimately some kind of formalism will always recur in criticism. *The Fate of Reading* (1976) calls for a more creative view of the critical act, a poetics attempting to avoid the fallacies of structuralism by highlighting the critic's own style; this general project of 'psychoaesthetics' is further developed in *Criticism in the Wilderness* (1980). 'The Interpreter's Freud' (originally presented as the 1984 Freud Lecture at Yale, and first collected in *Easy Pieces*, 1985) uses Wordsworth to illuminate Freud at the same time as it explicitly displays Hartman's position as a deconstructionist and his poetics of psychoaesthetics: the essay purports to demystify the Freudian dream of a purified language 'by accepting the romantic literary vision of the curative, but not ultimately curing, power of "messy" artistic mediation' (O'Hara in Hartman 2004: 6).

C. **Key terms**

Poststructuralism
- **Grand narrative** (*grands récits*) **/ metanarrative / master narrative** (Lyotard): total philosophy of history which regulates decision-making and the definition of 'truth', thereby *legitimating* the status quo. Hence, by making ethical and political prescriptions for society (roughly comparable to the everyday notion of the founding principles of society), meta-narratives form the basis of the *social bond*, e.g. the ideal of a progressive liberation of humanity through science (in the Enlightenment), the quest for a universally valid philosophy for humanity, or the quest for socio-political and economic emancipation and egalitarianism (in Marxism).

- **Power/knowledge** (Foucault): a reversal of Francis Bacon's 'Knowledge is power', the Foucauldian phrase demystifies power as not being concentrated in repressive institutions and/or powerful individuals (as ordinarily assumed), but rather as being disseminated among a cacophony of social practices and situations; he likewise demystifies knowledge as not being neutral nor necessarily empowering. In effect, Foucault (1980) construes both power and knowledge as decentralized, relativistic, ubiquitous and unstable systemic phenomena; accordingly, he needs to investigate the pervasive and insidious mechanisms by which power 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives'. In so far as knowledge is linked to power, it not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true; hence, discourse ('knowledge') in an institution (e.g. education, medicine, religion) *constitutes* 'reality', 'normality', 'the subject', i.e. it transmits and privileges ideas of what is normal ('valuable', 'good', 'normal'). Working as it does towards the 'normalization' of subjects, the discourse implicitly marginalizes those who do not hold those values, hence the *power relations* it institutes.

  > There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.
  >
  > (Foucault 1977a: 27)

  Nonetheless, Foucault does not construe the effects of power as entirely negative (i.e. as excluding, repressing, censoring), but rather as *productive* of reality. Moreover, a discourse is never totally 'pure': it will always contain some measure of counter-discursive elements or hide interstices that can potentially engender resistance.
- **Disciplinary power** (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, chap. 7): an *internalized* form of surveillance (connected to the rise of capitalism) whose basic goal is to produce docile people, so that each person disciplines him-/herself. Disciplinary power is especially important in the policing of sexual confession.
- **Disciplinary technologies** (Foucault): capitalism's '*techniques of discipline*' meant to produce docile people that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.
- **Discourse formation** (Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, chap. 2): a *system of representation* whose rules and practices produce meaningful statements and regulate knowledge in different historical periods, i.e. it provides a language for talking and reasoning about a particular topic at a particular historical moment (e.g. hysteria, sexuality, homosexuality in late 19th century). Hence the famous Foucauldian *constructivist* stance:

the discourse formation constructs the topic (i.e. it defines and produces the objects of our knowledge) and not the other way round.

- **Simulation** (Baudrillard): the creation of a real through conceptual models presented by the media; as these models are accepted by the masses, the simulation becomes our perception of reality, viz. in the process of simulation representations of things come to replace the things being represented ('substituting signs of the real for the real itself') – so much so that the representation becomes more important than the 'real thing'. There are four orders of simulation: (1) the sign reflects a basic reality, hence representation is 'of the order of sacrament'; (2) 'the sign masks and perverts a basic reality', hence it is an evil appearance: of the order of malefice'; (3) the sign masks the absence of a basic reality, hence it 'plays at being an appearance: it is of the order of sorcery' (e.g. Disneyland 'is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation'); (4) the sign 'bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum', viz. it simulates a simulation, hence 'it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation' (e.g. the 'escalation of the true, of the lived experience' in the TV footage of the Gulf War rendered it as unreal, or 'hyperreal', as a video game is, while at once being mistaken for the actual facts, viz. 'constituting' reality rather than 'informing' viewers of actual facts).
- **Simulacrum** (pl. **simulacra**) (Baudrillard): a system where empty signs refer to themselves and where meaning and value are absent, as the condition produced through the process of simulation.
- **Hyperreality** (Baudrillard): a condition in which 'reality' has been replaced by *simulacra*, i.e. the erstwhile division between 'real' and simulation has collapsed, and the illusion has become the reality: 'The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: that is the hyperreal... which is entirely in simulation'.

Deconstruction (Derrida)
- **Logocentrism**: the name Derrida uses for western metaphysics (viz. any 'science of presence', from philosophy to everyday thought). He critiques the belief that knowledge is rooted in a primeval language (now lost) given to humans by God (or some other *transcendental signifier*: the Idea, the Great Spirit, the Self, etc). Logocentrism has often been justified by reference to John 1.1 ('In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God') so as to claim an irrefutable foundation for (and hence to legitimize) all human thought, language and action as manifestation of the Truth. The divinity is perforce construed as the foundation for dichotomous thought, viz. thinking in binary oppositions (e.g. God/man, spirit/matter, man/woman,

good/evil, nature/culture, etc), where the first term is valorized over the second one.

- **Binary oppositions** (originally used by the *structuralists*): the hierarchical relation of elements that results from *logocentrism*. Derrida looks into the margins, the supplements as constitutive of the centre.

- *Différance*: a term coined by Derrida as 'an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring' (*Of Grammatology* p.23)[138] and likewise 'the source of linguistic value' (p.52). It merges the (spatial) differing and (temporal) deferring aspects involved in *arche-writing* by playing upon the distinction (observable solely in writing) between the audible and the written in Derrida's *différance* and the French noun *différence*. This move problematizes an entire philosophico-linguistic tradition of presence, from Plato to Saussure, wherein speech and writing are kept separate, and the latter is downplayed as an almost unnecessary addition to speech (see *supplement*). Derrida insists, however, that *différance* cannot be exhaustively defined, largely because it is 'neither a word, nor a concept' whose meaning is context-bound.

- **Arche-writing** (*Of Grammatology*): an originary and generalized writing, the condition of possibility of the now distinct species of writing and speech; it is still termed 'writing' so as to suggest that 'it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing', yet it can be captured only as the *trace* from which writing and speech have emerged. Derrida thus disputes the philosophical proposition of the 'derivativeness of writing', arguing instead for an understanding of the 'historical repression' manifest as 'the desire for a speech displacing its other and its double and working to reduce its difference'.

- **Trace** (*Of Grammatology*): not 'a master-word, [but one] that presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master' (Spivak, in Derrida 1974: xv); the trace is the mark of something absent that has never been actually present, it constitutes the present by its very relation to what is absent, hence it affords the only way in which language and the act of signifying can be understood: language is 'a play of traces' (*Margins of Philosophy*).

- **Supplement** (*Of Grammatology*): something that, allegedly secondarily (cf. Rousseau's definition of the *supplément* as an inessential extra added to something complete in itself), comes as an aid to something 'original' or 'natural' and thereby points to an *originary lack* (for otherwise what is complete in itself cannot be added to). In the case of writing vs. speech, the former is traditionally denigrated as doubly derivative (as '*representative* signifier of the first signifier,

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[138] Both English verbs, *to differ* and *to defer*, are translations of the same French verb, *différer*.

representation of the self-present voice'), while the latter is valorized as pure structure of presence-to-self.

> The logic of the supplement wrenches apart the neatness of the metaphysical binary oppositions. Instead of 'A is opposed to B' we have 'B is both added to A and replaces A'. A and B are no longer opposed, nor are they equivalent. Indeed, they are no longer even equivalent to themselves. 'Writing', for example, no longer means simply 'words on a page', but rather any differential trace structure, a structure that *also* inhabits speech. … Rather, the very notion of their identities [*writing* and *speech*] is put in question.
>
> (Johnson, in Derrida 2004: xiii)

However, considering the meanings of the French word *supplément* ('addition' and 'substitute'), it is always undecidable whether the supplement adds itself ('is a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence') or substitutes ('the supplement adds only to replace… its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness', OG 144): Derrida suggests that the supplement is both (OG 200).

▪ **Transcendental signified**: in logocentrism, the unquestionable meaning that exists outside language, hence which is not liable to the constant process of subversion inherent in signification, and to which all human signs seem to point to, e.g. the deity, the Idea, the World Spirit, the Self, etc.: 'the classical system's "outside"'… tak[ing] the form of 'the sort of extra-text which would arrest the concatenation of writing (i.e. that movement which situates ever signified as a differential trace)' (Derrida 2004: 5).

▪ **Transcendental signifier**: in logocentrism, the conceptualization of language as able to reach the ultimate meaning (the transcendental signified), which can thereby secure the meaning of all other signs: the 'lack, the voice, the break, etc., have been given the value of a signified or, which amounts to the same, of a transcendental signifier: the self-presentation of truth (veiled/unveiled) as *Logos*' (Derrida 2004). Derrida's deconstruction attempts to prove that 'reading… cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward the referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signifier outside the text whose content… could have taken place outside of language' (Derrida 2004: 158).

▪ *Sous rature* (Eng. **under erasure**) (*Of Grammatology*): a strategic philosophical device (originally developed by Martin Heidegger with reference to Being) whereby a word is typographically crossed out within a text yet still retained so as to highlight its simultaneous inadequacy *and* necessity, e.g. 'the sign~~is~~ that ill-named th~~ing~~ which

escapes the instituting question of philosophy' (Derrida, qtd. by Spivak, in Derrida 1974: xiv). This device is used in deconstruction to single out terms whose signifying status, according to Derrida's critique of western philosophy, should be challenged (in an overall critique of the signifying capacities of language) but which cannot be done without for lack of alternative, since any signifier has as its signified another signifier (cf. dictionary definitions of words), hence it always defers meaning and carries *traces* of other meanings.

- **Undecidable**: a radically unstable term which acts to disrupt systematization (e.g. *différance*).
- **Aporia**: according to Niall Lucy (*A Derrida Dictionary*, 2004, entry on 'aporia'), 'a Greek term denoting a logical contradiction, "aporia" is often used by Derrida to refer to what he often calls the "blind spots" of any metaphysical argument' (qtd. in Allen). Graham Allen refines this definition to 'a logical contradiction beyond rational resolution'. Nicholas Royle (in *Jacques Derrida*, 2003) writes that '"aporia" is loosely a rhetorical term for "doubt" or "difficulty in choosing", but more precisely it means a sort of absolute blockage, a 'No Way' ("aporia"… coming from ancient Greek, *a* "without", *porous*, "way" or "passage"). Aporia, as Derrida has described it, is a "non-road". … [It] entails "an interminable experience".… Like the experience of the undecidable, "the aporia can never simply be endured as such"' (qtd. in Allen). Calarco offers a brief overview of Derrida's '*plural* logic of the aporia' informing *Aporias: Dying–Awaiting (One Another at) the Limits of Truth*: aporia operates '1) as a nonpassage in the sense of an impermeability, an uncrossable border; 2) as a nonpassage stemming from the fact that there is no limit, or a limit that is so permeable as to not limit crossing; 3) and as a nonpassage in the sense of an antinomy or contradiction without solution, without a method or path that would allow us to find our way through' (Calarco 2003).
- **Dissemination**: the proliferation of textual meaning in all directions, thus resisting closure, yet not to be seen as a negative process which must be contained but as the necessary precondition for writing to exist at all. In so far as it imports meaning into the text (and not always accepted meanings), dissemination – which lies at the very core of language – turns the work into text, opening it for textuality and intertextuality. In discussing dissemination Derrida plays on the double meanings of 'seed'/'term'/'germ' and semantics ('polysemy'), all of which constitute the effect of dissemination. Dissemination, in its affinity with the *trace*, points out that there is no originating moment; furthermore, it cannot be severed from the *graft*.

- **Graft**: an understanding of *textuality* (similar to Kristeva's notion of *intertextuality*)[139] as only readable within the operation of 'reinscription': 'The heterogeneity of different writings is writing itself, the graft. It is numerous from the first or it is not" (Derrida 2004: 390). Time and again, Derrida explains text production not as an Apollonian enterprise but as 'an incision that is not apparent in the thickness of the text', a form of 'sustained, discrete violence' by means of 'a calculated insemination of the proliferating allogene through which the two texts are transformed, deform each other, contaminate each other's content, tend at times to reject each other, or pass elliptically into the other and become regenerated in the repetition, along the edges of an overcast seam' (Derrida 2004: 389-390).

D. **Application of deconstruction**

Deconstruction attempts to dismantle the binary oppositions which govern a text by focusing on the *aporias* or impasses of meaning, viz. inherent contradictions or paradoxes within a text (which work as built-in deconstruction). A deconstructive reading will therefore identify the logocentric assumptions of a text and textual binaries and hierarchies, with a view to demonstrating how a logocentric text always undercuts its own system of logic. Of course, there is no *one* way of actually deconstructing a literary text, as there is in fact no one way of doing any other type of reading. Moreover, it depends on one's critical and deconstructive experience and sophistication; in what follows I will be relying mainly on Barry (1995: 73-79) to map out how deconstruction can be applied by 'beginners'.

The deconstructionist technique is concerned with:

a. an oppositional reading of the text (viz. 'reading the text against itself') so as to expose the 'textual subconscious', whose meanings may be directly contrary to the surface meaning;

b. foregrounding the surface meanings of the words (e.g. similarities in sound, the root meanings of words, a 'dead' or dying metaphor) as they are crucial to the overall meaning;

c. showing that the text is characterized by disunity; this is achieved by 'close reading', viz. the intensive analysis of a single passage, whose findings will make it impossible to sustain a 'univocal' reading, as the language explodes into multiplicities of meaning;

d. looking for discontinuities, viz. shifts and breaks ('fault lines') of various kinds in the text as evidence of what is repressed or glossed over or passed over in silence by the text.

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[139] 'Every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts. The notion of intertextuality comes to take the place of the notion of intersubjectivity' (Kristeva, *Semiotikè*, qtd. in Culler 2002: 163).

Hence, deconstruction can be applied by following the steps in a three-stage model (Barry):

1. at the *verbal stage* do an analysis similar to 'close reading':
- look in the text for paradoxes and contradictions at the purely verbal level;
- identify if there is anything in the text which can lead to a reversal of the polarity of common binary oppositions, so that the second term will become privileged and regarded as the more desirable; what you achieve is an awareness that the text works at once a recognizable version of the world we live in and its inversion too, which shows that the signifier*s* are at war with the signified;
2. at the *textual stage* have a more overall view of the text: look in the text for shifts or breaks in the continuity of the text (e.g. shifts in the person of the pronoun or in the verb tense, indicative of a change in viewpoint) and omissions (e.g. of the subject; of reason for doing something), which reveal instabilities of attitude, hence the lack of a fixed and unified position;
3. at the *linguistic stage*: look for moments in the text when the adequacy of language itself as a medium of communication is called into question, viz. implicit or explicit reference to the unreliability of language (e.g. saying that something is unsayable; saying that language inflates or deflates or misrepresents its object but continuing to use it anyway).

After such a deconstructionist reading, the text may emerge, predictably, as an 'angst-ridden, fissured enactment of linguistic and other forms of indeterminacy' (Barry 1995: 77). Rob Pope (2002) suggests a deconstructive reading focused on four main issues:

1. binary opposition and plural differences – through an examination of
   - main contrasts and tensions, especially binary oppositions,
   - hierarchies resulting from polarities preferred before their opposites,
   - other, plural differences expressed or suppressed (so that things are seen differently);
2. centres and margins – by unravelling
   - what is central,
   - what is marginal or ignored completely, which can thus become an alternative centre of interest and valuation,
   - whether there is any limit to the number of different centres (de-centring and re-centring);
3. closed and open structures (or the interplay between wholes and holes):
   - describe the text or language as a whole, viz. complete and unified in itself,
   - identify the text or language as a series of holes through which fragments of other worlds or words can be glimpsed;
4. 'grand' and 'small' narratives, local and global images, factional and metafictional hi/stories

- are there any larger narratives (e.g. psychological, political, scientific, religious) that the text draws on? (is the text an episode in a global cultural history?)
- on a smaller scale, is the text a configuration of peculiarly local and unique effects?
    o is the text fiction or fact (viz. story or history)?
    o can the text be seen as blending the factional and hi/story?
    o is there a metatextual dimension?

Pope's model may possibly be more appropriately applied by readers who have already tried their hand at the three-stage model proposed by Barry. Combining the two, plus suggestions from deconstructive criticism, at a later stage of critical practice will quite likely help readers create their own deconstructive strategy adapted to a particular text's challenges.

E. **Outcome**

It has been pointed out that the relevance of deconstruction to literary studies (as pioneered by Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller at Yale) consists in its theoretical and conceptual insights rather than in a critical method as such (hardly explicitly on offer even in Barbara Johnson's studies) or in reaching final interpretations (completely at odds with its basic premises). Crasnow argues that many critical issues are open to deconstruction, as 'Derrida's way of thinking will radically revise what a reader expects to do with a text': for instance, 'our concern with authors evinces a desire for origin, to serve as interpretive closure; and realist representation is precisely an illusion of presence' (Crasnow, in Fowler 1987: 56). Moreover, in actual practice, 'the most effective teaching that would derive from deconstruction would begin by emphasizing how much more meaningful the text might potentially be… by deciding to respect its silences, or respect its forking paths (instead of starting immediately on moments of self-reflection)' (Johnson, interviewed in Salusinszky 1987: 162-3). Of course, a mechanical deployment of deconstruction in reading literary texts (like of any other critical approach, in fact) risks reducing all texts to simple or more sophisticated demonstrations of logocentrism and aporia. Arguably, practising deconstruction in literary studies can be an opportunity for learning to ask questions larger than those explicitly connected with the text under scrutiny. While there is no political program in deconstructive criticism, unlike in other kinds of criticism, e.g. Marxist, there is, as Barbara Johnson has remarked, 'a *political attitude*, which is to examine authority in language, and the pronouncements of any self-constituted authority for what it is repressing or what it is not saying' (interviewed in Salusinszky 1987: 167; my emphasis). Hence Johnson's poststructuralist metacritical rhetorical questions regarding (the Foucauldian) power/knowledge in the essay 'Teaching Ignorance' (concerned with the late 20th century inclusion of Molière's *School for Wives* in the French curriculum):

Could it be that the pedagogical enterprise as such is always constitutively a project of teaching ignorance? Are our ways of teaching students to ask *some* questions always correlative with our ways of teaching them *not to ask* – indeed, to be unconscious of – others? Does the educational system exist in order to promulgate knowledge, or is its main function rather to universalize a society's tacit agreement about what it has decided it does not and cannot know? And is there some fundamental correlation between the teaching of ignorance and the question of femininity?

(Johnson 1987: 76-7; her emphasis).

However, according to a leading deconstructionist like Barbara Johnson herself, deconstruction cannot be applied head on to every single socio-political issue, specifically, 'where it begs the question to say "it's undecidable"': 'You have not, at all, accounted for the fact of fascism, the fact of disadvantageous conditions of life. … What you have to figure out is how to ask questions that would *take* the impossibility of answering a question like that, alongside the social system that acts as if there is an answer, and then analyze the relation between these two' (Johnson, interviewed in Salusinszky 1987: 170). Feminism might be one of the areas where deconstruction could meet the need 'to articulate the relation between equality and difference, or between disregarding difference and re-articulating it: a system in which things both are different and are not different. That sort of logic is one that Derrida develops' (Johnson, interviewed in Salusinszky 1987: 169). However, as she perceptively argues, 'women are socialized to see more than one point of view at a time, and certainly to see more than their own point of view. … [W]omen are all trained, to some extent, to be deconstructors' (ibid.), which, by having deconstruction blend in with the very type of socialization its female practitioners have received, may undermine its social significance.

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