

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
LITERARY CRITICISM

VOLUME 8
FROM FORMALISM TO POSTSTRUCTURALISM

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

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The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism will provide a comprehensive historical account of Western literary criticism from classical antiquity to the present day, dealing with both literary theory and critical practice. The *History* is intended as an authoritative work of reference and exposition, but more than a mere chronicle of facts. While remaining broadly non-partisan it will, where appropriate, address controversial issues of current critical debate without evasion or false pretences of neutrality. Each volume is a self-contained unit designed to be used independently as well as in conjunction with the others in the series. Substantial bibliographical material in each volume will provide the foundation for further study of the subjects in question.

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VOLUME 8

*From Formalism to
Poststructuralism*

EDITED BY
RAMAN SELDEN



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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RAMAN SELDEN had completed most of the editorial work on this volume by the time of his sadly early death. He had fulfilled, with characteristic efficiency and good judgement, his brief to commission a first-rate team of contributors, to help work their chapters into the form of a systematic history, and to write an introduction. Professor Selden was the founder and first Director (1984–5) of the Centre for Seventeenth-Century Studies at the University of Durham, and author of *English Verse Satire, 1590–1765* (1978), *Criticism and Objectivity* (1984), *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1985), *John Dryden: Absalom and Achitophel* (1986), and *Practising Theory and Reading Literature* (1989). His other publications included *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present: A Reader* (1988) and (co-edited with Harold Brooks) *The Poems of John Oldham* (1987). From Durham he became Professor of English at Lancaster University and latterly held the same post at Sunderland Polytechnic (now the University of Sunderland).

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INTRODUCTION

RAMAN SELDEN

In the late nineteenth century, Germanic philology initiated the rise of *scholarship* in the English-speaking university world; in the 1920s, the writings of T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards launched the era of *criticism*. To risk a third sweeping generalization, we may regard the period between the mid-1960s and the present day as the age of *theory*. The present volume explores the major critical movements of the period since 1960, also taking account of relevant earlier developments. The critical writings of Todorov, Barthes, Derrida and Iser have more in common with the Classical and Renaissance philosophers and rhetoricians than with the preceding period of British and American criticism. The dominance of continental European philosophy and poetics over the positivist and empirical traditions of British thought has marked a major break in criticism – a sort of geological shift. ‘Feeling’, ‘intuition’, ‘life’, ‘tradition’, ‘organic unity’, ‘sensibility’ are no longer the dominant terms of critical discourse. A dominant humanistic discourse has begun to give way to the languages of formalism, structuralism, and phenomenology. Of course, the new theoretical modes sometimes preserve humanistic perspectives: Wolfgang Iser’s reception theory, for example, is founded upon the human *experience* of the reader. However, the structuralist tradition has proved more resistant to reappropriation by humanisms of one kind or another. It is this theoretical ‘anti-humanism’ which marks a real break with the era of ‘criticism’. These generalizations cannot disguise the fact that resistance to ‘theory’ has been ubiquitous.¹ But if we are to understand these controversies we must remember that ‘theory’ is a term which possesses at least three meanings in this context. First, it alludes to the scientific ambition to master and define a conceptual field. Secondly, the term is used to refer to those critical discourses which aim to disrupt

¹ See Laurence Lerner (ed.), *Reconstructing Literature* (Oxford, 1983); Geoffrey Thurley, *Counter-Modernism in Current Critical Theory* (London, 1983); A. D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London, 1983); Patrick Parrinder, *The Failure of Theory and the Teaching of English* (Brighton, 1987).

such mastery, truth-seeking, and systematic closure; paradoxically, they sometimes adopt a radically anti-theoretical stance.² Thirdly, 'theory' may connote a poetics or aesthetics concerned not with interpretation of texts but with theorizing discourse in general. The third mode of theory is especially offensive to traditional critics who are struggling to protect the boundaries of their literary discipline.

It would be wrong to see the sequence of theories presented in this volume as an unfolding progression. Within Russian Formalism there are a number of diverging tendencies. Problems of classification abound. To take a single example, the so-called Bakhtin School (Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev) combines formalist and Marxist perspectives. The political complexities of this amalgam are such that historians of criticism find it difficult to agree whether the School is essentially formalist or Marxist. The critical concepts which evolved from Saussurean linguistics have been dispersed and disseminated in various unpredictable ways. The concept of the sign, for example, is a site of endless debate. At one extreme, the texts of classical structuralism attempt a definitive description of every kind of social structure. For them, a structure governs a determinate system of signs in which the individual sign is a fixed component linking signifier and signified in happy solidarity. At the other extreme, the grammatology of Derrida and the later writings of Roland Barthes destabilize the sign's integrity by releasing within it the warring forces of signification which earlier structuralists had sought to contain.

It is extremely difficult to divide the general history of twentieth-century literary criticism into coherent groupings. This is partly because the histories of criticism in different countries have not followed the same trajectories. Cultural particularities have given quite different accents to the paradigms of critical discourses. For example, while there has been a dominant formalism in every cultural tradition, the patterns of dominance have differed, and the modes of formalism have been differently articulated. The late reception in the West of Russian Formalism and Czech structuralism entailed a general belatedness in European and American critical awareness. While there are similarities between New Criticism and Russian Formalism, the latter was moving rapidly towards a structuralist position as early as the late 1920s.

The lines of twentieth-century criticism in this volume were intended to trace the developments following the period of geological shift. However, no account of the formalist and structuralist phases in critical history can avoid returning to the early twentieth century for the crucial antecedents

² See Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, 'Against theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1982), 723–42.

of the movements which dominated the later twentieth century. The late 'discovery' of Ferdinand de Saussure, Russian Formalism and Czech structuralism has the effect of foreshortening an evolving set of critical practices which have had a long and distinguished history in Eastern Europe. In order to do it justice, this volume returns to the period before the emergence of New Criticism, and, leaping over for the most part the 1940s and 1950s, proceeds to follow the later developments in structuralist criticism during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

A second major critical path stems from German hermeneutic and phenomenological philosophy. There are points of debate and convergence with the structuralist tradition, and Derrida's critique of structuralism was partly inspired by the problematics of Heideggerian thought, although, as one would expect, Derrida relentlessly exposes phenomenology's dependence upon the notion of 'real presence'.³ Nevertheless, the German preoccupations with existential questions have produced a distinctive type of critical discourse. Paul Ricoeur argues that phenomenology is more nuanced than structuralism and treats language not as a differential system of units but as a means of referring to an existential situation.⁴ In this respect, the phenomenologists can claim to be a powerful group of theorists who still carry the banner of humanism.

Politically and historically oriented types of literary criticism are to be treated in a separate volume. However, it would be wrong to regard the issues of the formalist, structuralist, hermeneutic and phenomenological criticisms as having no bearing on questions of history and politics. Where appropriate, the impact upon such questions is rehearsed and explored. In chapter 8, Celia Britton specifically examines the assimilation of the structuralist legacy in Freudian and Marxist critical theories. But, for the most part, this volume is focused upon three of Roman Jakobson's famous linguistic functions: message, code, receiver (see chapter 3). These functions correspond roughly to the formalist, structuralist and reader-response types of criticism. However, the functional categories are easily elided and inverted. For example, the Geneva School's phenomenology of reading in practice restores authorial consciousness to a central position in the reading process: the reader's consciousness is identified with textual structures which are in turn expressions of the author's consciousness. Lacanian critics, working with an amalgam of psychoanalysis and Saussurean linguistics, treat literary texts as loci of transference psychoanalytic exchanges between readers, authors and textual signifiers. Even though the rationale for separating textualist

³ See Robert Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend* (W. Lafayette, IN, 1984), part 1.

⁴ Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL, 1974).

and reader-oriented approaches from the more culturalist (Marxist, psychological, feminist, anthropological, sociological and other) criticisms is rather limited, it is possible to outline a set of problems which govern the theories explored in this volume. They can be fallen under three heads: the linguistic model; the poetics of indeterminacy; the existential problematic.

The linguistic model

An implicit debate which runs through several chapters of this history of criticism concerns the status of the model of structure provided by structuralist linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure envisaged a scientific enterprise which was anti-positivist in its epistemology. Saussure believed that the only way to isolate a systematic level of linguistic structure was to take the focus off the flux of language change (diachrony) and its complex and unpredictable referential functions, and to study its synchronic aspect – the signifying system which enables each and every individual utterance. At a time when logical positivists were rigorously distinguishing between referential and pseudo-referential linguistic propositions in the search for a rigorously logical form of language capable of describing the world, Saussure was theorizing languages as a differential sign system with no positive terms.

He called the science of signs ‘semiology’ and claimed that his linguistic discoveries would lead the way to an expanded semiology which would uncover the systems underlying every form of social interaction. The subsequent history of structuralist thought has left uncertain the status of the linguistic model within this larger enterprise. Some structuralists have adopted the view that the linguistic model provides a universally valid structural theory. Claude Lévi-Strauss’ anthropology is a classic example: Roman Jakobson’s phonology (with its binary phonemic analysis) becomes the precise model for Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist analyses of kinship relations, myth, gastronomy, totemism, and so on. In contrast, those using the term ‘semiotics’ often challenge the empire of linguistics, arguing that each system has its own specific structural characteristics, and that the structure of language is not paradigmatic. The semiotic theory of C. S. Peirce (1839–1914) has been helpful in distinguishing between fundamentally different kinds of sign: the ‘icon’, the ‘index’ and the ‘symbol’. The icon signifies through resemblance (a portrait resembles its sitter); the index signifies metonymically and causally (smoke is an index of fire); the symbol is a conventional sign (as Saussure understood it). Only in the case of the third type is the connection between signifier and signified arbitrary. The dominance of Saussure’s linguistics has had the effect of limiting the dissemination of Peirce’s distinctions and of

preventing questions of representation and causation from entering the semiotic model.⁵

The scientific ambitions of structuralist theories required the rigorous exclusion of history and referentiality. It is arguable that the various structuralist and poststructuralist revisions of Marxist and psychoanalytic theories are not truly structuralist insofar as they require an ultimate grounding of structures in history or in subjective experience. A strictly structuralist history is possible in the form of a succession of synchronically functioning systems, but cannot provide an explanation of systemic mutation.

By subordinating *parole* to *langue* and by bracketing out the referential function of language, Saussurean structuralism dramatically undermined humanist and romantic assumptions about intentionality and creativity. Roland Barthes' celebrated essay, 'The death of the author', pushed these implications to their limit, provocatively announcing the demise of authors and celebrating the productivity of readers, who set in motion the semiosis of texts. The radical 'anti-humanism' of French structuralism is not directly derived from Saussure, and the formalists and Czech structuralists had already removed the humanist subject from the agenda of literary poetics. Indeed, even T. S. Eliot's theory of tradition and the individual talent reduces the writing subject to an inert catalyst in a process of textual production. However, a frankly anti-humanist stance did not emerge until the period of French structuralism and *nouvelle critique*. This subjectless scientificity dominated a whole range of French structuralist thought in philosophy, anthropology, narratology, and manifested itself in the *nouveau roman*.

The linguistic model also promoted the notion of a rigorously systematic science of structures. Ambitious attempts to delineate a coherent and comprehensive theory were especially apparent in Russian Formalism, Czech structuralism and French narratology. In 1929, Roman Jakobson summarized the aims of Czech structuralism: 'Any set of phenomena examined by contemporary science is treated not as a mechanical agglomeration but as a structural whole, and the basic task is to reveal the inner, whether static or developmental, laws of this system' (quoted in chapter 2, below, p. 37). In many ways this statement, which was written near the time of the famous Jakobson–Tynjanov theses, expresses the structuralist ambition in its most comprehensive form. The qualifying 'whether static or developmental' reminds us that, at this early stage, there was a bold

⁵ See Robert Brinkley and Michael Deneen, 'Towards an indexical criticism: on Coleridge, de Man and the materiality of the sign', in *Revolution and English Romanticism*, ed. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (New York and London, 1990), pp. 275–300, for an attempt to construct a revised literary semiotics based on an indexical notion of the sign.

attempt to reject the Saussurean privileging of the synchronic over the diachronic. French structuralism later returned to the less ambitious conception of structure, one which abandons all attempts to include the diachronic aspect of structures. One might argue that structuralism would never have climbed to the dizzy heights of scientific grandeur had it not abandoned the Czech comprehensiveness. The concluding remarks in Lubomír Doležel's chapter draw a reverse conclusion: 'A reduction of twentieth-century structuralism to its French stage greatly distorts its history and its theoretical achievement . . . Prague School structuralism had aimed to reshape all perennial problems of poetics and literary history into a coherent and dynamic theoretical system' (see below, p. 57).

The poetics of indeterminacy

There was no precise moment of transition from structuralism to poststructuralism. There was certainly a waning confidence in the scientific aspirations of French structuralism, which seems to have been given a decisive impetus by the students' protests in the late sixties. The new cultural pluralism which developed in the late sixties and early seventies (women's, gay and black militancy being especially significant) issued in a critical pluralism which undermined attempts to develop definitive systems and theories. Many newly articulated concepts, such as 'patriarchy', 'gynocriticism', 'logocentrism', 'difference', and 'heterogeneity', aimed to decentre the governing cultural codes and to prevent the institution of any master code.

It is possible to trace a number of consequential divergences within more or less coherent critical movements of the 1960s. For example, the semiotic movement divides between the rationalist and objective work of writers such as Jonathan Culler and the subversive and destabilizing semiotics of the so-called *Tel Quel* writers, notably Julia Kristeva (see below, chapter 00). The crucial motivation of Kristeva's semiotics was the felt need to centre semiotics upon the theory of the speaking subject. Semiotics fused with psychoanalysis and became reformulated as 'semanalysis'. The political motivation was no less important. Whereas the politics of structuralism was openly unengaged, the semiotic theories of *Tel Quel* were just as openly transgressive. Kristeva's semiotic theory, despite her subsequent abandonment of its radicalism, influenced a wide range of trends in later literary criticism, especially those associated with Marxism, psychoanalysis and Bakhtinian historicism. However, the rejection of mastercodes inevitably produces a politics of difference, change and resistance rather than of doctrinal truths.

While the Saussurean concepts remained in play in many post-structuralist theories, the emphasis was very much on *play*. Even in his

early structuralist phase, for example in *Critique et vérité* (1966), Barthes' alertness to textual plurality and indeterminacy distinguishes him from more orthodox structuralists such as Greimas and Todorov. Barthes' theories of hedonistic reading and Derrida's celebration of 'free-play' as opposed to the ossifying systems of structuralism contributed to a complete reorientation of American criticism. However, there are clear differences between the French radical poststructuralist thought and its American epigoni. Art Berman has helpfully defined the philosophical differences. He shows that American deconstruction is grounded in a romantic 'irony'. Its 'existentialized' version of deconstruction is concerned with certain dichotomies of human experience (reason and feeling, science and poetry, etc) which preoccupied the romantics. Consequently 'The theoretically infinite openness of language', the 'freeplay' which Derrida bases upon *différance* and the subversion of the signified, is used by Miller and de Man to support indeterminacy in critical interpretation and by Hartman to support a criticism based on freedom, on unconstrained creative pleasure and self-revelation.⁶ Mystical, Heideggerian and Kabbalistic quests introduce a distinctly non-Derridean foundationality to the master's refusal of every foundation. The American deconstructors give Derrideanism an existential turn.

The anti-foundational thrust of poststructuralist theories has a number of radical implications for literary studies. Structuralist poetics had already questioned the assumption that 'interpretation' was the central task of literary study. The point is not to accumulate alternative interpretations of texts but rather to explain the plurality of interpretations. Jonathan Culler undermined a central plank of New Criticism when he pointed out that 'unity' is simply one possible reading strategy which could be invoked.⁷ During the 1940s and 1950s, literary critics never questioned the concept of unity, which was a metaphysical absolute, constituting criticism's fundamental structural category. Perhaps the most disturbing effect of anti-foundationalism is to put in question disciplinary boundaries. The writings of Derrida, in particular, relentlessly transgress and reject the binary oppositions which govern the protocols of academic discourses. The category of 'writing' (*écriture*) precedes any other founding principle and eradicates the conventional boundaries between literary and non-literary texts. Derrida rejects the notion of the 'formal specificity of the literary work'.⁸ The relations between literature and philosophy have been the focus of lively debates among deconstructive critics (see Rorty,

⁶ Art Berman, *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction: The Reception of Structuralism and Poststructuralism* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), p. 229.

⁷ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London and Henley, 1981), pp. 68–71.

⁸ Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1981), p. 70.

below, pp. 175–84). While de Man goes as far as to claim that ‘Philosophy turns out to be an endless reflection on its own destruction at the hands of literature’, Derrida is inclined to preserve the more general category of ‘writing’ which may be best exemplified in certain modern literary texts, but he is not willing to exempt literature from implication in the metaphysics of presence. This broadened notion of ‘textuality’ has the effect of reducing the autonomy of ‘the literary’ and of opening up literary study in the direction of cultural studies.⁹ It is yet to be seen if traditional literature departments will survive in institutions of higher education.

The existential problematic

A key moment in the history of philosophy is Heidegger’s existential turn away from the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl. Husserl’s transcendental subject, while also being the object of investigation, gives meaning to its own history and being. In contrast, Heidegger stresses the idea that human subjects are formed by the historical and cultural conditions of their existence. Since individual subjects can never be fully conscious of the conditions of their existence, their understanding is pre-formed and not secured by a transcendental ego. This primordial understanding is the object of phenomenological study, and Heidegger uses the term ‘hermeneutics’ to describe the attempt to interpret this ‘foreknowledge’ which precedes every human act of cognition. In its most radical form, which Paul Ricoeur calls the hermeneutics of suspicion, Heidegger’s argument¹⁰ shows that the primordial understanding of the subject tends to cover up its own lack of foundation: our consciousness is always grounded in a groundless terrain whose motions are determined somewhere else (in the unconscious, or in historical or linguistic forces). This branch of phenomenology leads directly into the poststructuralist emphasis upon heterogeneity and indeterminacy.

The importance of the phenomenological perspective for poststructuralist positions (Derrida’s celebrated deconstruction of structuralism is partly a development of his critique of Heidegger, especially in *L’écriture et la différence – Writing and Difference*) does not disguise the fundamental differences between them. Heidegger rejects the Cartesian ego (the notion of a self contemplating the world), and asserts the ‘being there’ (*Dasein*) of human existence – ‘Being-in-the-World’. He attacks all forms of dualistic thought which have the effect of separating subjects from the world in which they exist. However, his critique of dualisms, so reminiscent of

⁹ See Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962), p. 359.

Derrida's deconstructive readings, always returns to the fundamental grounding concept of Being, an almost mystical wholeness, the awareness of which is the test of the individual's authentic existence. Most literary criticism which draws upon phenomenological thought preserves this concern for the experiential substrata of consciousness. Indeed, the essential contrast between structuralists and the hermeneutic-phenomenological critics lies in their view of language. Paul Ricoeur assumes the *derived* character of merely linguistic meanings, and the key philosophers in the field 'refer the linguistic order back to the more fundamental structure of experience' (see below, pp. 280–5). Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy insists that all human understanding is grounded in the 'prejudice' of its own historical moment. The understanding of the past must involve the 'fusion' of the horizons of understanding which have conditioned every understanding intervening between past and present. The process of comparing and contrasting the various understandings will establish a sort of human solidarity – a recognition that human existence is inevitably subject to the processes of history. The School of Constance has developed forms of reader-oriented critical theory which share the holistic drive of Heideggerian thought: the reader's relations with texts are conceived as a complex dialectic in which subject and object merge in an experiential fusion.

Putting in question the division between subject and object is both the strength and the weakness of existential critical theory. In the work of Hans Robert Jauss there is a great advance in historical criticism. We are no longer presented with a view of a monumental literary work whose eternal objectivity commands the passive subjectivity of the reader. Iser's theory of reading, following the phenomenologist Ingarden, subtly distinguishes between the artistic work, the reader's 'concretization' of the work, and the work of art, which exists at the point of convergence between artistic work and the reader. That is, the work of art exists only *between* the subject and object; its existence is virtual. However, many problems arise from the dissolution of the Cartesianism of earlier positions. Phenomenological critics cannot agree about the extent of the reader's freedom to concretize the text or about the text's degree of indeterminacy. At times it appears that the determinate aspects of the text are governing the reader's aesthetic experience, while at others the reader's activity appears to be paramount. How 'adequate' must be the reader's response to the text's intentional structures? Such questions seem unresolvable. Robert Holub uses the phrase 'circles of thought' to describe Heidegger's speculations about the relations between 'art' and 'work of art'. The phrase sums up much of the interminable struggle involved in sustaining the holism of phenomenology.

There is little doubt that the traditions of critical thought which are represented in this volume have transformed the practice of literary criticism in the English-speaking academic world. And yet there seems to be no emerging consensus which could constitute a new paradigm. For some, the critical field has a disturbingly postmodern groundlessness: we can choose to become either reactionaries working on outmoded but workable models, committed formalists refining the methodologies of the masters, or *bricoleurs* reworking the rich plurality of theories and producing wonderful but fragile constructions. For some, the choices have an arbitrariness of the market economy about them; for others, the shifting boundaries and receding horizons are the very conditions of modernity.

RUSSIAN FORMALISM

Russian Formalism is a convenient label for a loosely knit group of critics whose signal role for contemporary literary studies can hardly be overestimated. They were born mostly in the 1890s, came to prominence in Russian letters during World War I, established themselves institutionally through the restructuring of academia after the Communist revolution, and became marginalized with the rise of Stalinism in the late 1920s. Though the affinities of Russian Formalism to some previous trends in Russian poetics cannot be denied (A. Potebnya's theory of poetic language, A. Veselovsky's historical poetics, or the metrics of the Symbolist poet-theoreticians A. Belyj and V. Bryusov), it represents a radical departure from the previously dominant mimetic theory of art. The Russian Formalists assailed the view of literature as an emanation of the author's soul, as a socio-historical document, or as a manifestation of a philosophical system. In this way, their theoretical orientation corresponded to the aesthetic sensibility of modernist art, in particular Futurism, with which the Russian Formalists were initially closely allied. It was the Futurist emphasis on the shocking effect of art and the understanding of poetry as the 'unfolding of the word as such' that found an analogue in Russian Formalist poetics.

Russian Formalism resists a totalizing historical synthesis for several reasons. First of all, from its very inception it was split geographically into two centres: the Moscow Linguistic Circle established in 1915, among whose members were Petr Bogatyřev, Roman Jakobson and Grigory Vinokur, and the Petersburg OPOJAZ (the Society for the Study of Poetic Language) founded in 1916, with such scholars as Boris Eikhenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky and Yuri Tynyanov. Though the relations between these two associations were friendly, they approached literature from somewhat different perspectives. According to the Muscovites, Bogatyřev and Jakobson, 'while the Moscow Linguistic Circle proceeds from the assumption that poetry is language in its aesthetic function, the Petersburgers claim that the poetic motif is not always merely the unfolding of linguistic material. Further, while the former argue that the

historical development of artistic forms has a sociological basis, the latter insist upon the full autonomy of these forms.¹

The incorporation of the Russian Formalists into the Soviet institutions of higher learning after the Communist revolution further encouraged the centrifugal tendencies within Russian Formalism and generated a variety of critical approaches that in one way or another claimed the Formalist label. OPOJAZ was dissolved in the early twenties, to be incorporated into the State Institute for the History of the Arts in Petersburg. The Moscow Circle – transformed by the departures of Jakobson and Bogatyřev in 1920 for Prague – became part of the State Academy for the Study of the Arts in Moscow. Members of this organization were deeply influenced by the philosophical ideas propounded at the State Academy by Edmund Husserl's pupil, Gustav Shpet. Such intellectual cross-pollination gave rise to what some commentators have termed the 'formal-philosophical school' of the late 1920s which rehabilitated many concepts and methods programmatically spurned by the early Russian Formalists.²

The heterogeneity of Russian Formalism stems not only from the vicissitudes of geography and politics but also from the methodological pluralism openly displayed by its practitioners. In his stock-taking article, 'The question of the "formal method"', Viktor Zhirmunsky characterized the Formal school in this way:

The general and vague name 'Formal method' usually brings together the most diverse works dealing with poetic language and style in the broad sense of these terms, historical and theoretical poetics, studies of meter, sound orchestration and melodies, stylistics, composition and plot structure, the history of literary genres and styles, etc. From my enumeration, which does not pretend to be exhaustive or systematic, it is obvious that in principle it would be more correct to speak not of a new *method* but rather of the new *tasks* of scholarship, of a new sphere of scholarly problems.³

Zhirmunsky was not the only Russian Formalist who insisted that this approach should not be identified with any single method. Other more radical proponents such as Eikhenbaum who on several occasions blasted Zhirmunsky for his 'eclecticism', concurred with him on this point.⁴ In Eikhenbaum's assessment:

The Formal method, by gradually evolving and extending its field of inquiry, has completely exceeded what was traditionally called methodology and is turning into a special science that treats literature as a specific series of facts. Within

¹ 'Slavjanskaja filologija', p. 458.

² Efimov, 'Formalizm', p. 56.

³ *Voprosy*, p. 154.

⁴ See, e.g., 'Metody i podchody,' *Kniznyi ugol*, 8 (1922), 21–3.

the limits of this science the most heterogeneous methods can be developed . . . The designation of this movement as the the 'Formal method', which by now has become established, thus requires a qualification. What characterizes us is neither 'Formalism' as an aesthetic theory, nor 'methodology' as a closed scholarly system, but only the striving to establish, on the basis of specific properties of the literary material, an independent literary science.⁵

Despite their agreement on the necessity of methodological pluralism, however, there is an important difference between Zhirmunsky's 'eclecticism' and Eikhenbaum's 'principled stance.' While Zhirmunsky characterizes Formalism somewhat nebulously as a 'new sphere of scholarly problems', Eikhenbaum identifies it as something much more concrete – a new 'independent literary science'. Perhaps by taking advantage of Eikhenbaum's insight, one could look for a more deep-seated identity for Russian Formalism. Beneath all the diversity of method there may have existed a set of shared *epistemological* principles that generated the Formalist science of literature.

Unfortunately, the Formalists' methodological pluralism is more than matched by its epistemological pluralism. The principle that literature should be treated as a specific series of facts is too general to distinguish either the Formalists from non-Formalists, or genuine Formalists from fellow travellers. A similar concern was voiced by earlier Russian literary scholars, and the autonomy of literary facts *vis-à-vis* other phenomena was never solved by the Formalists themselves. Neither did they agree on what the specific properties of the literary material are or how the new science should proceed from them.

The epistemological diversity of this new literary science becomes obvious when we compare those who were methodologically similar, for example, the two leading Formalist metricians, Tomashevsky and Jakobson. The former, rebutting the charge that the Formalists shirk the basic ontological issues of literary studies (that is, what literature is), wrote:

I shall answer by comparison. It is possible to study electricity and yet not know what it is. And what does the question, 'what is electricity', mean anyway? I would answer: 'it is that which, if one screws in an electric bulb, will light it.' In studying phenomena one does not need an a priori definition of essences. It is important only to discern their manifestations and be aware of their connections. This is how the Formalists study literature. They conceive of poetics precisely as a discipline that studies the phenomena of literature and not its essence.⁶

⁵ *Literatura*, p. 117.

⁶ 'Formal'nyj metod: Vmesto nekrologa', *Sovremennaja literatura: Sbornik statej* (Leningrad, 1925), p. 148.

Jakobson, in contrast, argues that such an *ad hoc* procedure was the *modus operandi* of old-fashioned literary scholarship. ‘Until now, the literary historian has looked like a policeman who, in trying to arrest a person, would, just in case, grab everyone and everything from his apartment, as well as accidental passers-by on the street.’ To pursue accidental phenomena instead of the literary essence is not the correct way to proceed, Jakobson insisted. ‘The object of literary science is not literature but literariness, i.e., what makes a given work a literary work.’⁷ Seemingly, the epistemological underpinnings of Formalist literary science were fluid enough to accommodate both Tomashevsky’s blatant phenomenism and Jakobson’s implied phenomenology.

Perhaps such a conclusion should not surprise us. After all, Eikhenbaum declared that epistemological monism – the reduction of the heterogeneity of art to a single explanatory principle – was the cardinal sin of traditional Russian literary scholarship:

OPOJAZ is known today under the alias of the ‘Formal method’. This is misleading. What matters is not the method but the principle. Both the Russian intelligentsia and Russian scholarship have been poisoned by the idea of monism. Marx, like a good German, reduced all of life to ‘economics’. And the Russians who did not have their own scholarly *Weltanschauung*, but only a propensity toward it, did like to learn from German scholarship. Thus, the ‘monistic outlook’ became king in our country and the rest followed. A basic principle was discovered and schemes were constructed. Since art did not fit into them it was thrown out. Let it exist as a ‘reflection’ – sometimes it can be useful for education after all.

But no! Enough of monism! We are pluralists. Life is diverse and cannot be reduced to a single principle. Blind men may do so, but even they are beginning to see. Life moves like a river in a continuous flow, but with an infinite number of streams, each of which is particular. And art is not even a stream of this flow, but a bridge over it.⁸

Given such an intrinsic vagueness of the label Russian Formalism it is not surprising that the historical demarcation of this trend from the contiguous literary-theoretical movements remains problematic. I have in mind in particular two critical schools whose intellectual affinities with Russian Formalism are more or less clear: Prague Structuralism and the neo-Marxian group headed by Mikhail Bakhtin. Let me illustrate this point through the writings of the three most authoritative historians of Russian Formalism: Victor Erlich, Jury Striedter, and Age Hansen-Löve.

The close genealogical link between Russian Formalism and the Prague School is undeniable. The two not only had common members (Bogatyrëv and Jakobson) but the Prague group consciously named themselves after

⁷ *Novejsaja*, p. 11.

⁸ ‘5 = 100’, *Kniznyj ugol*, 8 (1922), 39–40.

the Moscow branch of the Formal school – the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Also, several leading Formalists (Tomashevsky, Tynyanov, and Vinokur) delivered in the 1920s lectures at the Prague Circle, and thus familiarized Czech scholars with the results of their research. Given this close relationship, it is not surprising that Victor Erlich's trail-blazing work, *Russian Formalism*, contains a chapter dealing with the Prague School. To account for the repercussions of Russian Formalism in the neighbouring countries, Erlich introduces the umbrella concept of 'Slavic Formalism' whose Prague mutation is called 'Structuralism'. Although he points out the differences between what he terms 'pure Formalism' and 'Prague Structuralism',⁹ for Erlich the literary theory of the Prague School is ultimately a restatement of the 'basic tenets of Russian Formalism in more judicious and rigorous terms'.¹⁰

While Erlich's historical account tends to conflate Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism, Striedter's developmental scheme charts their gradual divergence. It presents the transition from Russian Formalism to Prague Structuralism as a process consisting of a three-stage reconceptualization of what the literary work of art is:

- 1 The work of art as the sum of devices, which have a de-familiarizing function whose purpose is impeded perception.
- 2 The work of art as a system of devices in specific synchronic and diachronic functions.
- 3 The work of art as a sign in an aesthetic function.¹¹

Only the first and the last stages of Striedter's model can be assigned unambiguously to Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism (respectively); the middle stage is the grey area to which both labels apply. In this way the two critical schools remain historically connected yet, at the same time, their theoretical distance is emphasized.

Although disagreeing about the relationship between Russian Formalism and the Prague School, the accounts by Erlich and Striedter share one assumption. The theorizing of the Bakhtin group, the two scholars maintain, clearly exceeds the boundaries of Russian Formalism. Erlich is particularly strict on this issue. He includes Bakhtin in what he calls 'neo-Formalist developments' but categorically denies him the Formalist label.¹² Striedter is somewhat more flexible, willing to subsume the Bakhtinians under the heading of Formalism. But he is also quick to

⁹ *Russian Formalism* (New Haven, 1981), pp. 154–63.

¹⁰ 'Russian Formalism', *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Enlarged Edition*, ed. A. Preminger (Princeton, 1974), p. 727.

¹¹ *Literary Structure*, p. 88.

¹² *Russian Formalism*, p. 10.

point out that they are merely the fringes of what he considers to be genuine Russian Formalism.¹³

Such a view of Russian Formalism is, however, challenged by the younger generation of Slavists. In the most comprehensive and meticulous book written on the subject, the Viennese scholar Hansen-Löve divides the history of the Formal school into three successive stages. The last stage in his scheme includes not only the sociological and historical approaches propounded by such 'clear-cut' Formalists as Eikhenbaum and Tynyanov, but also semiotics and the theory of communication. This is the approach advanced, according to Hansen-Löve, by the Bakhtinians and the psychologist Lev Vygotsky.¹⁴ According to this history, therefore, Bakhtin and his cohort are an integral part of Russian Formalism.

The historical relativity of the concept 'Formalism' illustrated above stems, I believe, from the peculiar mode of theorizing characteristic of this movement. The Russian Formalists demanded a wholesale reorientation of their discipline toward a scientific model. They insisted that to achieve this objective, literary study should proceed from two general principles: 1) It must identify as its subject of inquiry not the cultural domains concomitant to the literary process but literature itself, or more precisely, those of its features that distinguish it from other human activities. 2) It must eschew the metaphysical commitments traditionally underlying literary theory (whether philosophical, aesthetic or psychological) and approach 'literary facts' directly, without presuppositions.

The practical application of these two principles, however, entailed certain difficulties. Though the Formalists shared the general postulate about the specificity of literature, they never agreed on the nature of this specificity, and this disunity was exacerbated by their programmatic disregard for any epistemological criteria. Thus, in a seeming paradox, the proponents of a 'pure science of literature' indiscriminately borrowed their explanatory models from other disciplines and moulded their data according to a variety of pre-existent matrices.

This fact, however, does not imply that Russian Formalism failed to accomplish its programme. What saved it from disintegrating into a collection of idiosyncratic doctrines each claiming a privileged status was the 'eristic' mode of its theorizing. In its anti-foundationalism Russian Formalism regarded all scientific explanations (including its own) not as apodictic statements but as fallible hypotheses. 'We advance concrete principles', Eikhenbaum asserted in 1925,

¹³ 'Einleitung', in Felix Vodička, *Die Struktur der literarischen Entwicklung* (Munich, 1976), p. xlviii.

¹⁴ *Der russische Formalismus*, pp. 426–62.

and stick to them to the extent that they are justified by the material. If the material requires their further elaboration or alteration we elaborate or alter them. In this respect we are free enough of our own theories, as a science should be if there is a difference between theory and conviction. A science lives not by establishing certitudes but by overcoming errors.¹⁵

Mistrustful of any systematic account of scientific presuppositions smacking of philosophy, the Russian Formalists conceived of science as a contest among competing theories, a self-correcting process of elimination and attrition. It was the collective nature of their enterprise that enabled them to put this programme into practice. By proceeding from very dissimilar premises, the young scholars turned their presuppositions against themselves, undercutting, subverting and refuting each other. 'In the moment', Eikhenbaum declared,

that we ourselves are compelled to admit that we have a universal theory, ready for all the contingencies of past and future and therefore not in need or capable of evolving, we would have to admit that the Formal method had ceased to exist, that the spirit of scientific inquiry had departed from it.¹⁶

Thus, the historical trajectory of Russian Formalism is not the sum total of its theories – a static set of explanatory models derived from a variety of sources – but a *polemos*, a struggle among contradictory and incompatible views none of which alone could provide the absolute foundation of a new literary science.

Because the 'spirit' of Russian Formalism lies in its participants' agreement to disagree, the presentation of the movement requires a special strategy. I shall describe it through the various explanatory models of literary study that it advanced. At the same time, to preserve its polyphonic unity I shall reinscribe these models into the dialogical context that generated them. Their heuristic value consists in their ability to subvert, correct or supplement the theoretical models propounded by other students of literature, whether allies or enemies.

The machine

'In its essence, the Formal method is simple', Viktor Shklovsky claimed in 1923. It is 'a return to craftsmanship'.¹⁷ This statement epitomizes one particular concept of literary science among the OPOJAZ membership, the 'study of laws of poetic production',¹⁸ and generated an approach

¹⁵ *Literatura*, p. 116.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁷ *Sentimental'noe putestvoie: Vospominanija 1917–1922* (Moscow, 1923), p. 317.

¹⁸ Brik, 'T. n. "formal'nyj metod"', p. 214.

that I term 'mechanistic' Formalism. As mentioned above the chief target of Russian Formalist criticism was the mimetic theory of art, the conception of literary texts as a reflection of other realities. This metaphor, the Formalists argued, reduces man-made artefacts to mere spectral shadows and turns a blind eye to their corporeal materiality. To highlight this facet of art a new frame of reference was necessary and the machine-analogy fulfilled this need. Literary works, according to this model, resemble machines: they are the result of an intentional human activity in which a specific skill transforms raw material into a complex mechanism suitable for a particular purpose. Thus, whether a work incidentally mirrors the 'spirit of the time', or its creator's psyche is unimportant. What is essential is its fitness for a preordained task.

In examining what this task, this *telos* of art, is, the Formalists developed the concept of de-familiarization (*ostranenie*). The purpose of art is to change the mode of human perception, to render imperceptible formulas unusual and palpable. To achieve this, the phenomena of life (the art's matter) must be displaced from their automatized context and deformed by means of artistic devices. Here the Formalist argumentation split along the following lines. Some of the OPOJAZ members argued that since the immediate material of verbal art is language, literary devices are primarily linguistic. This thinking led to the concept of poetic language. In contrast, Shklovsky maintained that there are artistic texts that do not de-familiarize language but events and happenings represented in them. Consequently, he concentrated on the devices pertaining to prose composition and narrative.

Disjunction was the key logical principle by which mechanistic Formalism organized its basic notions. This principle split art decisively from non-art and expressed their mutual exclusivity in terms of polar opposition. The now famous pair, story and plot (*fabula* and *sjuzhet*) is an application of this binarism to artistic prose. Story is a sequence of events unfolding as it would in reality, according to temporal succession and causality. This series serves the writer as a pretext for the plot construction, the liberation of events from their quotidian context and their teleological distribution within the text. The devices of repetition, parallelism, gradation and retardation scramble the natural order of happenings in literature and render its form artistic. The events depicted are relegated to an ancillary position and deprived of any emotional, cognitive, or social significance. Their only value rests in how they contribute to the technique of the work itself.

Given the paramount role of the device in the mechanistic model, it is not surprising that the issue of its ontological status triggered the earliest dissent within the Formalist camp. In the most general sense, the device is the smallest monad of artistic form migrating freely from work to work.

As such it is clearly a universal, atemporal phenomenon. As a result, the history of literature would seem to be nothing but a repetition of the same – a permutation of identical devices under different disguises. The device enters an artistic form without any interaction with its other elements. This seems to be the gist of Shklovsky's slogan of 1921 that the 'content [soul] of the literary work equals the sum total of its devices'.¹⁹ His critics objected that the text is never a mere conglomerate of devices but an intrinsically unified whole which cannot be mechanically dissected into its constitutive atoms. But to see the work this way required another perspective and a metaphor unlike that offered by the mechanists.

The organism

Since the romantic revolution, the analogy between organic wholes and artistic phenomena has captivated the imagination of poets and critics alike. The biological metaphor provided the frame of reference for Russian Formalists dissatisfied with the mechanistic model. They utilized the similarity between organic bodies and literary phenomena in two different ways: as it applied to individual works and to literary genres.

The first analogy is quite straightforward. Like an organism, a work is a unified body comprised of correlated parts integrated hierarchically. Perceived this way, the text is no longer an additive whole but a 'system of devices'.²⁰ The purposive definition of the device (de-familiarization) is replaced by its functional explanation: the role it effects in a text. Since the binary opposition – material vs. device – cannot account for the organic unity of the work, Zhirmunsky augmented it in 1919 with a third term, 'the *teleological* concept of *style* as the unity of devices'.²¹

The second extension of biology into literary study pertains to general classes of literature. Just as each individual organism shares certain features with other organisms of its type, and species that resemble each other belong to the same genus, the individual work is similar to other works of its form and homologous literary forms belong to the same genre. The most famous Formalist study inspired by this analogy is Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), which sought to establish the generic identity of folkloric fairy tales. Propp approached this problem generatively. All existing tales, he believed, are transformations of a deep-seated invariant that distinguishes them from members of other genres. He detected a marked repetition of the same actions ('departure,' 'interdiction,' 'trickery') in all fairy tales, and these actions turned out

¹⁹ Rozanov: *Iz knigi 'Sjuzet, kak javlenie stilja'* (Petersburg, 1921), p. 8.

²⁰ Zhirmunsky, *Voprosy*, p. 158.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

to be locked in an identical order; one triggered another, and so on, until the entire sequence of events was concluded. It was this sequence – the basic narrative scheme of the fairy tale – that Propp identified as its transformational invariant.

By concentrating on the *Gestaltqualitäten* of literary phenomena, the organic Formalists managed to rectify what they perceived as a shortcoming in the mechanistic metaphor. However, like the mechanists they were unable to deal with the problem of literary change. Concerned with the identity of literary wholes in their internal regularity they had no place in their model for the vicissitudes of history. Thus, they willingly traded the insecurity of change for the certitude of sameness, and subordinated diachrony to synchrony. Propp made this choice explicit when he wrote: ‘Historical studies may appear more interesting than morphological investigations . . . However, we maintain that as long as there is no correct morphological study there can be no correct historical study.’²² It was this rift between system and history that the next Formalist model I shall discuss attempted to heal.

The system

We encountered the term ‘system’ earlier as it was used by Zhirmunsky to designate the integral nature of the text. But whereas the organicists considered the work of art a harmonious whole, the systemic Formalists conceived of it as a disequilibrium, a struggle among its components for dominance. This internal tension between the dominating ‘constructive factor’ and the subordinated ‘material’ accounts for the heightened perceptibility of artistic form. At the same time, the perceptibility of form is a historical phenomenon. It is not inherent in the text itself but comes about through the projection of the work against the background of the previous literary tradition, the set of norms, that is the literary system.

From this vantage point the process of literary change has a dialectic character: a negation of one ‘principle of construction’ (i.e., the deformation of a specific material by a specific constructive factor) which through wear and tear becomes imperceptible by another, opposite one. Juri Tynyanov, the chief systematicist, described in 1924 the logic of literary history as follows:

- 1) a contrastive principle of construction dialectically arises in respect to an automatized principle;
- 2) it is applied – the constructive principle seeks the easiest application;
- 3) it spreads over the maximal number of phenomena;

²² *Morfologija*, p. 26.

- 4) it is automatized and gives rise to a contrastive principle of construction.²³

In light of this concept of literary evolution as a struggle among competing elements, the method of parody, ‘the dialectic play of devices,’ becomes an important vehicle of change. In Tynyanov’s eyes, literary parody was less the mocking of the parodied model than the displacement of an old form – the automatized constructive principle – through changing one member of this relation. Nikolai Nekrasov’s parodies of Juri Lermontov are a case in point. Their mechanism was quite simple: ‘the combination of elevated rhythmical-syntactic figures’ (the constructive factor of Lermontov’s poetry), with an inappropriate material, “low” themes and vocabulary’.²⁴ These parodies marked the beginning of a significant switch in Russian verse from the smooth, elegant romantic canon toward the prosaic character of the civic poetry of the 1850s.

At this point it could be argued that Tynyanov’s scheme is simply a recasting of Shklovskian de-familiarization in historical terms. However, the systemic model went further: it attempted to close the gap between art and non-art that the mechanists had opened. The literary series, Tynyanov believed, belongs to the overall cultural system; within this ‘system of systems’ it inevitably interacts with other human activities in part because of the linguistic aspect of social life. Our language behaviour is a complex set of forms, patterns, and discursive modalities – canonized or fluid – which evolve alongside the entire structure of communication. It is this communicative domain that provides literature with new constructive principles. By adjusting itself to extra-literary modes of discourse and drawing on the speech genres proper to them (the letter, *feuilleton*, etc.) literature rejuvenates itself, forging new and unusual relations between the constructive factor and material.

Language

The awareness of the special role language plays in verbal art was no doubt stimulated by the fourth explanatory analogy of Russian Formalism – linguistic model. In a synecdochic transference, this model reduced literature to its material – language – and substituted linguistics, the science of language, for poetics. The key notion of linguistic Formalism was ‘poetic language’. But due to the fluidity of Russian Formalism, the advocates of the linguistic model never reached a general agreement over this notion or the theoretical frame for its description.

²³ *Archaisty*, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

Poetic language was already a loaded term when it entered Formalist parlance. For the Russian philologists steeped in the Humboldtian tradition, it was the opposite of prosaic language. The poetic quality of a word stemmed, in their opinion, from its imagistic nature, its ability to evoke a multiplicity of meanings. The theoreticians of OPOJAZ redefined poetic language along the lines suggested by the mechanistic model. They divided all verbal activities into two mutually exclusive dialects according to the purpose they served. Thus, instead of prose, they spoke of practical language employed for communicative ends, where the linguistic mechanism is a transparent medium for the passage of information. In its poetic counterpart, according to Lev Jakubinsky's formulation of 1916, 'the practical goal retreats into background and linguistic combinations acquire a *value in themselves*'.²⁵ When this happens language becomes de-familiarized and utterances become poetic.

In their search for linguistic devices that de-familiarize language, the OPOJAZ members focused exclusively on the sound stratum. In practical utterances, they argued, *phone* as a mere servant of meaning is structured in a smooth, unobtrusive way. In poetic texts, on the other hand, the intentional manipulation of sound disrupts semantics, rendering the very linguistic forms noticeable, palpable. All the markers of poetic language advanced by the Formalists in the teens – concepts such as the 'clustering of liquids', 'expressive pronunciation', or 'sound gestures' – bear witness to this privileging of *phone*.

The initial infatuation with the notion of poetic language, however, was followed by a sharp backlash in the early twenties. The opposition between poetic and practical languages, it was argued, is inadequate. Artistic prose belongs within the category of verbal art, but it seldom foregrounds sound. In seeking a way out of this dilemma, the Formalists returned to the original Humboldtian dichotomy of the poetic and prosaic. But in a surprising turnabout, now it was the prosaic that was retained and the poetic that was rejected. It is only in rhythmically organized texts that sound plays a dominant role. Therefore, instead of poetic language, they began to speak of verse language and dedicated their energies to the study of prosody.

As it turned out, the Formalist preoccupation with Russian versification proved to be extremely productive and most of its results are still recognized as valid today. But given the range of topics they dealt with (from verse intonation to stanzaic structure) and the variety of their opinions, I shall limit my discussion to the theory of verse as it was formulated by Boris Tomashevsky – one of the most influential prosodists of Russian Formalism.

²⁵ 'O zvukach', p. 37.

For Tomashevsky, poetic verse consisted of three aspects – objective, subjective, and social – which he termed respectively, rhythm, rhythmical impulse, and meter. Rhythm is the objective stratum of verse experience, a particular repetition of acoustic markers that suggests the isochronic equivalence of rhythmical segments. In its physical actuality, however, it cannot be systematized because every utterance exhibits a number of rhythms based on the inevitable repetition of certain phonic elements. The plethora of rhythmical signals, therefore, must be reduced in the perceiver's consciousness if poetic verse is to arise. Through the aggregate effect of a series of lines, the perceiver recognizes some prosodic elements as basic and begins to expect their repetition as obligatory. When this happens the rhythmical impulse has been established. But this filtering-out of irrelevant signals is not an entirely subjective process because the perceiver's choice is guided by a canonized set of rhythmical norms – meter – 'that necessary conventionality', as Tomashevsky put it in 1925, 'that links the poet with his audience and helps his rhythmical intentions to be perceived'.²⁶ Thus, only the projection of a rhythmicized utterance against the current metrical norm can establish it as verse.

It must be emphasized, however, that OPOJAZ's success in the field of prosody did not displace the concept of poetic language entirely. For while the stock of the linguistic model was dipping in Petersburg it was rising in Moscow thanks to the genius of the vice-chairman of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, Roman Jakobson. To salvage poetic language, Jakobson rejected the rigid binarism of the early OPOJAZ, which contrasted poetic to practical language on the basis of the presence or absence of meaning. Meaning, he insisted, is the essential component of the verbal parcel and cannot be eliminated from it without depriving it of its linguistic character. This insight, which Jakobson gained from contemporary phenomenology and phonology, provided the linguistic model with new vitality.

Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* analyzed in great detail the variety of functions that linguistic signs serve. In communicative discourse, locutions are indices: they either intimate the speaker's state of mind or point to objects. But while indexical signs can operate only within an empirical context (they must signify an actual referent) words are context-free. This is so, Husserl argued, because linguistic signs are endowed with an *a priori* meaning, because they are not mere pointers but meaning-intending expressions (*Ausdrucken*). In 1921, when he defined the essence of poetry as a 'mental set [*ustanovka*] toward expression',²⁷ Jakobson was clearly following Husserl's lead. But in this way he was able to refute the OPOJAZ dichotomy of functional dialects as

²⁶ *O stiche*, p. 11.

²⁷ *Novejsaja*, p. 41.

the opposition of sound to meaning. Since verbal art operates with expressions, it always involves meaning. Therefore, Jakobson proposed his own classification of these dialects based on their orientation toward different components of the speech event: *the emotive* oriented toward the speaker, *the practical* oriented toward the referent, and *the poetic* oriented toward the expression itself.

Jakobson rejected the separation of linguistic sound from meaning for still another reason. An early pioneer of phonology, he conceived of phonemes (the minimal units of sound in language) as intrinsically semantic because their main function is to differentiate words of unlike meaning. In literary studies, Jakobson applied this insight most successfully to prosody. If verse, as he wrote in 1923, 'is an organized violence of poetic form over language',²⁸ this violence must have its limits. It cannot disrupt the meaning-differentiating role of phonemes because then poetry would lose its verbal nature and turn into a kind of music. Rhythm, therefore, deforms the non-phonemic elements while the phonemic elements provide the organizational base for the deformation. In closely related languages with unlike phonological systems such as Czech and Russian, different phonological features will serve as basic prosodic elements (stress in Russian, word boundary in Czech). Thus, despite their apparent similarity, Russian and Czech verse written in the same meter diverge from each other considerably. Jakobson elaborated phonological metrics further in Prague where he settled in the early 1920s.

Because of its baffling heterogeneity Russian Formalism is not a literary-theoretical school in the ordinary sense. Rather, it is a peculiar developmental moment in the history of Slavic poetics: a disruption of old practices in the discipline and the opening of the modern era. From this perspective Russian Formalism can be termed an 'inter-paradigmatic stage' of Slavic literary scholarship. Thomas Kuhn, who introduced this notion, argues that normal scientific practice is characterized by the presence of a 'paradigm', a 'strong network of commitments – conceptual, theoretical, instrumental and methodological' shared by researchers in a given field.²⁹ The paradigm provides the scientific community with everything it needs for its work: the problems to be solved, the tools for doing so, as well as the standards for judging the results. At a certain moment, however, the hitherto accepted paradigm comes under suspicion because of its persistent failure to yield the results it predicts. Kuhn noted:

²⁸ *O ccesskom*, p. 16.

²⁹ *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2nd edn (Chicago, 1970), p. 42.

Confronted with anomaly or crisis, scientists take a different attitude toward the existing paradigms and the nature of their research changes accordingly. The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research.³⁰

Such inter-paradigmatic hallmarks are prime characteristics of Russian Formalism. Though it might be argued that the situation in the humanities is somewhat different from that in the exact sciences, inasmuch as the total domination of a single paradigm never occurs there, Kuhn's remarks apply quite well to the Formalist movement. Motivated by the desire to provide a 'more rigid definition of the field', Formalist scholars raised fundamental questions about the principles and methods of literary study. In order to destabilize older paradigm(s), they strove to open the theoretical space as widely as possible rather than to limit it by some *a priori* agreement. Hence, the extreme heterogeneity of their enterprise, the proliferation of quite divergent and often incompatible models. What ties individual Formalists together is the goal that they pursued: to change the scholarly practice of their discipline. The unity of Formalism is thus of a special kind. It is a unity of action, a dynamic configuration of multiple forces converging in a particular historical context.

Russian Formalism's debunking of earlier paradigms and its wealth of insights into the nature of the literary process provided fertile ground for the new syntheses and new disciplinary matrices that began to appear at the very moment of Formalism's demise in the late 1920s. One of these emerged in Prague under the label of Structuralism, and for the next forty years achieved an evergrowing worldwide influence. The other was Bakhtinian metasemiotics, forcibly suppressed for many decades, but since the 1970s enjoying an international reputation as a viable alternative to Structuralism.

These post-Formalist developments, though quite unlike in many respects, exhibit one similarity. They both criticize the two general principles which were for Russian Formalism the cornerstone of its new literary science: the autonomy of literature *vis-à-vis* other cultural domains, and the presuppositionless nature of critical inquiry. The Bakhtinians regarded literature as merely one branch of the all-encompassing field of ideology. Within this sphere, they maintained, verbal art always interacts with other branches of human endeavour and, therefore, the autonomy of literature is always limited.

Of course, this idea was not utterly alien to Russian Formalism. The Formalist principle of the specificity of the literary series was vague

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–1.

enough to allow some members of the movement to inquire in a limited way into the relationship between literature and social life. What set the Bakhtinians apart was their semiotic frame of reference. Every ideological phenomenon, they claimed, is a sign, a reality which stands for another reality. The entire ideological sphere is a thick web of interconnected signs (literary, religious, political) each of which refers to reality in its own way and refracts it according to its own needs.

The Bakhtinians' casting of literature in semiotic terms may seem to paraphrase Jakobson, who also conceived of verbal art as a specific type of sign – the expression. In fact, the two are quite different. As an expression, the literary work is an oxymoron: a semiotic nonsign. It is endowed with meaning, yet it does not point to any other reality. For the Bakhtinians, however, literature differs from other ideological domains not in failing to signify but in its mode of signifying. Literary signs, according to Pavel Medvedev, are metasigns – representations of representations:

Literature reflects in its content an ideological horizon: alien, nonartistic (ethical, cognitive) ideological formations. But in reflecting these alien signs literature creates new forms – literary works – new signs of ideological intercourse. And these signs – literary works – become in turn an actual component of the social reality surrounding man. By refracting what lies outside them, literary works are, at the same time, self-valuable and distinct phenomena of the ideological milieu. Their presence cannot be reduced to the simple, technical, auxiliary role of refracting other ideologems. They have their own ideological role and refract socioeconomic reality in their own way.³¹

This metasemiotic definition led the Bakhtinians to a thorough revision of Formalist theories of language, the medium of literature. From a linguistic point of view, a verbal sign that reflects or refracts another sign is exactly like an utterance commenting or replying to another utterance. It forms a *dialogue*. This concept is the controlling metaphor of Bakhtinian literary-theoretical discourse. Moreover, the dialogic conception of language was a direct challenge to Formalist linguistics which was primarily concerned with the centripetal forces operating in language that make it systemic. The Bakhtinians' priorities were precisely the opposite. As a dialogue, language is not a system (*ergon*) but a process (*energeia*), an ongoing struggle between different points of view, different ideologies. Hence, what intrigued them was not the homogeneity of discourse but its heterogeneity, the centrifugal forces that resist integration.

Like the Bakhtin group, the Prague Structuralists also rejected the radical Formalist view of literature as an autonomous reality and in a similar manner they accounted for the relative autonomy of the literary structure

³¹ *Formal'nyj metod*, p. 29.

by means of the general theory of signs. Because they considered all of human culture a semiotic construct, they were forced to introduce some criterion to differentiate the individual sign-structures from each other. Here the notion of *function* entered Structuralist parlance. Rooted in a purposive view of human behaviour, it designated the interaction between objects and the goals which they serve to achieve. The Structuralists stressed the social dimension of functionality, the necessary consensus among the members of a collectivity about the purpose which an object serves and its utility for such a purpose. From the functional perspective, every semiotic structure – art, religion, science – appeared as a set of social norms regulating the attainment of values in these cultural spheres.

We have seen that both the Bakhtinians and the Prague Structuralists redefined the primary principle of Formalist literary science from a semiotic perspective. They did not stop there; they also questioned the second principle of this science, namely, that its theories must be generated solely from the data studied. Medvedev's critique of Russian Formalism takes up this point several times. 'In the humanities, to approach the concrete material and to do so correctly is rather hard. Pathetic appeals to the "facts themselves" and the "concrete material" do not say or prove much.' And since a correct grasp of the material at hand influences the entire theory that follows from it,

the onset of research, the first methodological orientation, the mere sketching out of the object of inquiry, are crucially important. They are of decisive value. One cannot establish the initial methodological orientation ad hoc, guided solely by his own subjective 'intuition' of the object.³²

This, of course, was precisely what Medvedev accused the Formalists of doing. Sprung from an 'unholy union' of positivism and Futurism, Formalism lacked any solid philosophical foundations. Literary study, in order to treat its material adequately, must proceed from a well-defined philosophical point of view. This, Medvedev happily announced, is Marxism. The sociological poetics which he promulgated proceeds from the assumption that the literary fact is first of all an ideological fact, and literary study a branch of the global science of ideology. 'The foundations of this science concerning the general definition of ideological superstructures, their functions in the unity of social life, their relationship with the economic basis and partially also their interaction, were laid deeply and firmly by Marxism.'³³ Although one may ask how well the Bakhtinians' metasemiotics squared with the official Soviet Marxism and its flat-footed theory of reflection (and hence whether they should be called

³² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Marxist at all), the choice of a tag is not important. The point is that the Bakhtinians saw philosophy as the necessary ground of literary study and the Formalists did not.

On this issue the members of the Prague School were perhaps more reserved than the Bakhtinians; yet they certainly did not deny the relevance of philosophy to theory. The Formalists had considered themselves pioneers in the new science of literature, but the Structuralists emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of their enterprise and the similarity of their principles and methods to those in other fields of knowledge. 'Structuralism', as the coiner of the term Roman Jakobson, stated in 1929, 'is the leading idea of present-day science in its most various manifestations.'³⁴ Its emergence heralds the eclipse of one era in European intellectual history and the beginning of another.

This view of Structuralism was echoed by other members of the Prague Circle as well. According to Jan Mukařovský, the modern history of European scholarship was marked by an oscillation between romantic deductivism, which subordinated scientific data to an overall philosophical system, and positivistic inductivism, which reduced philosophy to a mere extension of the empirical sciences. The novelty of Structuralism, Mukařovský believed, lay in its efforts to bridge this dichotomy:

Structuralist research . . . consciously and intentionally operates between two extremes: on the one hand, philosophical presuppositions, on the other, data. These two have a similar relation to science. Data are neither a passive object of study nor a completely determinant one, as the positivists believed, but the two are mutually determining.

For Mukařovský, 'Structuralism is a scholarly attitude that proceeds from the knowledge of this unceasing interrelation of science and philosophy. I say "attitude",' he continues, 'to avoid terms such as "theory" or "method" . . . Structuralism is neither. It is an *epistemological stance* [my italics] from which particular working rules and knowledge follow to be sure, but which exists independently of them and is therefore capable of development in both these aspects.'³⁵

Against these two global projects – Bakhtinian metasemiotics and Prague Structuralism – the nature of Russian Formalism is apparent. It is a transitional and transitory period in the history of literary study. This characterization, however, should not be understood as a denigration of the historical significance of Russian Formalism. Without its radical destabilization of traditional criticism and its relentless pursuit

³⁴ 'Romantické všeslovanství – nová slavistika', *Čin*, 1 (1929), 11.

³⁵ 'Strukturalismus v estetice a ve vědě o literatuře', *Kapitoly z české poetiky*, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (Prague, 1948), pp. 13–15.

of alternative vistas, there would have been no need for the birth of new disciplinary paradigms. And, insofar as the literary-theoretical paradigms which Russian Formalism inaugurated are still with us, it stands not as a historical curiosity but a vital presence in the theoretical discourse of our day.

STRUCTURALISM: ITS RISE, INFLUENCE AND AFTERMATH

STRUCTURALISM OF THE PRAGUE SCHOOL

The groundwork of structural poetics laid by the Russian Formalists was developed into the first system of twentieth-century literary structuralism by scholars of the *Cercle linguistique de Prague* (Prague Linguistic Circle – PLC). The personal and theoretical links between the Russian and the Prague schools are well known. Jan Mukařovský, the most prominent literary theorist of Prague, acknowledged that the conceptual system of his first major work – the *May* monograph of 1928 – originated with the Russian Formalists (*Kapitoly*, II, p. 12). Later on, in his review of the Czech translation of Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose* (published in 1934) Mukařovský summed up not only the Czech indebtedness to, but also the Czech criticism of, early Russian Formalism ('K českému překladu', *Kapitoly*, I, pp. 344–50; Steiner, *The Word*, pp. 134–42). The first president of the PLC, Vilém Mathesius, surveying the first ten years of the Circle's activities in 1936, highly commended the contribution of Russian scholars, but emphasized the domestic sources of Prague School thought. He strongly protested the claim that the work done in Prague was nothing more than an application of Russian linguistic and literary-theoretical trends; the 'working symbiosis' achieved in the Circle is a 'mutual give and take' ('Deset let', pp. 149ff.; cf. Renský, 'Roman Jakobson', p. 380). In the same year, Roman Jakobson, who was a member of both Schools, spoke as well of a 'symbiosis of Czech and Russian thought', but pointed also to influences from Western European and American science. Such a synthesis was not exceptional in Prague: 'The position at the crossroads of various cultures has been always characteristic of the Czechoslovak world' ('Die Arbeit', *SW*, II, p. 547). Today, from a historical distance, we recognise the Prague School as one of the manifestations of the last blossoming of Central European culture.¹ In

¹ Contemporary views about the position of Prague School theory in the inter-war intellectual context can be found in Sus, 'Preconditions'; Červenka, 'Grundkategorien'; Matejka, 'Postscript'; Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch, *Theories*, pp. 10–49, Renský, 'Roman Jakobson'; Steiner, *Formalism*.

the short period between the 1910s and 1930s, Central Europe gave rise to several theoretical systems which were to dominate the twentieth-century intellectual climate: phenomenology (Husserl, Ingarden), psychoanalysis (Freud, Rank), neopositivism (the Vienna Circle), *Gestalt*-psychology (Wertheimer, Köhler, Koffka), the Warsaw School of logic (Leśniewski, Tarski) and, last but not least, structuralism (the Prague School). The PLC was integrated into the Central European context not only by the international composition of its membership, but also by lively scholarly contacts (lectures by Husserl, Carnap, Utitz and others).

History

The Prague Linguistic Circle was born on 6 October 1926: Vilém Mathesius, director of the English seminar at Charles University, and four of his colleagues (R. Jakobson, B. Havránek, B. Trnka, J. Rypka) met to discuss a lecture presented by the young German linguist H. Becker. Mathesius gave the group not only an organized form, but also a clear theoretical direction.² The Circle quickly grew into an international association of about fifty scholars, including, in addition to its founding members, J. Mukařovský, O. Fischer, N. V. Trubeckoj, S. Karcevskij, P. Bogatyrëv, D. Čyževskij, F. Slotty. In the 1930s, a group of younger scholars entered the Circle, among them R. Wellek, F. Vodička, J. Veltruský, J. Prušek and J. Vachek. Initially, papers presented at the regular meetings were concerned with theoretical linguistics, but soon questions of poetics became an equally important topic of discussion; ethnology and anthropology, philosophy and legal theory followed.³ The Circle's international scholarly series *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague (TCLP)* (1929–1939) contains in eight volumes germinal contributions by members and 'fellow travellers', written in English, French and German. In 1928, the Prague participants of the first international congress of linguistics in The Hague drafted jointly with the Geneva School scholars a document outlining the principles of the new, structural linguistics. The programmatic 'Thèses du Cercle Linguistique de Prague' (presented to the first International Congress

² Mathesius was one of the early twentieth-century linguists who were critical of the legacy of the historically oriented neo-grammarians. Already in 1912, four years before the appearance of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, Mathesius published an article 'On the potentiality of linguistic phenomena' (English trans. in Vachek, *Reader*, pp. 1–32) where he advocated a synchronistic and functionalist approach to language. The article remained hidden in an esoteric scholarly journal, but in the 1920s when the work of Saussure and the Russian 'Saussurians' became known in Prague many young linguists were ready to follow Mathesius' lead.

³ A list of the papers presented in the PLC between 1926 and 1948 is published in Matejka (ed.), *Sound*, pp. 607–22.

of Slavists held in Prague and published in TCLP, I, 1929) set out the structural theory of language, literary language and poetic language. In 1932, in the documents of the third International Congress of Phonetic Sciences in Amsterdam the label 'L'Ecole de Prague' was first used, in a narrow application, referring to the innovative phonology of the PLC linguists.

In the 1930s, the Circle emerged as a strong cultural force on the domestic scene. Its first contribution of this kind was a tribute to the philosopher president of the Czechoslovak republic T. G. Masaryk (on the occasion of his eightieth birthday) – a slim volume *Masaryk a řeč* (Masaryk and Language) (1930) containing lectures by Mukařovský and Jakobson. The PLC attracted wide public attention when its members, in alliance with *avant-garde* Czech writers and poets⁴ stood up against conservative purists who tried pedantically to restrict experimentation in contemporary poetic language. The cycle of polemical and programmatic lectures published in *Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura* (Standard Czech and Language Culture) (1932) formulated the PLC principles of language, culture and planning which have retained their significance up to today (see also Garvin, 'Role'). No less enduring are studies on the history of old and modern Czech verse (Jakobson, Mukařovský), on Czech dialects and on the history of Czech literary language (both by Havránek) published in a special volume of the representative *Ottův slovník naučný* (Otta's Encyclopaedia) (1934). In 1935 the PLC launched its Czech journal *Slovo a slovesnost* (The Word and Verbal Art), exploiting in its title the happy etymological link which in Slavic languages exists between the terms for language and for literature; the journal soon became an influential forum for modern linguistics and literary theory. Three widely read collections reaffirmed the PLC's cultural position in the rapidly changing political conditions: a jubilee volume *Torso a tajemství Máchova díla* (Torso and Mystery of Mách's Work) (1938), a popularising collective work *Čtení o jazyce a poesii* (Readings on Language and Poetry) (1942) and a cycle of radio broadcasts *O básnickém jazyce* (On Poetic Language) (1947).

As the influence of the PLC grew, so did the voices of the critics, coming

⁴ The alliance between progressive theorists and *avant-garde* artists was already forged before the formation of PLC and proved to be long lasting. Jan Mukařovský was very close to the surrealist poet Vítězslav Nezval and to the experimental prose writer Vladislav Vančura. Roman Jakobson, who had been an active member of the Russian poetic *avant-garde*, established close contacts with Czech poets and artists shortly after his arrival in Prague: 'The young Czech poets and artists made me a member of their circle, and I became very close to them . . . My intimate knowledge of Czech artistic circles allowed me to comprehend fully the force of Czech literary art from the Middle Ages to today' (*Dialogues*, p. 143; cf. Linhartová, 'La place'; Effenberger, 'Roman Jakobson'; Toman, 'Chemical laboratory').

both from the right – the traditionalists in language and literary science, and from the left – the Marxists. The exchange between PLC members and the Marxist publicists (which took place between 1930 and 1934) is probably the first confrontation between structuralism and Marxism in the twentieth century.

In the final years of Czechoslovak independence and even during the German occupation the Prague School scholars worked vigorously to systematize structural poetics and aesthetics and published their best works in literary analysis. When Czech universities were closed by the Nazis in November 1939, the meetings of the Circle continued in private homes and apartments. Public activities were resumed in June 1945. A few leaders were lost, either to natural death (Trubeckoj, Mathesius), or to exile (Jakobson, Wellek); on the other hand, many PLC members found themselves in key positions in Czechoslovak universities and in the newly established Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. In fact, the brief spell of democracy in post-war Czechoslovakia (between May 1945 and February 1948) was the most productive time for Prague School structuralism. In 1946 Mukařovský visited Paris and presented a lecture on structuralism at the Institut d'Études Slaves, which offered the last and most concise exposition of Prague School thinking for the benefit of a foreign audience; the lecture was never published in French and had no impact on the Parisian intellectual scene. In 1948 the second, three-volume, edition of Mukařovský's selected works *Kapitoly z české poetiky* (Chapters from Czech Poetics) as well as the last representative work of Prague School structuralism, Vodička's monograph *Počátky krásné prózy novočeské* (The Beginnings of Czech Artistic Prose), were published. Shortly afterwards, the Circle's activities were abruptly terminated; the last lecture took place on 13 December 1948.

The PLC was not a mutual admiration society. Differences of opinion, polemical exchanges and personal tensions were inevitable in a discussion group.⁵ Nevertheless, in its basic assumptions about literature and literary study, the Prague School was more homogeneous than Russian Formalism; consequently a cohesive synopsis of its theory can be given.

⁵ Jakobson captured the ambience of both the Moscow and the Prague Circles with the following words: 'Recollecting their passionate, impetuous discussions which tested, egged on, and whetted our scientific thought, I must confess that never since and nowhere else have I witnessed learned debates of similar creative force' (*SW*, II, p. vi). Wellek was true to the Prague School spirit when he stated that his profound indebtedness to the work of Mukařovský and Jakobson and to the stimulating atmosphere of the PLC 'can be best expressed by *critical* collaboration' ('Theory', p. 191, 39; emphasis added).

Theory

According to Mathesius, the ideas promulgated by the PLC achieved a rapid success because they were not the product of chance, but fulfilled an 'acute intellectual need' of the international scientific community ('Deset let', p. 137). Prague Structuralism was a development in the mainstream of twentieth-century theoretical thought: it was a stage in the post-positivistic paradigm of linguistics and poetics that had been initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure and the Russian Formalists.

Prague School epistemology

The Prague School poetics reformulated traditional concerns of literary study into an advanced post-positivist epistemology based upon the following principles.⁶

First, the study of literature, in accordance with modern scientific thought, adopts a structural stance. Its principles were defined in a 1929 Czech paper of Jakobson's where the label 'structuralism' was coined: 'Were we to summarize the leading idea of present-day science in its most various manifestations, we could hardly find a more appropriate designation than *structuralism*. Any set of phenomena examined by contemporary science is treated not as a mechanical agglomeration but as a structural whole, and the basic task is to reveal the inner, whether static or developmental, laws of this system' (quoted in 'Retrospect', *SW*, II, p. 711). For Mukařovský, structuralism is 'an epistemological stance' whose essence is 'the manner by which it forms its concepts and operates with them'. In the structuralist view, 'the conceptual system of every particular discipline is a web of internal correlations. Every concept is determined by all the others and in turn determines them. Thus a concept is defined unequivocally by the place it occupies in its conceptual system rather than by the enumeration of its contents' ('Strukturalismus', *Chapters*, I, p. 13; *Prague School*, p. 68).⁷

⁶ This achievement would be impossible without the close cooperation of linguists and literary theorists typical of the Prague School. According to Mathesius, 'linguistics makes the most natural ally of literary theory' ('Deset let', p. 145). All Prague School linguists, including Mathesius, were deeply involved in the study of literature, while its literary theorists were perfectly at home in linguistic theory. It should be emphasized that the Prague School continued the tradition of a *mutual* exchange between linguistics and literary study, inaugurated by Wilhelm von Humboldt and continued by Ferdinand de Saussure (see Doležel, *Occidental Poetics*). In Prague, the study of literature and poetic language stimulated significant departures in linguistic theory, for example the formulation of the principles of phonology (Jakobson and Pomorska, *Dialogues*, p. 22).

⁷ Mukařovský pointed to parallels and differences between structuralism and biological holism (Smuts) ('K pojmosloví', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 29). Trnka singled out Russell's

Secondly, Prague School poetics is an *empirical* theory; its scope, problems and metalanguage were developed in a constant exchange with literary analysis. Vodička perceived this feature of Mukařovský's work when he provided an evaluation of his teacher's method: 'Mukařovský did not proceed from general, essentially philosophical problems of aesthetics, but from the empirical study of verbal material in literary works' ('Integrity', p. 11). When, in turn, Vodička's own work was assessed by his disciple Červenka, the same epistemological principle was recognized: 'Today, there are many speculations about the relationship between Marxism and structuralism, existentialism and structuralism, etc., as if we were dealing with a confrontation of contradictory philosophical trends. However, structuralism as conceived by Mukařovský, Jakobson, Vodička and their disciples . . . is not a philosophy, but a methodological trend in certain sciences, especially those concerned with sign systems and their concrete uses.' ('O Vodičkově metodologii', p. 331)

Thirdly, the study of literature combines abstract poetics of universal categories and descriptive poetics concerned with particular literary works. This epistemological principle was not explored in theory, but rather in the practice of Prague School writings. The model was provided by Mukařovský's *May* monograph: in the theoretical Introduction Mukařovský unfolded a conceptual framework for the description of poetic structure (see below) and then proceeded to describe in terms of this framework the structure of a masterwork of Czech romanticism, from phonic patterning through semantic devices to thematic organization. Vodička in his *Beginnings* adopted a method of presentation which was later popularized by Roland Barthes' *S/Z*: analytic segments dealing with particular texts are interspersed with theoretical reflections on topics provoked by the analysis. Jakobson in his best-known poetological investigations posited the theoretical problem of grammatical categories in poetry and then analyzed many poems with a view to revealing their characteristic grammatical patterning.

Fourthly, Prague School epistemology postulated a fundamental difference between ordinary readers and expert students of literature. According to Jakobson, a poem, like a musical composition, 'affords the ordinary reader the possibility of an artistic perception, but produces neither the need nor the competence to effect a scientific analysis' (*Dialogues*, pp. 116ff.). In post-war structuralism, this epistemological principle was reinforced by the mathematical theory of communication

relational logic as one of the inspirations of structuralism ('Linguistics', p. 159). The relationship of structuralism to the twentieth-century logic of wholes – *mereology* (Husserl, Leśniewski) – has been established only recently (see Smith and Mulligan, 'Pieces').

(see Cherry, *Communication*, pp. 89ff.). But the Prague School scholars were aware that a student of human communication is more than an engineer of signals, because he has to deal with semantic and cultural phenomena; his epistemic position is not fixed but mobile, depending on the character and aim of his inquiry. In a 'preliminary stage' he can assume the posture of 'the most detached and external onlooker', of a 'cryptanalyst'; but this stage leads to an 'internal approach' to the language studied, when the observer assumes the role of 'a potential or actual partner in the exchange of verbal messages among the members of the speech community, a passive or even active fellow member of that community' (Jakobson, 'Linguistics and communication', *SW*, III, p. 574). This mobility gives the student of human communication an efficient epistemic versatility: as cryptanalyst he proceeds 'from text to code', but as observer-participant he is capable of understanding 'the text through the code' (Jakobson, 'Zeichen', *SW*, II, p. 277). These epistemic postures satisfy the diverse needs of the literary theorist without confusing practical literary activities (such as writing and reading) with cognitive activities aiming at theoretical understanding.

Specificity of literary communication

The post-positivistic paradigm which was detected (above) in Prague School epistemology was equally decisive for the formulation of its theoretical tenets regarding the nature of literature. Prague School scholars outlined a comprehensive theory of literature within general semiotics and semiotic aesthetics. The semiotic impulse was perceived primarily as a radical contrast to traditional literary study: 'Without a semiotic orientation the theoretician of art will always be inclined to regard the work of art as a purely formal construction, or as a direct image of the author's psychic or even physiological dispositions or of the particular reality expressed by the work, or, perhaps, as a reflection of the ideological, economic, social and cultural situation of a certain milieu' (Mukařovský, 'L'Art', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 87; *Structure*, p. 87). Semiotic aesthetics is a negation of all forms of determinism and stands in contrast to established views of art, specifically to the formalist, the expressive, the mimetic and the sociological conceptions.

It is well known that a powerful inspiration for twentieth-century semiotics of literature came from Saussure's linguistics. However, the Prague School did not subsume literature and other forms of art under the linguistic model; aesthetics was linked to general semiotics directly rather than through linguistic mediation (see also chapter 4). All forms of art – literature, visual arts, music, theatre, cinema, architecture, folk art, etc. – constitute the realm of aesthetic signs, but they are substantially

different in their material bases, modes of signification and social channels of communication. Language, literature, art are specific systems within the general system of human culture and their semiotic study requires models and methods specific and appropriate for each system.

Central to Prague School semiotics of literature is the idea of literature as a form of communication. Going back at least to romantic poetics, the idea postulates the existence of specific features in the production, structure and reception of the poetic 'message' (text). The Prague School scholars found a stimulating theoretical framework in the work of Karl Bühler (particularly in his *Sprachtheorie*). His 'Organonmodel' identified three fundamental factors involved in every speech event: sender, receiver and referent (the 'objects' or 'facts' talked about). From this model Bühler derived three basic functions of language: the expressive function (*Ausdruck*) orients the speech event towards the sender, the conative function (*Appell*) towards the receiver and the referential function (*Darstellung*) towards the referent.⁸ While these functions are distinguished in theory, every speech event involves all three functions; they operate as a hierarchy, the dominant function determining the speech event's character.⁹

In Prague, Bühler's functionalism was accepted and modified. Not surprisingly, the first modification was prompted by the need to account for literary (poetic) communication. Mukařovský noticed that the nature of poetic utterance requires activation of a fourth factor of human communication – ignored by Bühler – language (the linguistic sign) itself. Consequently, the *aesthetic* function is discovered and placed in opposition to all the others. The aesthetic function, 'nullifying any exterior aim, turns an instrument into an end' ('Estetika', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 42). However, the 'negativity' of the aesthetic function *vis-à-vis* the other language functions becomes 'a positive quality' when we consider its ramifications for human existence and experience: 'Aesthetic-phenomena make man again and again aware of the many-sidedness and diversity of reality' (*ibid.*). For the scholars of the Prague School, aesthetic activities were functionally different from practical activities, but no less necessary for man's existence (cf. Chvatík, 'Strukturalismus', p. 140; van der Eng, 'Effectiveness'; Schmid, 'Funktionsbegriff', p. 461; Kalivoda, 'Typologie').

The second stage in the development of Bühler's model, Jakobson's well-known schema of language communication ('Linguistics', *SW*, III,

⁸ In Bühler's and Prague School functional linguistics the term function is not used in the mathematical sense, but in the sense of 'aim' or 'goal' (cf. Skalička, 'Strukturalismus'; Holenstein, *Approach*, p. 121).

⁹ Referring specifically to the Bühlerian tradition, Holenstein ('Poetry') praised the idea of 'polyfunctionality' as a major achievement of modern functionalist thought (see also Broekman, *Strukturalismus*, pp. 95f.; Chvatík, *Strukturalismus*, pp. 138f.; Martínez-Bonati, *Discourse*, p. 54).

pp. 18–51), was formulated much later, but has its roots in Prague School functionalism. Inspired by the mathematical theory of communication, Jakobson expands the factors of communication to six – ‘addresser’, ‘addressee’, ‘message’, ‘context’ (‘referent’), ‘contact’ (‘channel’), ‘code’ – and consequently distinguishes six language functions – ‘emotive’, ‘conative’, ‘poetic’, ‘referential’, ‘phatic’ and ‘metalingual’. As far as the poetic function is concerned, Jakobson took an important, but little noticed step by defining it as ‘the set [*Einstellung*] toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake’ (*ibid.*, p. 25). This shift from Mukařovský’s focus on the ‘sign’ (language, ‘code’) to the focus on the ‘message’ (text) is indicative of the post-war conception of literature as text rather than as language.

The popularity of the Bühlerian system of language functions probably explains why an alternative version of Prague School functional linguistics has gone almost unnoticed. Its development was promoted by the interest of Prague scholars in the theory of standard (literary) language, stimulated by the polemic of 1932 (see above, History). Its foremost representative, Bohuslav Havránek, observed that standard language as the primary tool of communication in modern society has to serve many specialized ‘social functions’ (‘Funkce’, *Studie*, p. 16), being used to express ‘the results of philosophical, scientific, political, legal and administrative thought’ (‘Úkoly’, *Studie*, p. 20). Obviously, Havránek’s term ‘social function’ is meant to designate the role of standard language in the various societal and, especially, cultural activities which are conducted with its aid. However, no sociological model of these activities was suggested or invoked and this version of Prague School functional linguistics was therefore left without a theoretical base. In an *ad hoc* classification, Havránek suggested the following set of language functions and of the corresponding functional languages:

- a) function of everyday communication – conversational language;
- b) technological function – technical language;
- c) theoretical function – scientific language;
- d) aesthetic function – poetic language.

(‘Úkoly’, *Studie*, p. 49; Garvin, *Reader*, p. 14)

Although ‘aesthetic function’ and ‘poetic language’ appear in different company than in Mukařovský’s Bühlerian system, Havránek did not reinterpret these notions, but rather reiterated the contrast between poetic language and the languages with communicative function (conversational, technical, scientific) (*ibid.*, p. 51; *ibid.*, p. 15).¹⁰

¹⁰ Havránek’s sociological functionalism has its parallel in functionalist ethnography pioneered in Prague by Bogatyřov, especially in his *Functions*. We find here a precocious formulation of the idea of social semiosis (cf. Halliday, *Explorations*).

Functional linguistics provided the contrastive frame necessary for defining the specific character of the aesthetic/poetic functioning of language. In his later work, Mukařovský dissociated the aesthetic function from the 'object' (language, text) and grounded it in the 'subject' (user). Function is now defined as 'a mode of a subject's self-realization *vis-à-vis* the external world'. A new, 'purely phenomenological' typology of functions is suggested, distinguishing *immediate* (practical and theoretical) and *semiotic* (symbolic and aesthetic) functions ('Místo', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 69; *Structure*, p. 40; cf. Vodička, 'Integrity', pp. 13ff.; Veltruský, 'Mukařovský', pp. 142–5). The aesthetic function remains contrasted 'to each individual function and to every set of individual functions' ('K problému', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 200; *Structure*, p. 244), but its anchoring in the subject brings about a radical relativization of its domain. The realm of aesthetic phenomena becomes essentially unstable, being continuously redesigned by fundamental functional shifts: 'The aesthetic function immediately penetrates and enlarges proportionately wherever the other functions have weakened, withdrawn or shifted. Moreover, there is no object which could not become its bearer or, conversely, an object which necessarily has to be its bearer' (*ibid.*).

This departure from Bühlerian functionalism manifests Mukařovský's temporary engagement with phenomenological aesthetics in the late 1930s; simultaneously, we observe in his writings a shift from analytical metalanguage to florid but vague poetic metaphors. This episode confirms that Prague School doctrines were forged at the crossroads of several intellectual trends. In their repeated attempts to define the specificity of literary communication, the Prague scholars explored three avenues: the linguistic, the sociological and the phenomenological. While the similarities and differences in these approaches remained obscure at the time, we are now able to see that they represent the intellectual context in which the Prague School semiotics was born.

Literary structure

In harmony with its structuralist epistemology (see above, p. 37), Prague School poetics treated literary works as specific, poetic (aesthetic) structures. What it achieved is a substantial development of the model of poetic structure.¹¹ Prague School structuralism favours a *stratificational* model

¹¹ The tradition of the structural model in poetics goes back to Aristotle, to his theory of the tragedy based on general principles of his logic and philosophy of science. In the Romantic period under the influence of organic thinking the structural model became morphological. Prague School structuralism initiates the semiotic version of the model. The advance of the structural model from a *logical* to a *morphological* to a *semiological* stage represents the main thread of the history of poetics (see Doležel, *Occidental Poetics*).

of signifying structures. In its linguistic version, the model represents language as a structure consisting of several differentiated, but integrated, levels of entities (phonemic, morphonemic, morphemic, lexical, syntactic) (cf. Daneš, 'Strata').

Similarly, the stratificational model of poetics conceives literary structure as a hierarchy of strata. From the beginning, however, the stratificational model in poetics displayed two features which distinguished it considerably from its linguistic counterpart: a) the verbal strata (phonic and semantic) are complemented by the extralinguistic stratum of thematics ('thematic structure'); b) the aesthetic opposition of 'material' and 'form' is superimposed on all the strata. The independence of the thematic stratum from language was stated explicitly by Mukařovský: 'We will not . . . try to reduce thematic and language elements to one concept, as has been done by some theoreticians who claim that in a literary work there are only language elements and no others' (Máj, Kapitoly, III, p. 11). But Mukařovský also emphasized the necessary link between the linguistic and the thematic strata: thematic entities of literature cannot be expressed otherwise but by verbal (linguistic) means. Themes and language are 'material' of literature. 'Material' is transformed into an aesthetically effective structure by the form, which in Mukařovský's innovative formulation is a dynamic force of two jointly operating procedures: deformation and organisation. Deformation, 'a conspicuous, even violent, disturbance of the original shape of the material' (*ibid.*) is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of aesthetic structuring; deformations can also be found in emotional or pathological discourse where they have no aesthetic function. The model of poetic structure requires the coupling of deformation with organisation, achieved in two ways: a) deformation is implemented in a systematic way which gives rise to 'formal devices'; b) formal devices stand in mutual relationships which establish their 'correspondences'.

This reconstruction of Mukařovský's structural model puts to rest the often-repeated claim that Prague poetics was based on nothing more than on the concept of 'deviation'.¹² Furthermore, the limited role of linguistics in the poetological model becomes apparent: its domain is the 'material' of language elements, which cannot be described without

¹² The source of this misrepresentation is Mukařovský's paper 'Standard language and poetic language' known from an early English translation (Garvin, *Reader*). This paper should be read within its polemical context: in opposition to arbitrary restrictions imposed by conservative Czech purists (see History), Mukařovský defends the right of the language of modern poetry to 'deviate' from the norms of standard Czech. Serious students of Prague School poetics have emphasized the duality of its aesthetic principle: 'Poetic language is to be seen as an organized, systematic violation of language norms, characterised by *strict regularity*' (Bulygina, 'Pražská škola', p. 118; emphasis added). Van Peer labelled this aesthetic principle 'systematic foregrounding' (*Stylistics*, p. 7).

precise linguistic concepts and categories; but the core of the Prague School model – the aesthetic structuring – requires a special, poetological conceptual system.

The semiotic aesthetics which Mukařovský developed in the 1930s brought substantial modifications to his original model. The difference between ‘material’ and ‘form’ is relativized when all constituents of the poetic structure are assigned ‘meaning-creating value’: ‘All constituents traditionally called formal are . . . vehicles of meaning, partial signs in a work of art. Conversely, the constituents called ‘thematic’ are by their very nature mere signs which acquire full meaning only in the context of the work of art’ (‘O strukturalismu’, *Studie z estetiky*, pp. 112ff.; *Structure*, pp. 10ff.) In a semiotic perspective a literary work is a totally semanticized structure. The semanticization affects not only the ‘vertical’ (stratificational), but also the ‘horizontal’ (linear) dimension of the model. The poetic text is not a uni-directional temporal progression, but a process of *semantic accumulation*, a bi-directional ‘growth’ of sense within the sentence and beyond (‘O jazyce’, *Kapitoly*, I, pp. 113–21; *Word*, pp. 46–55). Semantic accumulation, retraced by the reader, generates the coherence and totality of the poetic text: ‘Every new partial sign which the receiver apprehends during the process of reception . . . not only associates with those which have penetrated previously into the receiver’s consciousness, but also changes to a greater or lesser extent the sense of everything that has preceded. And, conversely, everything that has preceded affects the meaning of each newly apprehended partial sign’ (‘O strukturalismu’, *Studie z estetiky*, p. 112; *Structure*, pp. 8ff.; cf. ‘O jazyce’, *Kapitoly*, I, pp. 113ff.; *Word*, p. 47).

Mukařovský’s semanticization of the poetic structure and his conception of poetic meaning as a dynamic, bi-directional process of accumulation is surely a historic achievement in structural poetics, as has often been noted (Grygar, ‘Mehredeutigkeit’, pp. 31ff.; Červenka, ‘Contexts’; Slawiński, *Literatur*, p. 208; Steiner and Steiner, ‘Axes’; Veltruský, ‘Mukařovský’, pp. 125–7; Bojtár, *Structuralism*, pp. 56ff.; Volek, *Metastructuralismo*, p. 240). No less significant is Vodička’s contribution to the theory and analytical application of the structural model. His *Beginnings of Modern Czech Artistic Prose* is not only a historical study of a crucial period in the evolution of Czech literature, but also a theoretical pinnacle of Prague School structural narratology.¹³ Vodička modifies Mukařovský’s

¹³ Mukařovský’s papers on nineteenth and twentieth century Czech prose writers (now collected in the second volume of *Chapters from Czech Poetics* under the heading ‘On poetic prose’) and Jakobson’s essay on Pasternak’s prose (‘Randbemerkungen’), where he formulated his well-known differentiation of poetry (metaphor) and prose (metonymy), testify further to the deep interest of Prague School scholars in narrative poetics.

stratificational model by fusing its phonic and semantic levels into one – the verbal (linguistic) level. Narrative structure thus becomes a correlation of a *thematic* and a *verbal* level. Vodička's project of a structural thematics is centered around three concepts: *motif*, thematic plane and *world*. The term 'motif' – used in the sense of Tomashevsky (*Teorija*) and Mukařovský (*Máj*) – designates the elementary unit of narrative content. A thematic plane is a compositionally homogeneous set of motifs which are not contiguous, but rather distributed through the entire work. The basic thematic planes – story, characters, outer world – can be found under various names in traditional narratology. Structural thematics represents thematic planes as macrostructural integers of motifs, and thus opens the way to studying stories, characters and setting as semantic categories rather than as mimetic representations. Vodička did not develop theoretically the highest level of his thematics and relied on ordinary language for the meaning of such terms as 'fictional world', 'novelistic world', 'ideal world', etc.

Vodička devoted so much attention to thematics because he considered it a channel through which reality enters literature and exercises pressure on its evolution (see below, pp. 54–6). On the other side, the pivotal place of thematics in the literary structure is ensured by its bond with the verbal stratum. Vodička's theme is not a self-contained 'deep structure' more or less independent of the 'surface structure' of its expression; rather, it is shaped and modified by forms of expression, by the micro- and macro-devices of narrative discourse. Vodička's interest is focused on discourse devices which emerge along three axes: a) narration–characterization–description; b) narrator's speech–characters' speech; c) monologue–dialogue. Inspired by Mukařovský's theory of the monologue–dialogue opposition ('Dialog', *Kapitoly*, I, pp. 129–53; *Word*, pp. 81–112), Vodička initiated a systematic study of narrative modes and of the diverse forms of characters' speech.¹⁴

Semiotics of the subject and of the social context of literature; literary norms

Semiotic poetics as a theory of literary communication is necessarily concerned with the *pragmatic* factors involved in literary activity – with the communicating subjects (sender and receiver) and with the social conditions in which the activity takes place.

The semiotics of the literary subject was formulated in Prague in a critical exchange with expressive and phenomenological theories of literature. The most resolute criticism was directed against the determinism of

¹⁴ For a further development of narrative discourse theory in the Prague School tradition, see Doležel, *Narrative Modes*.

expressive theories – against the claim that ‘poetic invention’ is a reflex of the author’s ‘psychic reality’. In Jakobson’s succinct statement, expressive explanations are ‘equations with two unknowns’ (‘Coje’, *Language*, p. 371). Jakobson went beyond epistemological to substantive criticism when he challenged the uni-directionality of psychological determinism. Using the case of the Czech Romantic poet Mácha, he demonstrated that the poet’s ‘life’ and his ‘work’ are mutually substitutable. A comparison of Mácha’s intimate diary, a *private* text, with his famous poem *May*, a *public* text, reveals that both texts record a set of possible events caused by a lover’s passionate jealousy: murder, suicide or resignation. Each of these events, Jakobson maintains, ‘was experienced by the poet; all are equally genuine, regardless of which of the given possibilities were realized in the poet’s private life and which in his *oeuvre*’ (ibid., p. 374).¹⁵

Mukařovský criticized psychological determinism on similar grounds: ‘the relationship between the poet’s work and his life does not have the character of a unilateral dependency but of a correlation’ (‘Strukturalismus’, *Kapitoly*, I, p. 27; *Prague School*, p. 81). He proceeded to articulate a semiotic view of the creative subject which can be summarized in three theses: a) The literary work *signifies* the poet’s life in different possible ways, direct as well as figurative (‘Básník’, *Studie z estetiky*, p. 144; *Word*, p. 143). For semiotic poetics the relationship between the work and its creator is not an *a priori* constant but an empirical variable.¹⁶ b) Intersubjective (‘objective’) factors are necessarily present in literary communication since the literary work serves ‘as an intermediary between its author and a collectivity’ (‘L’art’, *Studie z estetiky*, p. 85; *Structure*, p. 82). Historically changing objective factors, particularly literary norms, constrain individual creative acts not only by contributing to the work’s theme, genre, style, etc., but even by regulating the admission of particular aspects of the subject into the process of creation: ‘There exist, for example, certain periods which put emphasis on direct sense perception, while others emphasize ‘memory’, i.e. the stock of perceptions’ (‘Nové německé dílo’, *Studie z poetiky*, p. 345). c) The creative subject is in dialectical tension with the intersubjective norms, challenging their authority by constant violations. More importantly, the subject is responsible for the uniqueness of the literary work by creating it according to a global ‘constructional

¹⁵ In her summary of Jakobson’s reconstruction of Pushkin’s ‘sculptural myth’ (‘Socha’, *Language*, pp. 318–67) Pomorska pointed out another aspect of the ‘work-life’ exchange: ‘According to the results of Jakobson’s analysis, not only is the life situation active in the process of literary creation, but the product created is likewise active and often decisive in the poet’s actual biography’ (‘Roman Jakobson’, p. 373).

¹⁶ The range of possibilities was indicated by Wellek: ‘The work of art may embody the dream of its creator, his exact psychological opposite, it may function almost as a mask in a subtly inverse fashion only indirectly related to the empirical “personality”’ (‘Theory’, p. 181).

principle' which operates 'in every segment of the work, even the most minute, and which results in a unified and unifying systematization of all the constituents' ('Genetika', *Kapitoly*, III, p. 239). It is not by chance that Mukařovský baptized this individualizing factor of poetic creativity *semantic gesture*. In its formation and sense this term synthesizes the semanticization of the poetic structure (see above, pp. 42–5) and the personal character of the creative act, thus bringing Prague School poetics to its culmination. By making the poet's characteristic 'gesture' responsible for the semantic regularities of the literary work, Mukařovský promotes the subject to the highest factor of aesthetic structuration.¹⁷

Turning to the theory of the receiving subject's activity, we find its most lucid formulation in the context of a critique of the phenomenological concept of *Verstehen* ('understanding').¹⁸ Mukařovský accepts the self-evident fact that the mental states of different receivers of one and the same literary work are not identical. However, structural theory shifts the focus of the theory of reception by recognizing that literary study cannot investigate the mental state of each recipient, but 'the *conditions* of the induction of this state, conditions which are given equally for all receiving individuals and are objectively identifiable in the structure of the work' ('Nové německé dílo', *Studie z poetiky*, p. 343). Thanks to the supra-individual status of the literary work the idiosyncratic mental states of the individual receivers 'always have something in common' and, therefore, 'a generally valid judgement about the value and the sense of a work is possible' ('K pojmosloví', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 37).

The existence of objective factors in the creation and reception of literary works leads Mukařovský to develop a conceptual differentiation between concrete psycho-physical individual and 'personality' (*osobnost*). The concept of personality incorporates the objective constraints imposed on the social interaction called 'literature'; without such constraints, the production, transmission and reception of literary 'messages' would be impossible. Far from suppressing the subject, Prague School structuralism envisaged a theory which finds a balance between individual and supra-individual factors in literary communication: 'The conception of the work of art as a sign offers for aesthetics a deep insight into the problems of the role of personality in art precisely because it liberates

¹⁷ The concept of semantic gesture was not sufficiently developed in Mukařovský's theoretical writings, but was repeatedly applied in his mature analyses of the *oeuvre* of several Czech poets and prose writers. It has received considerable attention from Mukařovský's interpreters (Prochažka, *Příspěvek*, pp. 64f., 68; Jankovič, 'Perspectives'; Mercks, 'Gesture'; Schmid, 'Geste'; Burg, *Mukařovský*, pp. 87–96, 288–96, 398–401; Volek, *Metastructuralismo*, pp. 228–30).

¹⁸ The occasion for a direct engagement with phenomenology was Mukařovský's review article of the first volume of J. Petersen's *Die Wissenschaft von der Dichtung*, published in Berlin in 1939.

the artwork from its unequivocal dependence on the individuality of its author' ('Strukturalismus', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 19; *Prague School*, p. 74).

The concept of 'personality' can be applied not only to individual producers and receivers, but also to 'collectives' engaged in literary communication; thus it connects the semiotics of the subject and that of the social context. On the production side, collective personalities are artistic or literary *groups, schools, generations*; on the reception side – the *public*. The semiotics of the collective personality is formulated in contrast to sociological determinism. Mukařovský emphatically denied the possibility of deriving characteristics of art from societal conditions: 'If we had no other evidence, we could not unequivocally derive from a certain state of a society the art corresponding to that society, just as we could not form a picture of a society solely on the basis of the art which it produced or accepted as its own'. Postulating the work of art as 'a sign with respect to society no less than with regard to the individual', Mukařovský reasserted a basic thesis of semiotic poetics: the relationship between literature and society is not uniform and constant, but 'empirically highly variable'. Mapping out the range of possibilities, he sets them between two poles – 'consensus between art and society' and 'mutual separation'. *Regulated* and *tendentious* art is situated on the first pole, while *l'art-pour-l'art* trends and *poètes maudits* are positioned on the pole of separation (*ibid.*, pp. 19–21; *ibid.*, pp. 74ff.).

Mukařovský devoted considerable attention to the role of the public in the reception of art and literature, pointing out that the public *mediates* between art and society. It can perform this mediating role because its members are capable of 'perceiving certain kinds of artistic signs (for example, musical, poetic, etc.) adequately'. A necessary condition for an individual to become a part of the public is 'some special education' (*ibid.*, p. 22; *ibid.*, p. 76). Thanks to this education, the public's reception of artworks is an active involvement and, as such, exercises a strong influence on the development of art. On the other hand, art shapes the public's taste, creating, in a sense, its own public.

A semiotic theory of literature puts much emphasis on the crucial objective factors of production and reception, the aesthetic norms. Mukařovský introduced this concept by analogy with Saussure's *langue*: 'The essence of art is not the individual work of art; rather, it is the ensemble of artistic habits and norms, the artistic structure which is of a supra-individual, social character. A particular work of art relates to this supra-individual structure as an individual verbal discourse relates to the system of language, which is also common property and transcends every actual language user' ('K pojmoslovi', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 32). Mukařovský recognized, however, the essential difference between linguistic and literary norms. First, literary norms are much less rigid than their linguistic counterparts;

consequently, literary norms are not respected, but constantly violated in the practice of literary communication: 'A work which would fully correspond to the accepted norm would be standardized, repetitive; only the works of epigones approach this limit, whereas a powerful work of art is non-repetitive' ('Estetická funkce', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 32; *Aesthetic Function*, p. 37).

Literary norms thus function as the supra-individual background of literary creativity. Not surprisingly, historically minded theorists of the Prague School identified literary norms with tradition: 'Every work of art is part of a tradition (system of norms) without which it would be incomprehensible' (Wellek, 'Theory', p. 182). Vodička identifies norms with standards of a period ('Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 37) and derives the dynamics of literature from a tension that arises between these standards and the poets' need for innovation (see below, pp. 54–6).

Variability and bi-directionality of the relationship between art and society form the basis of the Prague School sociology of art and literature. Its general model of societal activities, including artistic production, as a set of parallel, autonomous, but mutually related 'series' has been much discussed and criticized (see Striedter, 'Einleitung', pp. lii–lvii; Grygar, 'Role'). However provisional, the model closed the breach between the purely immanent theory of literary structures and pragmatic explanations, while firmly rejecting dogmatic determinism of all shades and provenances.

Poetic (fictional) reference

The relationship between the sign and the 'world' – the reference relation – is one of the basic problems of semiotics. In Prague School linguistics, with its general Saussurean bent, the reference relation was kept in the background; its semantics was focused on the immanent nexus between *signifiant* and *signifié*. In the domain of aesthetics and poetics, however, the problem of reference could not be ignored. The most interesting statements of the Prague School position were arrived at in the comparative typology of semiotic systems (Jakobson) and in the contrastive semantics of poetic and non-poetic language (Mukařovský).

Jakobson noted that the reference relation constitutes one of the differential properties of visual and auditory signs. He was struck by the fact that many people react violently to abstract, non-representational paintings, while the issue of representation is hardly ever raised with respect to music:

In the entire history of the world quite rarely have people grieved and asked, 'What facet of reality does Mozart's or Chopin's sonata such-and-such represent?' . . . The question of mimesis, of imitation, of objective representation seems,

however, quite natural and even compulsory for the great majority of human beings as soon as we enter into the field of painting and sculpture.

(‘On the Relation’, *SW*, II, p. 339)

Jakobson resolves the puzzle by pointing to the typological contrast between auditory and visual signs: while visual signs have a strong tendency to be ‘reified’ (interpreted as representations of things or beings) auditory signs are ‘artificial’ and nonrepresentational systems (*ibid.*, p. 341, p. 337).

The lack of reference in music could be explained on these grounds. Literature, however, cannot be lumped together with music when it comes to reference. Language, unlike music, refers to the world and so does the art of language. Mukařovský tried to face the issue by postulating for literary texts a dual reference, particular and universal: ‘The work of art as sign is based on a dialectical tension between two kinds of relationship to reality: a relationship to the concrete reality which is directly referred to and a relationship to reality in general’ (‘K pojmosloví’, *Kapitoly*, I, pp. 35ff.). Particular reference, which literary signs share with non-literary verbal signs (ordinary language), is restricted to ‘thematic’ literary genres, such as narratives; they refer to (are about) specific events, particular characters, and so on. (‘L’Art’, *Studie z estetiky*, p. 87; *Structure*, p. 86). This brief comment exhausts Mukařovský’s semantics of particular reference. On the issue of universal reference he is less laconic but no less vague. In a late formulation he suggested that ‘the text “means” not that reality which comprizes its immediate theme but the set of all realities, the universe as a whole, or – more precisely – the entire existential experience of the author or of the perceiver’ (‘O jazyce’, *Kapitoly*, I, p. 82; *Word*, p. 6). In earlier pronouncements, universal reference seems to have had the character of an ideological category: the ‘infinite reality’ which works of literature refer to is ‘the total context of so-called social phenomena – for example, philosophy, politics, religion, economy, etc.’ (‘L’Art’, *Studie z estetiky*, p. 86; *Structure*, p. 84).¹⁹

In tying literary works of ‘thematic’ genres to particular reference, Mukařovský could not ignore the issue of fictionality. He formulated it in a purely negative way: in contradistinction to reference in ordinary language, reference in poetic language ‘has no existential value, even

¹⁹ The vagueness of the concept of universal reference is reflected in the diversity of opinions among Mukařovský’s interpreters. Steiner takes universal reference to mean ‘reality *in toto*’ (‘Basis’, p. 371). Fokkema highlighted Mukařovský’s idea that a work of art ‘may have an indirect or metaphorical meaning in relation to the reality we live in’ (Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch, *Theories*, p. 32). Mayenowa understood the term as meaning ‘the recipients’ diverse experience’ (‘Statements’, p. 428). Veltruský believes that Mukařovský’s ‘phenomenological’ and ‘sociological’ conceptions of universal reference ‘were to a large extent complementary’ (‘Mukařovský’s poetics’, p. 140).

if the work asserts or posits something' (*ibid.*, p. 87; *ibid.*, p. 86). The same contrast frames the closely related problem of poetic truth. In communicative language the question of truth does arise: 'The reception of the utterance with communicative function will be accompanied by the question whether that which the speaker is telling actually happened', that is the receiver will ask whether the utterance is truth, or lie, or mystification, or 'pure fiction' ('Estetická funkce', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 45; *Aesthetic Function*, p. 72). In poetic texts such concepts as truth, illusion, lie, pretending and so on are not applicable, since they all presuppose truth-value. But poetic texts lack truth-value: 'In poetry, where the aesthetic function prevails, the question of truthfulness does not make any sense' ('O jazyce', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 82; *Word*, p. 6).²⁰ The special truth-conditions do not obliterate the distinction between 'real' events (narrated events based on actual happenings) and 'fictional' events (the author's inventions) in literary works; however, this distinction is relevant only insofar as it becomes 'an important component of the structure of the poetic work' ('Estetická funkce', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 45; *Aesthetic Function*, p. 72; cf. Winner, 'Mukařovský', p. 446).

By semanticizing the structural model of poetics, Prague School scholars, as demonstrated above, were able to launch a comprehensive study of semantic and thematic structures of literature. However, the dominance of Saussurean non-referential semantics prevented them from appreciating the importance of the reference relation which links literature to the 'world'. Rejecting as 'aesthetic subjectivism' the view that art is 'a sovereign creation of a hitherto nonexistent reality' (*ibid.*, p. 46; *ibid.*, p. 74), Mukařovský lets the aesthetic sign 'hover', 'detached to a considerable extent from direct contact with the thing or event it represents' ('Význam', *Studie z estetiky*, p. 57; *Structure*, p. 21). In such a semantics, the pivotal problem of fictionality could not be tackled. The theoretical system of semiotic poetics was left with a considerable lacuna.

Literary history

There is no doubt that a theoretically based study of literature tends to privilege its synchronic dimension. In Prague, this natural tendency was reinforced by the influence of Saussure who installed synchronic structure of language as the legitimate subject of scientific investigation.²¹ While Saussure's differentiation of synchrony and diachrony was accepted in

²⁰ Mukařovský's position on truth-value in poetry as well as its justification accord with the views of Gottlob Frege (for a detailed discussion see Doležel, *Occidental Poetics*).

²¹ Saussure's differentiation of linguistic synchrony and diachrony did not imply rejection of historical study. In fact, Saussure justified it with a new argument: the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign makes historical change in language inevitable.

Prague, his ideas about linguistic evolution were subject to a persistent critical examination. The Prague School's divergence from Saussure was succinctly summed up by Jakobson: Saussure 'attempted to suppress the tie between the system of a language and its modifications by considering the system as the exclusive domain of synchrony and assigning modifications to the sphere of diachrony alone. In actuality, as indicated in the different social sciences, the concepts of a system and its change are not only compatible but indissolubly tied' (*Dialogues*, p. 58). The Prague linguists developed a theory which deemed the evolution of the language system no less 'systemic and goal-oriented' than its synchronic functioning (*ibid.*, p. 64).

The dialectic of stability and change and the idea of a systemic evolution also stimulated an original theory of literary history.²² Its early formulation in Mukařovský's study of a nineteenth-century Czech descriptive poem (Polák's *Sublimity of Nature*) led to a lively polemic on the writing of literary history (for a summary, see Galan's *Structures*, pp. 56–77). In *TCLP* 6 René Wellek published a penetrating, but rather neglected, essay 'The theory of literary history'. The most significant contributions to literary history were made by Felix Vodička in his papers and in his book *The Beginnings of Czech Artistic Prose*.

Prague School scholars were unanimous in postulating a close connection between literary theory (poetics) and literary history: a new understanding of literary evolution is possible only on the foundations of a structural and semiotic theory of literature. Mukařovský derived the 'dynamism' of the literary structure directly from its basic characteristics. Structure is not 'a mere aggregation of parts', but is 'energized' by the functional relationships which exist between its parts. While an aggregated whole is annulled by change, for structure change is necessary ('Strukturalismus', *Kapitoly*, I, p. 15; *Prague School*, pp. 69f.). Wellek spelled out the new epistemology of literary history in contrast to two traditional trends documented on English literary scholarship: 'All histories of English literature are either histories of civilization or collections of critical essays. The one type is not a history of *art*, the other not a *history of art*' ('Theory', p. 175).²³ Wellek demands a history focused on the

²² 'What most sharply distinguishes Czech structuralism from the other twentieth-century literary theories is its commitment to literary history' (Galan, *Structures*, p. 2).

²³ Wellek does not criticize social historians, historians of ideas and others for using literature as documentary material, nor is he trying to prevent professors of literature from becoming involved in these domains. He points out, however, that these practical or pedagogical considerations should not be confused with 'the clarification of a theoretical problem which can be solved only on a philosophical basis' ('Theory', pp. 175ff). Vodička added an important caveat: the aesthetic function affects substantially the information conveyed in the literary work and, therefore, the use of literary works as historical sources requires extreme caution ('Literární historie', *Struktura*, pp. 38ff).

'internal development' of 'art in literature': 'Individual structures together make up an order in a certain period and this order is transforming itself in a certain direction under the pressure of the changing environment' (*ibid.*, p. 189).²⁴ In a similar vein, Vodička assigned to literary history the task of studying all texts displaying the aesthetic function; the shifting domain of this function is itself a literary historical problem ('Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 13).

In a theoretical framework, which represents literature as a specific system of communication, literary history necessarily becomes a three-pronged process: the history of production (genesis), the history of reception and the history of literary structures (cf. Vodička, 'Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 16). In Prague, these three strains were differentiated in theory and explored in historical research, but their correlations and hierarchies were not clarified.

Production history

In contrast to the positivist focus on production history, the Prague School de-emphasized this strain. Nevertheless, significant ideas about this topic were formulated. In harmony with Prague School theory (see above, pp. 45–9) production history was released from its dependence on external (psychological, social) factors and focused on the intrinsic relationship between the individual creative acts and supra-individual aesthetic norms (tradition). The poet 'either identifies with the tradition, or departs from it in an effort for a new and individually coloured creation' (Vodička, *ibid.*, p. 25). But the author's innovative individuality 'can assert itself only within the range of possibilities afforded by the immanent evolutionary tendency of the literary structure'. The significance of the creator is not thereby diminished: 'the quality of the work is ultimately dependent on the talent and the artistic feeling of the poet' (*ibid.*, p. 26). The Prague School shifts the core of production history to the study of the evolution of the text and of its sources in language, thematic tradition and artistic devices. The influence of texts on texts and literatures on literatures is reconciled with the general postulate of the autonomy of literary structure: such influences operate within the evolutionary possibilities of an author or a period (*ibid.*, p. 29).

²⁴ From the very beginning of his theoretical development Wellek closely associated literary structures with values and, therefore, charged the literary historian with critical evaluation. In contrast, Mukařovský believed that the question of aesthetic valuation cannot be answered by literary history ('Polakova Vznešenost' *Kapitoly*, II, p. 100). Vodička took a middle-of-the-road position, differentiating between the aesthetic and the historical value (see below).

Reception history

It has been recognised (Striedter, 'Einleitung') that the foundations of the theory of reception were laid down by Felix Vodička. Vodička derived this theory quite naturally from the semiotics of literary communication: 'A literary work is understood as an aesthetic sign destined for the public. We must, therefore, always keep in mind not only a work's existence but also its reception; we must take into account that a literary work is aesthetically perceived, interpreted and evaluated by the community of readers' ('Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 34; *Semiotics*, p. 197). The dynamism of reception and the diversity of interpretations arise from two factors: from the aesthetic properties of the literary text and from the changing attitudes of the reading public.²⁵

Vodička's reception history is an empirical study of the post-genesis fortunes of literary works as attested in *recorded* concretizations (diaries, memoirs, letters, critical reviews and essays, etc.) ('Problematika', *Struktura*, p. 199; *Prague School*, p. 111). In his study of the successive reinterpretations and re-evaluations of the work of the nineteenth-century Czech poet Jan Neruda, Vodička focused exclusively on critical receptions. Critical texts are of special interest for a literary historian because critics 'fix' concretizations of literary works in conformity with 'contemporary literary requirements' (norms); their concretizations are representative of a particular historical stage of reception (*ibid.*, p. 200; *ibid.*, p. 112). On the other hand, critical texts stimulate, as a rule, subsequent critical texts, so that a work's 'critical history' (Cohen, *Art*, p. 10) can be retraced.

Vodička started the development of his reception theory from the premise that a literary work is an 'aesthetic sign'. He concluded it with the trenchant observation that reception itself is an aesthetic process:

Just as automatized devices in poetic language lose their aesthetic effectiveness, which motivates the search for new, aesthetically actualized devices, so a new concretization of a work or author emerges not only because literary norms change but also because older concretizations lose their convincingness through

²⁵ Vodička drew a careful distinction between his semiotic position and Ingarden's phenomenology. He borrowed Ingarden's term 'concretization', but gave it his own definition – 'a reflection of a work in the consciousness of those individuals for whom the work is an aesthetic object' ('Problematika', *Struktura*, p. 199; *Prague School*, p. 110). Despite Vodička's explicit dissociation, his borrowing of Ingarden's term has led to a spontaneous linking of his semiotic theory of reception with phenomenological *Rezeptionsästhetik* (see below, chapter 11) and resulted in a confusion which up to now has not been cleared up (for contradictory opinions see Schmid, 'Begriff'; Fieguth, 'Rezeption'; Martens, 'Textstrukturen'; Striedter, 'Einleitung', pp. lxiii–lxv; de Man, 'Introduction', pp. xvii–xviii). A claim according to which Prague School theory of reception was 'established on the foundations of *Rezeptionsästhetik*' (Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte*, p. 246; *Aesthetic*, p. 72) is contrary to historical facts.

constant repetition. A new concretization always means a regeneration of the work; the work is introduced into literature with a fresh appearance, while the fact that an old concretization is repeated (in schools, for example) and no new concretizations arise is evidence that the work has ceased to be a living part of literature' ('Problematika', *Struktura*, p. 216; *Prague School*, p. 128).²⁶

Vodička thus reaffirmed the basic principle of Prague School poetics: all literary phenomena, from minute poetic devices to literary history spanning centuries, are products of unceasing human aesthetic activity.

History of structure

The subject of literary history is the 'literary series', 'an abstract repertoire of all possibilities of literary creativity'. What changes and evolves are not concrete literary works, but this 'higher, hierarchically superior structure' (Vodička, 'Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 18). Positivistic literary history sought the 'causes' of literary change outside literature. In contrast, structural literary history 'conceives of the evolution of poetry as a continuous "self-motion" [*Selbtbewegung*] carried by the dynamism of the evolving series itself and governed by its own, immanent order' (Mukařovský, 'Polákova Vznešenost', *Kapitoly*, II, p. 91). The impact of external factors (ideology, politics, economy, science, etc.) is not denied, but it is the dynamism of the structure itself which determines the continuity of history (*ibid.*, p. 165). If the evolution of literature is treated as 'a mere commentary' on extraliterary (cultural, social, economic) history, then literary history becomes 'a discontinuous set of random phenomena' (*ibid.*, p. 166). Vodička specified the immanent order of literary evolution by recalling the principles of Prague School aesthetics: conventionalization (automatization) of the aesthetic structure creates a necessity for 'actualization' ('foregrounding') – a necessity for change. Vodička, however, makes a distinction between the immanent 'cause' and the deterministic cause of natural science: 'The state of the structure at a certain moment does not lead to a necessary, single effect; in the internal tensions of the structure there exist a certain number of possibilities which condition future development' ('Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 19). The most powerful, but by no means only immanent factor of evolution is the principle of contrast (in the Hegelian sense), evident in the sequence classicism–romanticism–realism. In his own historical research Vodička resists reducing the complex literary process to a simple teleological

²⁶ It is worth remembering that Vodička's reception theory is not restricted to concretizations of individual literary works; 'higher literary wholes', authors, literary groups, periods and entire national literatures, preserve their vitality in a continual process of reception.

schema; literary history is never a straightforward transformation of one structure into another, but a chain of 'attempts, failures and half-successes' (*Počátky*, p. 306).

Structural literary history does not deny the impact of heteronomous, extraliterary factors: 'Literary works are materialized by people, they are facts of social culture and exist in numerous relationships to other phenomena of cultural life' (Vodička, 'Literární historie', *Struktura*, p. 25). In the final account, evolution of the literary series is a result of a complex interplay (dialectic) of immanent and external impulses.²⁷ In keeping with his poetics (see above, p. 45), Vodička charges thematics with mediating this interplay: through thematics '*the contents of a community's practical interests and period problems exercise the most powerful influence on the immanent evolution of the literary structure*' (*Počátky*, p. 168).

The literary historian studies all changes in the evolving literary structure: changes of constituents, of their selection and organization, but he is particularly concerned with the profoundly consequential shifts of dominants. These shifts set the entire literary structure into motion and are responsible for the pendulum of literary evolution: the maximum–minimum impact of supra-individual norms generates the contrast between normative and individualistic epochs; the maximum–minimum weight afforded the poetic subject in the literary structure opposes the expressive literature of the romantics to the objective literature of the modernists; the admission or suppression of actual world material brings about the alternation of realistic and antirealistic trends. Shifts of dominants were explored in detail in the history of Czech verse (Jakobson, 'Staročeský verš', *SW*, VI, pp. 417–65; Mukařovský, 'Obecné zásady', *Kapitoly*, II, pp. 9–90), but proved to be no less decisive in the history of narrative prose (Vodička, *Počátky*).

In reconstructing the evolving series, the literary historian discovers evolutionary tendencies and thus provides a ground for assessing the historical value of individual works. Historical value is not identical with the work's aesthetic value; the latter arises in the subject's perception of the literary work, while the former is given by the work's participation and success in implementing the tendencies of the literary process.

The fate of Prague School structuralism in its country of origin is strangely mirrored in its reception abroad. The significance of the Prague School for modern linguistic theory has been generally acknowledged. According to

²⁷ This 'Prague School model' of literary evolution was succinctly summed up by Červenka: 'The preceding state of the literary series predetermines in a *manifold manner* its following stage; the actual selection from this immanently given set of possibilities is accomplished under the impact from a different realm, from the external, extraliterary series' ('O Vodičkově metodologii', p. 335).

Stankiewicz, we owe to the PLC 'a body of work that surpasses in scope all that was done by other contemporary schools of linguistics' ('Roman Jakobson', p. 20). In contrast, Prague School poetics and aesthetics has been virtually expunged from the history of twentieth-century structuralism. Contemporary literary theory and aesthetics is dominated by the opinion that structuralism is a French phenomenon of the 1960s; even when the Prague stage is not ignored, it is treated as just a 'strategic background' to a 'story' located in 'the *haute culture* milieu of modern Paris' (Merquior, *From Prague*, p. x).

A reduction of twentieth-century structuralism to its French stage greatly distorts its history and its theoretical achievement: structuralism appears as a historically short-lived and epistemologically restrictive episode in Western thought. Prague School structuralism had aimed to reshape *all* perennial problems of poetics and literary history into a coherent and dynamic theoretical system. Given the variety and difficulty of these problems – from the 'intrinsic' properties of literary works, to the specific function of poetic language, to the 'extrinsic' relationships of literature to its producers, its recipients and the world – the ideas of the Prague School scholars should not be regarded as definitive. The spirit of the Prague School, shaped in a struggle to preserve integrity of theoretical thought against the pressures of ideology, was strongly antidogmatic. The heritage of Prague is an inspiration for future ventures rather than a historical monument.

3

THE LINGUISTIC MODEL AND ITS APPLICATIONS

The Saussurean model

The small number of students who, in the years 1906–7, 1908–9, and 1910–11, attended the lectures on general linguistics given at the University of Geneva by Ferdinand de Saussure could scarcely have guessed that they were participating in the birth of one of the new century's most potent intellectual movements. Those lectures, recreated after Saussure's death in 1913 by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye from students' notes and published as the *Cours de linguistique générale* (*Course in General Linguistics*) in 1916, produced two great waves of influence, the first upon the fledgling discipline of scientific linguistics itself, the second – after a delay of several decades – on the wider study of cultural practices and concepts. It is the second, the movement known as 'structuralism',¹ which constitutes a major development in twentieth-century literary studies, but in order to explain the impact of Saussure's linguistic model upon this field (as well as upon a number of other fields, including anthropology, psychoanalysis, cultural history, and political theory), it is necessary to devote some attention to the most important elements of that model, and to the later modifications it underwent within linguistic theory. The development of the model within literary studies is largely covered in other chapters in this volume and in volume 9, and this chapter will offer only a sketch – with the exception of the work of Roman Jakobson, who occupies a unique position at the juncture of linguistic and literary studies.

In examining the arguments of the *Course* for the specific purposes of this chapter, we are situating ourselves at two removes from Saussure's own thinking. In the first place, the authorship of the text whose influence

¹ The term 'structuralism' has been used to name a number of related but distinct intellectual trends in the twentieth century. In this chapter, it refers, unless otherwise indicated, to French structuralism – that is to say, a body of work which employs Saussurean principles in the systematic analysis of cultural, political, and psychological phenomena.

we are tracing is shared among a number of people: Saussure himself, the students whose notes were consulted, and the editors Bally and Sechehaye, who rewrote and reorganized those notes to create out of 'faint, sometimes conflicting, hints' (*Course*, p. xxx²) a relatively clear and coherent exposition. For convenience, however, this multiple author is usually referred to as 'Saussure'. In the second place our interest is not in Saussure's contribution to linguistic theory as such but in those aspects of his thought that were to be influential in literary theory and allied fields; in the account of his argument that follows, therefore, 'language' can be thought of as a paradigm for all cultural systems of signification, including literature.

The first major theoretical task Saussure sets himself in the *Course* is the definition of the proper *object* of linguistic study. He is quite open about the circularity involved in this willed choice of an object: 'Other sciences work with objects that are given in advance and that can then be considered from different viewpoints; but not linguistics. . . . Far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object' (p. 8)³. The choice of object, then, will be in part determined by the question of amenability to the kind of project Saussure wishes to undertake, which is, it soon becomes clear, the construction of a rational, explicit, scientific account. This means carving out of the heterogeneous assemblage of phenomena and practices that falls under the heading of language (*langage* is Saussure's term for this broadest of categories)⁴ an object which is discrete, stable, systematic, homogeneous,

² References are to Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin (hereafter referred to as *Course*); this is the translation that has been most influential upon English-speaking critics and theorists. A more recent translation by Roy Harris is in some respects more faithful to the original, though some of Harris' choices of English equivalents are open to question. Quotations are cited in the notes from the standard French edition, usefully reprinted with extensive commentary and bibliography translated from the Italian of Tullio de Mauro. The students' notes from which the published *Course* was constructed are included by Rudolf Engler in his edition.

³ 'D'autres sciences opèrent sur des objets donnés d'avance et qu'on peut considérer ensuite à différents points de vue; dans notre domaine, rien de semblable . . . Bien loin que l'objet précède le point de vue, on dirait que c'est le point de vue qui crée l'objet' (p. 23).

⁴ See *Course*, p. 9. Translation problems abound in regard to Saussure's French terms for language in its different aspects, and many writers in English retain the original terms *langage*, *langue*, and *parole*, a practice which I shall follow. Although it produces some grammatical anomalies, this practice has the advantage of signalling that these terms are being used in a technical sense which extends beyond language to all sign-systems. Baskin translates these terms respectively as 'speech', 'language', and 'speaking,' while Harris renders *langage* as 'language', *parole* as 'speech', and uses various equivalents for *langue*, including 'the language', 'a language', and 'language structure'. In quoting from Baskin's translation I shall silently replace his translations of these terms with the original French where appropriate.

and open to empirical examination and logical theorizing. The study of language all too easily turns into a study of cultural history, psychological processes, social interaction, or stylistic evaluation, topics which cannot profitably be pursued, Saussure feels, until some understanding is attained of the linguistic core itself. He locates this core at the interface between auditory images and concepts: the fundamental fact of any language, that is, is its systematic linking of sounds (or, more accurately, the mental representations of sounds) with meanings. This system he calls *langue*, choosing the French word used for individual languages in contrast to the more general term *langage*.

Langue is distinguished from the individual acts of speaking which it makes possible, and which Saussure terms *parole*. The set of conventional associations that constitutes a *langue* is held more or less completely in the brain of each member of the group, but in its entirety it can be thought of only as a social phenomenon – not, Saussure stresses, as an abstract set of laws existing apart from its users in some ideal realm, but as the sum of all the individually possessed systems (*Course*, pp. 13–14). It is outside the control of any individual within the group, whereas an act of *parole* is an example of an individual's willed behaviour.⁵

Saussure's attempt to envisage a type of fact which is both individual and social, which has a psychological character without being limited to the representations of a single brain, which is an empirical reality yet is not directly observable, is one of the most significant features of the *Course* and one which was to have lasting effects on other disciplines. Later versions of *langue* often treat it as the abstract system upon which the concrete phenomena of *parole* depend; but Saussure insists that '*Langue* is concrete, no less so than *parole*; and this is a help in our study of it. Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval – and which added together constitute *langue* – are realities which have their seat in the brain' (p. 15). This strenuous avoidance of alternatives results in a conception of language that is rather less amenable to objective analysis than Saussure would have wished, but one which was to prove immensely fruitful for later thinkers engaged in the study of other cultural phenomena. He himself remarks prophetically:

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; . . . I shall call it *semiology* . . . Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern

⁵ De Mauro discusses the *langage/parole* distinction in several notes in his critical edition of the *Course*, with useful bibliographical information. See his notes 63–71.

them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. (p. 16)⁶

The most important discussions in the *Course* for later literary theorists are those concerned primarily with semiotic principles and only secondarily with language.

The central notion for any semiotic theory is the *sign*, and Saussure begins his section on 'General principles' with what was to become a famous chapter on the 'Nature of the linguistic sign'. It is always easiest to discuss the linguistic sign by focusing on the example of a single word, usually a familiar, concrete noun, and Saussure, in using 'tree' and 'horse,' is no exception. (In addition, his use of diagrams with pictures of these objects – actually an addition of the editors – misleadingly suggests that meanings are fundamentally visual images; see Harris, *Reading Saussure*, pp. 59–61, for a useful discussion of the expository problems Saussure faces here.) The simplicity of this conceptualization of the sign made it instantly accessible to Saussure's readers, but also gave rise to a number of problems, and it is worth placing it in the context of the more general discussion of *langue*. If the system of *langue* is fundamentally a set of socially agreed conventions linking aural representations with meanings, the term 'sign' applies to any such linkage, and would include such modes of signification as affixation, accident, word-order, figuration, or tone. Thus the final /s/ meaning 'plural' in some English words is just as much part of the system of signs as the word 'tree' and its associated concept. Saussure's choice of 'sign' over any more specific term from linguistics is clearly designed to leave its application as open as possible, but his tendency to use words or morphemes in illustration obscures its generality in a manner that has given rise to some confusion. In applications of the linguistic model to literary study, however, it is precisely the generality of the term which is productive.

For the components of the sign, Saussure coined two words: *signifier* and *signified* (*signifiant* and *signifié*).⁷ This successful act of linguistic creativity (which contradicts Saussure's own assertion that the individual has no

⁶ 'On peut donc concevoir une science qui étudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale . . . nous la nommerons *sémiologie* . . . Elle nous apprendrait en quoi consiste les signes, quelle lois les régissent. Puisqu'elle n'existe pas encore, on ne peut dire ce qu'elle sera; mais elle a droit à l'existence, sa place est déterminée d'avance' (p. 33).

⁷ Jakobson regarded Saussure's terms as an echo of the Stoic distinction between *semainon* and *semainomenon*, and preferred to use the Augustinian terms *signans* and *signatum* (no doubt as part of a strategy of distancing himself from one of the thinkers to whom he was most indebted). See, for instance, his discussion of the sign in 'Quest for the essence of language', *Language in Literature*, pp. 413–16. The Jakobsonian *signatum* is, however, less clearly distinguishable from the referent than is the Saussurean *signifié*.

power over the language) encapsulates much of Saussure's intellectual revolution. An older discourse distinguished between sign and meaning (or sign and referent), implying that the sign is an independent, self-sufficient entity – we know what a cross is without having to know what it stands for – whereas Saussure wanted to stress that the most typical sign comes into being *only when it is conveying a meaning*.

For instance, in a specimen of foreign script that appears to us only as a strange line of curlicues, we cannot distinguish the scribe's ornamental flourishes from the elements of a written language – if, that is, we recognize the presence of a language at all. So the terms 'signifier' and 'signified' are totally interdependent: a signifier, the word itself tells us, is that which has a signified, and vice versa. (We shall return shortly to the importance of the reverse implication.) Moreover, a perceptual object can function as a signifier only through its existence within a system of signs (*a langue*) by virtue of which it is linked to a signified; and it can only function in this way for an individual who is in possession of that *langue*. Like *langue* itself, therefore, the signifier is an entity that is not easily categorizable within the terms of empirical science: it is very definitely material, yet its material specificity is in no way essential to it.

For Saussure, then, the traditional use of the word 'sign,' supposedly in opposition to 'meaning,' in fact involved smuggling in meaning as well. His revised terminology makes a virtue of this confusion, with 'sign' standing for the combination of a signifier and a signified; any one of the three terms therefore co-implies the other two. The difference between 'sign' and 'signifier' is small, but crucial, and some of the contradictions which later applications of Saussure have run into arise from a failure to acknowledge it. The gesture we call a 'salute' made on a particular occasion is in itself neither a sign nor a signifier, merely a physical movement; within the code of military gestures, it is a sign which combines a signifier (the physical gesture as understood by someone who has internalized that code) with a signified (the acknowledgement of a relationship of authority, also understood in terms of the internalized code). Saussure suggests that we might think of the relation between signifier and signified by analogy with that between the front and back of a sheet of paper: 'one cannot cut the front without cutting the back at the same time' (p. 113).

By coining words which refer purely to the *functions* of the two aspects of the sign, Saussure also avoids the connotations of more familiar terms such as 'sound', 'image', 'meaning', 'thought', 'concept', and although he has frequent recourse to this traditional vocabulary, what is important for the work he inspired is his attempt to bypass them. A signifier is *anything* that signifies for a group; a signified is *anything* – it need not be something we would happily call a 'meaning' – which is so signified. Although Saussure's vocabulary frequently leads to a sense of language as

a pre-programmed psychological dance between discrete auditory images and sharply defined concepts, his theory points to an understanding of signification as a continuing social process in which all the terms are mutually defining.

Saussure's double-sided terminology for the sign also leaves no room for a third term such as 'thing' or 'reality' or 'referent', and this exclusion has been the source of some unease among those who feel that it marks a retreat into the sphere of idealism and social irresponsibility. It is, however, completely consistent with the decision to concentrate on language as a set of social conventions: such conventions operate as much in spite of as in the service of reality, as any study of ideology will indicate. The epistemological question of language's access to the 'real' and the political question of language's capacity to change the conditions of human existence are clearly important questions, but not the ones Saussure was asking. Saussure has no doubt about the reality of the language system, of the social groups who produce and preserve it, of the acts of speaking and writing, listening and reading, by which it is manifested and transmitted, or of the historical processes in which it is always caught up; and it is his view that an understanding of these realities is not enhanced by confusing them with the philosophical issue of reference or the pragmatic issue of language as an instrument for change. Saussure's influence may have been partly responsible for a tendency to bracket these questions (especially the second one) in later semiological work, in the hope of achieving a full understanding of systems of signification in themselves; the impossibility of semiology as a rigorously scientific project (already implicit at several points in the *Course*) became more evident in time, however, and the value of Saussure's writing turned out to be less a matter of the proffering of objective analyses than an unsettling of entrenched mental habits.

Implicit in Saussure's presentation of the sign as the simultaneous coming-into-being of a signifier and a signified is the notion of arbitrariness. It is an odd fact that many of those who cite Saussure as the source of their use of this notion are employing it in a way which Saussure viewed as an established truism, albeit one in need of fuller consideration. The principle that language's yoking of words and ideas operates purely by convention, that there is no intrinsic suitability governing the relation between any piece of language and what it means, is an ancient one, argued forcefully (if not clinchingly) by Hermogenes in Plato's *Cratylus*, and repeated at intervals throughout the history of Western thought. 'No one disputes the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign', observes Saussure, 'but it is often easier to discover a truth than to assign to it its proper place' (p. 68). For Saussure, its proper place is within

an appreciation of the system of *langue* by which the relations between signifiers and signifieds are determined. For if a signifier comes into existence only when it is fused with a signified, and vice versa, and that signifier can function as such only if it operates within a set of social conventions, arbitrariness extends not merely to the relationship between the two parts of the sign, but is a property of each of them. There is no intrinsic reason why the aural possibilities of the human vocal apparatus should be classified in any particular way; and there is no intrinsic reason why the conceptual possibilities open to the human mind should be classified in any particular way. It is this principle of *radical arbitrariness* that constitutes Saussure's challenge to traditional modes of thought, and clearly has major importance for all attempts at the analysis of cultural signification.

The first part of the double challenge is easy to accept: the variety of the world's languages demonstrates that the human potential for making noises can be employed in many different ways, and the same point can be extended to all types of sign-system. (There are, of course, functional and historical reasons why certain patterns and not others emerge, but these do not govern the way signs are used.) It is less easy to agree that the categories of our thought are produced by the language we think in rather than by the extra-linguistic world that impinges upon us. Here again, it is important to bear in mind that Saussure's focus is on the language system, not the relation between that system and another reality outside of signification; *within* the system, it is the simultaneous birth of signifier and signified as interdependent elements of a system of signs that creates the category denominated by the signified. The sign-system which results will function perfectly well whatever its relation to the non-significatory realm, as long as there is communal agreement about it. Such communal agreement will, of course, depend on a number of extra-linguistic realities, notably the language's adequacy in performing the tasks demanded of it, and at this point the real certainly impinges on the linguistic: but the real remains, by definition, outside the system, always leaving open the possibility of a changed relationship to it. Saussure's insistence (over-insistence, it could be argued) is always that language can never be fixed or determined in advance, whether by human agency or the non-linguistic world; he remarks in a manuscript note: 'If any object could be, at any point whatsoever, the term on which the sign is fixed, linguistics would immediately stop being what it is, from top to bottom' (*Cours*, ed. Engler, fasc. 2, p. 148). It should be noted, however, that nothing in Saussure's argument implies that the shades of meaning available to one language are not available to other languages; what is implied is merely that they may require different means to convey them.

If both signifiers and signifieds are what they are only by virtue of the system within which they exist, they have no essential core by which they are determined. Again, this is easy to demonstrate for signifiers; the letter ‘t’, Saussure observes, can be written in many different ways: ‘the only requirement is that the sign for *t* not be confused . . . with the signs used for *l*, *d*, etc.’ (p. 120). But the same is true, for the same reasons, of the signifieds; they too are only what they are by virtue of what, within the system of signifieds, they are not. This is one of Saussure’s most influential pronouncements:

Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. (p. 120)⁸

Saussure uses the term *value* for the kind of identity possessed by signs: the analogy is with an economic system, in which the value of an object or a monetary token is determined not by its inherent properties but solely by what it can be exchanged for. (As in the linguistic system, economic values are strongly conditioned by factors outside the system, such as usefulness and scarcity; but the economic system would still function as a system of values if such factors operated differently from the way they do.)

Saussure took one further decisive (and influential) step in constituting the object of his linguistic science: he insisted on the theoretical separation of the type of relation that holds between two elements within a given state of a system, and the type of relation that holds between an element in one state of a system and the equivalent element in a prior or subsequent state of the same system. The former he termed *synchronic* relations, and the latter *diachronic* relations. These are both aspects of *langue*, which is systematic in its internal relations and in the ways in which changes – which are in themselves unsystematic – produce effects within it, and the *Course* has a long section on each. What was innovative in the study of language early in the twentieth century, however, was

⁸ Tout ce qui précède revient à dire que *dans la langue il n’y a que des différences*. Bien plus: une différence suppose en général des termes positifs entre lesquels elle s’établit; mais dans la langue il n’y a que des différences *sans termes positifs*. Qu’on prenne le signifié ou le signifiant, la langue ne comporte ni des idées ni des sons qui préexisteraient au système linguistique, mais seulement des différences conceptuelles et des différences phoniques issues de ce système. (p. 166)

the promotion of the synchronic study of the language system to an autonomous discipline, without which any diachronic study would be inadequate – since it follows from Saussure’s argument that the function of any item in the system can be understood only if the system as a whole is understood. For the individual user of language, and for the language community at a given time, only the synchronic state of the language has any relevance; and analysis of the structure of relations in which that state consists is only muddled by introducing questions of etymology or language-change. As with all Saussure’s distinctions, this opposition is a conceptual and methodological one which is considerably complicated in practical application; what it offers to the wider field of semiology is an initial simplification upon which more complex analyses can be built.

Another bold conceptual opposition helped to provide initial clarification of the multitude of synchronic relations within a system of *langue*, though this one perhaps raised as many problems as it solved for Saussure’s intellectual heirs. If we imagine a pair of items in the system between which a relation or a potential relation exists, this relation can be manifested in two ways in *parole*: either both items occur in an utterance, or one occurs and the other does not. Relations that hold *in praesentia* between occurring items are termed *syntagmatic* (in that they form part of a syntagm, or chain), and relations that hold *in absentia* between an occurring item and one or more items held in memory are termed *associative*. Both these categories remain rather vague in Saussure’s thinking, however, and he admits that syntagmatic relations cut across the boundary between *langue* and *parole* – and so, it might be argued, do associative ones. It is perhaps the very obscurity of Saussure’s thought here that allowed this relatively marginal distinction to become, in a new guise, a central one in Saussurean semiology.

Modifications and alternatives to the Saussurean model

The effects of Saussure’s conceptual revolution are to be felt everywhere in modern linguistics, operating most powerfully, perhaps, where they are least acknowledged. The isolation of the language system as the primary object of study, the theoretical distinction between synchronic and diachronic approaches, the crucial role of differential relations: these methodological assumptions, even though they are debated in their detailed ramifications, form the broad foundation of modern linguistic thought. And more than any specific model of linguistic structure, these general principles, in conjunction with related principles derived in particular from the work of Marx, Freud, and Durkheim, produced massive changes in the modes of twentieth-century cultural analysis. In some areas, however, the influence of Saussure’s theory was mediated

through later modifications, and this section will be concerned with some of these refashionings.

The fundamental Saussurean conception of language (in so far as it is the 'object' analyzed by linguistic science) as a system of purely differential relations which makes possible all linguistic activity was developed in somewhat different ways by all the major schools of twentieth-century linguistics, and its subsequent use as a model in literary studies derives in part from some of these post-Saussurean developments. Most of those who revised the model attempted to evacuate from it Saussure's lingering, if inconsistent, psychologism; the *langue* which underlies linguistic behaviour comes to be understood as an abstract form, deducible from acts of *parole*, a term which now covers the psychological as well as the physical aspects of language. (At the same time, Saussure's related effort to keep the *social* nature of language in view at all times found few followers, though an important theory of just this aspect of language was elaborated in the 1920s by Voloshinov (Bakhtin?) in opposition to what he called the 'abstract objectivism' of Saussurean theory then dominant in Russia; see *Marxism*, pp. 58–61.) The linguist who took to its furthest extreme the idea of the language system's abstractness was Louis Hjelmslev, the leading member of the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen where 'glossematic' linguistics was developed in the 1930s. Hjelmslev's emphasis on the purely formal properties of *langue*, independent of any given realization in a sign-system, was later to be a significant influence upon French structuralism, and his principled distinction between *denotation* and *connotation* – first-order and second-order systems of signification – also proved fruitful for wider semiological purposes.

In the United States, linguistics took another direction, partly as a result of the empirical task of analyzing North American Indian languages. Although the pioneering work of Edward Sapir has affinities with Saussure's mentalistic approach to language, what became known as structuralism within American linguistics – championed in particular by Leonard Bloomfield – adopted a rigorously inductive method based on mechanistic and behaviourist assumptions, and strongly opposed the continental use of deductive arguments about the mental system underlying language. However, the Saussurean tradition reasserted itself in a new guise after 1957 with the rapid acceptance in the United States, and beyond, of Noam Chomsky's theory of generative grammar, advanced as a direct challenge to the Bloomfieldian approach (see Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*). The debt to Saussure became particularly evident with Chomsky's reformulation in *Current Issues* (1964) of the distinction between *langue* and *parole* as a distinction between *competence* and *performance* – with, significantly, the omission of the social dimension of Saussure's distinction,

and the replacement of Saussure's rather imprecise notion of a language system as a set of relations with the theory – later much modified – of generative processes.⁹ The Bloomfieldian emphasis on linguistic study as primarily the establishment of taxonomies gave way to an attempt to explain why languages are as they are, and this project, too, brought the American linguistic enterprise closer to structuralism in the continental, rather than the Bloomfieldian, sense. Chomsky was also responsible for the much echoed phrase 'deep structure'; this was a technical term within sentence-analysis, but its metaphoric resonances proved irresistible to many non-linguists and it became, for a time at least, part of the rhetoric of structuralism.

One branch of post-Saussurean linguistics, in particular, had a considerable impact on literary studies: phonology. Although Saussure's own discussion of phonology is one of the less coherent parts of the *Course*, the foundation-stone of the concept of the 'phoneme' was laid by his clear apprehension of the distinction between, on the one hand, the identity of a linguistic unit – given entirely by its relation to other units within the system of *langue* – and, on the other, the concrete instances of its use within acts of *parole*. The history of the phoneme as a concept is an extremely complex one, going back well before Saussure, and the notion itself emerged in a variety of forms in the work of different schools; but Saussure's general model of language provides the firmest framework for its central insight – the recognition that the actual sounds of any language are able to function as determiners of meaning only because of a system of differences whereby they are identified by the speakers of that language. Saussure's discussion, mentioned earlier, of the variety of ways in which the letter *t* can be written provides a clear instance of the argument; in exactly the same way, the phoneme /t/ in English is realized in a host of different ways (the qualities of a given pronunciation being determined by its place in the utterance, the accent or dialect being used, the idiosyncrasies of the particular speaker and speech act, and so on), but it will continue to be recognized as that phoneme as long as it does not lose its clear difference from all the other phonemes in the system. (The language could still function – by communal agreement – if /t/ was replaced by a completely different sound that remained clearly distinguishable within the system.) We thus arrive at a sharp methodological distinction between *phonetics*, the study of the sounds of speech as physical phenomena, and *phonology*, the study of the differential system of which those physical sounds are a realization. The frequent invention of terms ending in '-eme' in modern linguistic and structuralist

⁹ Chomsky discusses Saussure's distinction on pp. 10–11 and 23 of *Current Issues*.

theory (mytheme, gusteme, philosopheme) bears witness to the appeal of the phoneme as an analytic concept.

Of the various versions of this theory, the one which was to play the most direct part in the evolution of structuralism was that developed by Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson in the late 1920s. Both Russian emigrés, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson played a leading part in the Prague Linguistic Circle and its evolving theoretical enterprise, which came to be known as Prague Structuralism (see above, chapter 1). (The following section will be devoted to Jakobson's peculiarly important role in the application of the linguistic model to literary analysis.) Prague Circle phonology, for whom Saussure and the Polish linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay were probably the most important influences, placed special emphasis on the *functions* of language and of its elements, and the phoneme was therefore understood in terms of its function in differentiating meaning. This understanding of the phoneme gives rise to the widely used principle of the 'commutation test', an elegant demonstration of the differential nature of the language system. In a word of the language under examination, a series of replacements is made at a given point; the word 'farm', for instance, undergoes modifications in its initial element. Among the responses which an English speaker would make to these changes would be that the same word was being pronounced in a different way, or that a different word – say 'charm' – was being uttered. In the former case, the two sounds in question are evidently both variant realizations of the same phoneme, in the latter case the two sounds are realizations of different phonemes. As we shall see, Jakobson took this principle further by applying Saussurean principles to the constitutive elements of the phoneme itself.

Saussurean principles also helped to produce an influential theory of phonology within American structuralist linguistics. Bloomfield – who favourably reviewed the *Course* in 1923 (though he later paid it little overt attention) – laid the foundations, and the 'phonemicists', notably George L. Trager, Bernard Bloch, and Henry Lee Smith, later elaborated upon it, once again employing the Saussurean distinction between actual sounds and a more abstract system of differences. Their work on 'suprasegmental phonemes' – features of language such as stress and intonation – was influential for a time in studies of verse form. The phonemic approach was displaced, however, by the twin influences of Jakobson and Chomsky; generative phonology absorbed Jakobson's analysis of elementary phonological oppositions into a Chomskeian framework, and the subsequent development of metrical phonology found in the traditions of verse form telling evidence for a systematic rhythmic component in the sound patterns of English.

Another of Saussure's distinctions, that between syntagmatic and associative relations, proved fruitful in a number of different recastings. The term 'associative' as used by Saussure found little favour, however: it lumps together all possible mental associations – including mere association of ideas – between an occurring sign and other signs within the system. It was replaced in the work of most followers of Saussure by the term 'paradigmatic', which was given a more precise structural definition: just as the relation between the terms in a grammatical paradigm (*amo, amas, amat*, etc.) is such that only one is chosen for a particular context, so any actually occurring sign is related to a set of signs from which it was chosen. Thus the phoneme represented by the *p* in *pen* is paradigmatically related to the other phonemes which the system of English phonology allows at this point in the syntagmatic context *-en*. The productiveness of the distinction lies, as with all Saussure's conceptual oppositions, in its generality: it applies at every level of the sign-system, and to all varieties of sign. It also gives a more specific content to the notion of identity within a differential system: the elements of any sign-system are determined not by the substance in which they are realized but by the co-occurring and interdependent syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations into which they enter (see Lyons, *Introduction*, pp. 70–81). The recognition of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and their interdependence in determining units, is crucial to all types of structuralism (it is, for instance, the basis on which the commutation test is built) and to all linguistic theories which rely on a distributional analysis of units. Its most influential reformulation was that made by Jakobson, to be considered in the following section.

Saussure remained uncertain about the relation of this distinction to the distinction between *langue* and *parole*, regarding the syntagm as blurring the boundary between them (p. 125). (One reason for this was his undeveloped notion of syntax, which led him to regard the sentence as the free invention of the individual speaker, and hence as part of *parole* – see *Course*, pp. 106, 124.) Later linguists have, in effect, distinguished between the syntagm as a particular utterance, belonging to *parole*, and the syntagmatic pattern or regularity, belonging to *langue* and specifying the rules which individual syntagms observe. The work of Chomsky, in particular, presented a means of preserving within a rule-governed system of language Saussure's recognition of the freedom with which speakers produce new sentences. It is possible, therefore, to use the syntagmatic/paradigmatic distinction to classify the types of relation determined by the language *system* – which elements may co-exist in conjunction with, or replace, which other elements – and also as a tool to analyze a given utterance or text. But the Saussurean slide from *langue* to *parole* in the domain of the syntagm remained a source of possible confusion for later theorists, especially as the syntagmatic dimension

of language was sometimes confused – because the spoken syntagm unfolds in time – with the diachronic approach to linguistic study. (In fact, the two distinctions have the opposite relation: both paradigm and diachrony are characterized by relations of substitution, and both syntagm and synchrony – as their names imply – are characterized by relations of co-occurrence.) A further source of confusion lies in the differing connotations of the words ‘structure’ and ‘system’: the former may seem to imply a syntagm, an act of *parole* which exhibits relationships among its parts, rather than an underlying set of relationships which makes such acts possible, while the latter is likely to suggest a paradigm, a set of substitutable terms, to the exclusion of syntagmatic possibilities. (‘System’ is in fact used in this way by Barthes in *Elements of Semiology*, where it is put in opposition to ‘syntagm’.) However, the term ‘structuralism’ denotes a concern not with acts of *parole* but with the underlying relational system that makes them possible, a system which includes *both* paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations.

Saussure’s absolute distinction between synchronic and diachronic approaches to language has frequently been challenged, but most linguistic schools of the twentieth century (in stark contrast to the previous century) have taken advantage of the methodological clarification it offers to study the rules and relationships which co-exist in a given system. Treated as a necessary simplification of the actual condition of language (whether conceived of as an individual or as a collective phenomenon) it has borne fruit not only in more rigorous accounts of contemporary languages, but in accounts of earlier languages or language states, since the synchronic approach is valid for any period and language community for which it is possible to hypothesize a single linguistic system. Historical studies of cultural fields have found this a highly productive model.¹⁰

An alternative to Saussure’s concept of the sign which should be mentioned for its importance in literary semiotics was that developed simultaneously but independently by Charles Saunders Peirce, who, using a quite different terminology, and not confining himself to language, proposed a tripartite classification of signs (though a given sign can combine the features of more than one class): the *icon*, in which there is a resemblance between the sign and its object (a road-sign in which a cross represents an intersection, for example), the *index*, in which the sign is an effect of the object (such as an animal’s spoor), and the *symbol*, which is the Peircian equivalent of the arbitrary sign upon which Saussure placed all

¹⁰ For further discussion of the significance of Saussure’s synchronic/diachronic distinction in literary theory, see Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, chapter 4.

his emphasis. Like Saussure, Peirce rejects the simple nomenclaturist view of signs as names that refer directly to objects. Signs relate to objects only through mental interpretations: 'A sign . . . is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign' (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 99). Moreover, a sign 'can only be a sign of . . . [its] object insofar as that object is itself of the nature of a sign or thought' (*Collected Papers*, vol. 1, para. 538). Peirce's notion of the *interpretant* as the third term necessary to any signification, not determining the sign-object relation but determined by it, and having itself the structure of a sign, underwent many reformulations and remains the subject of discussion and dispute, but what is evident is that for Peirce as for Saussure, signs are not locked onto the world outside them, but relate to one another in a network without a fixed limit or centre.

In order to appreciate the way in which Saussurean linguistic theory influenced structuralism it is necessary to understand the particular gloss put upon it by the French linguist Emile Benveniste. In 1939, Benveniste published an essay entitled 'The nature of the linguistic sign', which both reasserts the importance of Saussure's theory of the sign, and claims to save it from some of its own inconsistencies (*Problems*, pp. 43–8). Benveniste insists that from the point of view of the language user the relation between signifier and signified is not arbitrary, but necessary (a fact which Saussure – for whom 'arbitrary' did not mean 'random' or 'unfixed' – had himself stressed), and reintroduces the notion of the referent in order to proclaim that the true site of arbitrariness is between the sign and the reality to which it refers. In doing so Benveniste abandons Saussure's most significant claim: that the sign is *radically* arbitrary, in both its aspects. Some of the tensions within later structuralist thought stem from this return, in Saussure's name, to a conception of language that he had resolutely rejected.

A number of other essays by Benveniste, collected in *Problems*, played a crucial part in the discourse of structuralism. His account of the distinction – in any act of *parole* – between language as *énoncé* ('enounced': the particular linguistic items in a particular order) and as *énonciation* ('enunciation': the utterance as it occurs on a particular occasion) had extensive repercussions in studies of the constitution of subjectivity in language. In particular, he pointed to the special properties of 'deictics', verbal elements such as 'I' and 'here' which derive a large part of their meaning not from the linguistic system but from the situation in which they are uttered (a topic in which Jakobson also took an influential interest: see 'Shifters').

Roman Jakobson

As one of the twentieth century's most influential figures in both linguistics and literary studies, Roman Jakobson deserves separate attention. In 1915, when he was still a nineteen-year old student in his first year at university, Jakobson helped to found the Moscow Linguistic Circle, which with the Petersburg-based group known as OPOJAZ (with which he was also associated), was the main centre of what would later be called Russian Formalism (see above, chapter 1). Having moved to Czechoslovakia in 1920, he again participated in meetings with a group of linguistic and literary scholars, and in 1926 was instrumental in their formal constitution as the Prague Linguistic Circle. In 1939 Jakobson left Czechoslovakia, settling in the USA in 1941, where he taught in a number of institutions until his death in 1982. In all three countries he had a considerable intellectual impact, and his international itinerary is an important factor in the belated influence of the Russian and Czech movements upon the English-speaking (and, as we shall see, the French-speaking) world. Although his ideas underwent significant changes during his life, they manifest a consistent thread of outlook and aspiration.

Jakobson's contribution as a literary theorist to Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism is discussed elsewhere in this volume: what is important to note here is that his dual interest – which he saw as single – in linguistic science and in literature (and the arts more generally) stems from the earliest stage of his career. In Moscow he was actively involved as poet and critic in the Futurist movement, whose linguistic experiments were continuous with the more academic study of language, literary and otherwise, being pursued at the same time. It is characteristic that he should in the same year – 1928 – collaborate with Jury Tynyanov, a leading Russian Formalist, to produce a programmatic statement entitled 'Problems in the study of language and literature' (*Language in Literature*, pp. 47–9) and with the phonologists Karcevskiy and Trubetzkoy to present a set of epoch-making proposals on the appropriate methods for the analysis of phonological systems to the First International Congress of Linguistics at The Hague (*Selected Writings*, I, pp. 3–6). After his move to the USA, he continued to write prolifically on both linguistic and literary topics, alone and in collaboration with a number of other scholars.

The Saussurean conception of linguistic science is fundamental to Jakobson's enterprise, which is characterized by a positivistic spirit, an attempt to identify a relatively abstract system implicit in actual behaviour, and a particular focus on binary oppositions, including the two-sidedness of the linguistic sign and the paradigmatic/syntagmatic distinction. Jakobson himself frequently acknowledged the influence of Saussure upon his work, though his indebtedness is sometimes obscured

by the pains he took to emphasize his differences.¹¹ Thus, the topics on which he lectured in New York soon after his arrival there were ‘Saussurean theory in retrospect’ and ‘Sound and meaning’¹², the latter course also much concerned with Saussure’s linguistic theory. Jakobson, even more than Saussure, detected the principle of the binary opposition at work throughout the language system, and he proposed an analysis of the phoneme in terms of a number of binary *distinctive features*, such as voiced/voiceless or tense/lax, thus making it possible to give the notion of a ‘system of differences’ a precise sense at the phonological level. Although Jakobson frequently presented this theory as a major revision of Saussurean doctrine in that it contradicts the principle of the linearity of the signifier (see, for instance, *Six Lectures*, pp. 97–9), it is in fact an extension of basic Saussurean principles to relations between co-occurring aspects of a single phoneme. These relations remain syntagmatic in that they occur between elements *in praesentia*, though Jakobson makes the useful further distinction between successive elements in a syntagmatic relation of *concatenation* and simultaneous elements in a syntagmatic relation of *concurrence*.

The other points relevant to literary studies on which Jakobson frequently expressed disagreement with Saussure involve the notion of arbitrariness and the opposition between synchronic and diachronic approaches. Although Jakobson’s practice in analyzing language, like that of virtually all twentieth-century linguists, assumes that the signs of language are fundamentally in an arbitrary relation to their meanings, his strong interest in poetry led him frequently to emphasize those aspects of the signifier which could be said to be motivated (see, in particular, ‘Quest for the essence of language’, in *Language in Literature*, pp. 413–27, and chapter 4 of *Sound Shape*). In doing so, he found Peirce’s account of the sign, and in particular the category of iconic signs, a useful complement to Saussure’s (though Peirce’s emphasis on triadic structures was less attractive to Jakobson than Saussure’s binary oppositions). For Saussure, it is the arbitrary nature of the sign which results in the peculiar indissolubility of the bond between signifier and signified, since

¹¹ Jakobson’s indebtedness to Saussure and his insistence on his divergences from Saussure are evident throughout most of his career. His late work with Linda Waugh, *Sound Shape*, repeats most of the motifs of this ambivalent relationship; see pp. 13, 14–21 (where attention is drawn (p. 17) to the symbolic appropriateness of the fact that Saussure’s *Course* appeared in the same year as Einstein’s *General Theory of Relativity*), 76, 182, and 220–1 (a sympathetic discussion of Saussure’s extensive and highly problematic work on anagrams in ancient poetry).

¹² The manuscripts of both lecture series (given in 1942–3) have been published in French in Jakobson’s *Selected Writings*, vol. 8; the second is also available as *Six leçons*, translated as *Six Lectures*.

the two aspects of the sign are brought into being simultaneously by the system; Jakobson, however, follows Benveniste in emphasizing the necessary connection between signifier and signified from the point of view of the language user (see *Six Lectures*, p. 111).

Like many literary theorists after him, Jakobson frequently complains that Saussure's distinction between synchronic and diachronic approaches to language implies that language is static and obscures the importance of the historical dimension within language at any given time (see, for instance, Jakobson and Pomorska, *Dialogues*, ch. 7: 'The time factor in language and literature'). Nevertheless, his own analytical procedures testify to the methodological importance of the distinction, which is a necessary precondition to any discussion of the interaction of the two dimensions. (The common confusion of diachrony and the syntagm mentioned above may have its origins in Jakobson's unfortunate conflation of the paradigmatic/syntagmatic opposition with the synchronic/diachronic opposition – see *Six Lectures*, pp. 100–1.) More importantly, Jakobson takes issue with Saussure's argument that linguistic change occurs first in *parole* – some speakers, for a variety of possible reasons, start using the language in a different way – and then (occasionally) becomes established in the *langue*; for Jakobson, change can take place in the system itself (see, for example, 'La théorie saussurienne', pp. 421–4). The question of change in semiological systems was to remain a crucial one in structuralist theory.

Perhaps the most fruitful Saussurean distinction in Jakobson's hands was that between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and his development of it was to constitute a major part of his impact upon literary structuralism. In 1956, with Morris Halle, he published *Fundamentals of Language*, describing it in his foreword as the result of a temptation 'to explore, forty years after the publication of Saussure's *Cours* with its radical distinction between the "syntagmatic" and "associative" plane of language, what has been and can be drawn from this fundamental dichotomy' (p. 6). Particularly seminal was the second part of the monograph, by Jakobson alone, entitled 'Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances' (reprinted in *Language in Literature*, pp. 95–114). Here Jakobson describes two types of linguistic difficulty caused by aphasia, the first, disorders of selection and substitution, characterized by problems in choosing the right word when the context offers little help, the second, disorders of combination and contexture, involving problems in constructing grammatical sequences. The first type, which Jakobson terms 'similarity disorder', is also characterized by the substitution of words *associated* with the one that is blocked even though they may be entirely different in their meaning (thus *table* for *lamp*, *eat* for *toaster*), whereas the second type, which he calls 'contiguity disorder', is characterized by substitutions based on *similarity* of meaning (thus *spyglass* for *microscope* and *fire* for *gaslight*). Jakobson

relates this opposition on the one hand to Saussure's classification of all linguistic relations as either syntagmatic or paradigmatic (the first type of aphasia involves the retention of syntagmatic but the loss of paradigmatic capacities, the second type the reverse) and on the other to the traditional rhetorical figures metonymy (substitution based purely on association, without similarity of meaning) and metaphor (substitution based on similarity of meaning). Jakobson postulates that this opposition underlies cultural productions more generally, so that realism, for instance, can be understood as privileging syntagmatic relations or metonymy (realistic details are related to one another by their contiguity) while romanticism and symbolism operate with paradigmatic relations favouring metaphor (literal elements suggest figurative meanings through relations of similarity). The bold generality of this distinction (typical of Jakobson's search for universals) gave it immense appeal to literary theorists on the lookout for explanatory keys.¹³

The syntagmatic/paradigmatic distinction also played a central role in Jakobson's most programmatic statement of the relation between linguistics and literary study, first published as 'Closing statement: linguistics and poetics' in the volume of papers from the 1958 Indiana Conference on Style edited by Sebeok as *Style in Language*¹⁴. Jakobson asserts that 'poetics is entitled to the leading place in literary studies' and that 'poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics' (p. 63); he thus takes up a somewhat different posture from that of most importers of linguistic models and terminology into literary studies, seeing the process not as one of borrowing between one discipline and another but of one discipline's completely subsuming another. He justifies the place of poetics in his scheme by means of a global model of language functions (an elaboration of the Prague School model derived from Karl Bühler; see chapter 2), in which the poetic function finds its place as that use of language in which attention is directed towards what Jakobson calls 'the message itself', 'the message as such', 'the message for its own sake' (p. 69) – the 'message' in Jakobson's terminology being the combination of signifiers and signifieds which make up the verbal object, and not, as is sometimes assumed, the signifiers alone.¹⁵ The

¹³ For a full-scale development of the implications of Jakobson's distinction, see Lodge, *Modes*, pp. 73–124.

¹⁴ Jakobson's paper has frequently been reprinted; it is included as 'Linguistics and poetics', in *Language in Literature*, pp. 62–94. Page references will be to this printing. For a critical discussion of this paper and of Jakobson's approach to literary analysis, see Attridge, 'Closing statement: linguistics and poetics in retrospect', in Fabb *et al.*, *The Linguistics of Writing*, pp. 15–32.

¹⁵ The relation between 'signified' (or *signatum*) and 'referent' in Jakobson's thought is by no means consistent or clear; for discussion see Waugh, *Jakobson's Science of Language*, pp. 28–31 and 39–40, and Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, pp. 128–35.

means whereby poetry secures this attention is a single general device which employs the Saussurean opposition: ‘*The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*’ (p. 71). Whereas in other uses of language it is only the paradigmatic axis which employs equivalence, an occurring item being equivalent to those which do not occur but could have done so, poetic language implies a reader alert (consciously or not) to equivalences operative along the chain of language itself. This gives rise to a structural analysis of poetry in which similar linguistic characteristics (or for that matter opposed characteristics, opposition being one form of equivalence) are charted across the text, whether they belong to phonological, morphological, syntactic, or semantic categories. The degree of cohesion and intricacy of these relations is regarded as indicative of the quality of the poem, whether or not they are perceptible to the reader. Jakobson, working alone or in collaboration, produced a number of such analyses in the years after publishing ‘Poetics and linguistics’, the most famous of which is that of Baudelaire’s ‘Les chats’, undertaken with Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962; *Language in Literature*, pp. 198–215). English poems analyzed include, with L. G. Jones, Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129 (1970; *Language in Literature*, pp. 198–215) and, with Stephen Rudy Yeats’ ‘Sorrow of love’ (1977; *Language in Literature*, pp. 216–49). These studies reveal the fruitfulness of the binary opposition as an analytic tool when applied over a range of categories; indeed, one of the method’s drawbacks is precisely the ease with which such structures can be found.¹⁶ (Another weakness is its privileging of lyric poetry over other literary forms.) Jakobson’s survey in ‘Linguistics and poetics’ also includes a characteristic emphasis on the potential for sound symbolism within every language, and on the importance of grammatical as well as phonetic patterning within poems.

The appeal of Jakobson’s programme of literary study, and of its demonstration in specific examples, lay largely in the claim to found the analysis of literary texts upon an objective basis, and to sweep away centuries of muddled and impressionistic thinking. It thus echoes Saussure’s claim with regard to the study of language; and, like Saussure, Jakobson proposes a series of grand distinctions and memorable formulae to guide his followers in their enterprise. He does not, however, follow the Saussurean model in quite the way that the French structuralists did; rather than taking as his task the elaboration of the *langue* which underlies all individual acts of reading literary texts, he limits his rule to the most general principles and concentrates on the detailed analysis of specific examples. In spite of many resounding assertions of the objectivity of

¹⁶ For critical discussions of this problem, see Riffaterre, ‘Describing poetic structures’, and Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 55–74.

his method, his rhetoric is imbued with evaluative colouring, and his interest extends only to texts that he regards as possessing unusual literary quality (a quality which his analysis is designed to explain). His heritage in literary studies is therefore double; he passed on to structuralists some simple but widely applicable principles derived from linguistic theory, and he passed on to stylistics some examples of the finely detailed structural description made possible by linguistic science. The tensions and contradictions one finds in his work are the tensions and contradictions one finds still unresolved in structuralism and stylistics.

Applications of the model

If there was a generative moment in the history of structuralism it was the decision in 1942 by one professor of the Ecole libre des hautes études in New York (founded a short time previously by French and Belgian exiles) to attend the lectures of another. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, wishing to improve his understanding of linguistics in order to record the languages of central Brazil, decided to attend the course being given by Roman Jakobson, of whom he knew very little. As he records in his introduction to Jakobson's *Six Lectures* (which were not published until 1976), 'what I received from his teaching was something quite different and, I hardly need add, something far more important: the revelation of structural linguistics' (p. xi). The major lesson was that 'instead of losing one's way among the multitude of different terms the important thing is to consider the simpler and more intelligible relations by which they are interconnected' (p. xii). Jakobson's exposition, and modification, of Saussure's theory of *langue* as a system of differences underlying acts of *parole* allowed Lévi-Strauss to reconceive the problem of kinship structures across different societies and to present in 1945, in *Word*, the new journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York, an analysis which detected in the greatly varying patterns of relationships involving the figure of the maternal uncle a consistent differential system.¹⁷ Since it is at the level of phonological analysis that Jakobson, building on his work with Trubetzkoy, locates the purest operation of Saussurean principles, it is the Jakobsonian theory of binary distinctive features that the anthropologist adopts as his model announcing that structural linguistics is the most highly developed of the social sciences and is destined to play a 'renovating

¹⁷ This essay, 'L'analyse structurale en linguistique et en anthropologie', was reprinted with slight modifications in Lévi-Strauss' *Anthropologie structurale* (1958), and translated as 'Structural analysis in linguistics and anthropology' in *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 31–54.

role' throughout those disciplines (*Structural Anthropology*, p. 33).¹⁸ What is striking about Lévi-Strauss' way of translating the insights of linguistics is that it bears witness itself to the very principle he learned from the other discipline, the primacy of formal over substantive relations: 'Can the anthropologist', he asks, 'using a method analogous *in form* (if not in content) to the method used in structural linguistics, achieve the same kind of progress in his own science as that which has taken place in linguistics?' (*Structural Anthropology*, p. 34). It is with this gesture that Lévi-Strauss opens the door to the spread of Saussurean principles beyond linguistics, with his own emphasis on the term 'structural,' derived from the 'structural linguistics' of Trubetzkoy and Jakobson (not that of the Bloomfieldians), bearing fruit in the term 'structuralism'.

The wide attention that structuralism gained in the 1950s, first in France and then in a number of other countries, grew out of the application of a Lévi-Straussian notion of myth to contemporary French culture. Inspired by Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes infused a Saussurean view of *langue* and signification with a Marxist (and Brechtian) awareness of the operation of class ideology in order to anatomize the daily preoccupations of his fellow-citizens, and published the resulting eminently readable essays in French magazines. A collection of these pieces, together with a much more systematic and explicitly Saussurean theory of contemporary myth, appeared in 1957, a year before Lévi-Strauss published his *Anthropologie structurale*.¹⁹ Barthes, who adopted linguistic concepts and terminology not only from Saussure but also from Peirce, Hjelmslev, Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, and Benveniste, was perhaps the most influential promoter of the linguistic model in the wider cultural field, with notable contributions to literary theory and criticism (see below, chapter 6). He advanced a structural account of an earlier synchronic system (the universe of Racine's tragedies) in *Sur Racine* (1963); attempted a systematic account of Saussure's proposed new science in *Elements de sémiologie* (1964); put forward a linguistic model for the analysis of all narratives in 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' (1966); carried out a detailed semiological analysis (of captions in fashion magazines) in *Système de la mode* (1967); and in *S/Z* (1970) (whose title is an instance of a Jakobsonian distinctive feature, the opposition *unvoiced/voiced*) he both took Saussurean analysis of a literary text to a new extreme of detail and simultaneously undermined its claims to

¹⁸ While Lévi-Strauss accepts Jakobson's argument that arbitrariness is not total when meaning is involved, as well as Benveniste's emphasis on the 'necessity' of the signifier/signified relation, his own application of the notion is closer to Saussure's than theirs; see, for instance, his foreword to Jakobson's *Six Lectures*, p. xxii.

¹⁹ Barthes' *Mythologies* was (in part) translated as *Mythologies* in 1972; the final essay, 'Myth today,' appears on pp. 109–59.

scientific status.²⁰ Barthes follows Saussure's model more strictly than Jakobson or Lévi-Strauss; he takes issue with Benveniste's reintroduction of the referent and Jakobson's emphasis on motivation, and, taking a hint from Lévi-Strauss (and from Marxist accounts of ideology), emphasizes instead the culture's tendency to *naturalize* its unmotivated signs (*Elements*, pp. 50–1). He makes powerful analytic tools out of Saussure's distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic (or for him, 'systematic') relations and Hjelmslev's distinction between denotation and connotation, whereby an entire sign – signifier and signified – functions as a signifier in a second-order system.

One major difference between Barthes' project and that of Lévi-Strauss, however, was his concentration on the specific *langue* of a historically and geographically located culture rather than on postulated human universals. Like Saussure (and Jakobson in his poetic analyses), he used some rather general methodological principles, spelled out most fully in *Elements of Semiology*, to trace the systematic relations operative in a given field: narratives, the captions of contemporary fashion plates, the Racinian universe. Unlike Lévi-Strauss (and Jakobson in his phonological theory), he does not take the goal of this activity to be the discovery of unconscious universal laws and categories governing all human behaviour. His structuralism is therefore of more use in literary criticism, as it usually focuses upon the actual working of individual texts, rather than on the abstract relations that may underlie all texts; and it is also more alert to historical change (*Elements* ends with the speculation that 'the essential aim of semiological research' may be to discover how systems change through time (p. 98)) and to the political dimension of all signification.

Lévi-Strauss' adoption of the Saussurean model was also a crucial source for Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and practice; in his 1953 paper, 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis' (also known as the 'Discours de Rome' (*Écrits*, pp. 30–113)) he used Saussurean and Jakobsonian terms in a manner that suggests mediation via Benveniste and Lévi-Strauss, but by the time of 'The Freudian thing' (delivered in 1955, and first published in a revised form in 1956 (*Écrits*, pp. 114–45)) he is urging the reader to 'read Saussure' (p. 125). His best-known use of Saussurean linguistics is in 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious' (delivered in 1957 (*Écrits*, pp. 146–78)), where the strong influence of Jakobson's 'Two aspects of language' is evident (though in

²⁰ These books have been translated as *On Racine*, *Elements of Semiology*, *The Fashion System*, and *S/Z*; the essay referred to is translated as 'Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives' in *Image-Music-Text*, pp. 79–124.

both cases Lacan's versions are distinctly his own – for example, he adds to Jakobson's confusion of the syntagm with the diachronic approach to language a further confusion of the signified with both of these (*Écrits*, p. 126)).

Lacanian literary theory is dealt with elsewhere (see below, chapter 8), as are a number of other deployments of the Saussurean model, some involving direct engagement, some filtered through the revisions we have discussed. These include the work of a number of narratologists, in which a Saussurean framework is often combined with a grammatical analysis of the sentence to provide a model for the system underlying narratives (see below, chapter 5); Michel Foucault's theory of the *episteme*, which seeks to lay bare the fundamental modes of knowledge in a relatively homogeneous historical period; Louis Althusser's influential borrowing of Saussurean concepts in his reworking of Marx (see below, chapter 8); and Julia Kristeva's development of Saussure's pre-linguistic 'indistinct mass' into the notion of the 'semiotic' (see below, chapter 8). Structuralism gained a significant, if tendentious, place in Soviet literary studies in the 1960s, the most notable practitioner being Jury Lotman (see Seyffert, *Soviet Literary Structuralism*). The science which Saussure envisaged has become a reality, if not a secure component of the academy; one might cite the work of Umberto Eco as a detailed working-out of the impulses which led Saussure and Peirce to see themselves as harbingers of a wider semiological enterprise. Chomsky's revision of Saussure's founding distinction between *langue* and *parole* has also borne fruit in literary theory, notably in Jonathan Culler's argument (in *Structuralist Poetics*) in favour of a notion of 'literary competence', even though Chomsky's own linguistic goals remain conditioned by a universalism reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss' and of little use to the reader of literary texts.

As important as the clarifications which Saussure bequeathed to the study of culture are his inconsistencies and confusions, which allowed structuralism to promote its own undoing as it was coming into being. The paradox involved in a 'science' which constitutes its own object, the undermining of objectivity implied in the notion of the sign's radical arbitrariness, the insistence on the purely differential nature of sign-systems, the oscillation of *langue* between the individual and the social, the failure of the attempt to make absolute distinctions between speech and writing, between synchrony and diachrony, between *langue* and *parole*: all these point to a deeper set of problems inherited by Saussure from his intellectual forebears. The relation of Saussure's endeavour to the history of Western thought, and its usefulness as a pointer to endemic contradictions within that history, were brought out most clearly by Jacques Derrida (see below, chapter 7), whose reading of Saussure constitutes a more careful return to the actual

text of the *Course* than is evident in most of the theorists we have discussed.²¹

Stylistics

Whereas structuralism tends to see literature as *equivalent to* a language, and makes use of the model of linguistic theory accordingly, another broad field in which the influence of linguistics has been paramount has been stylistics, which stresses that literature is *made of* language and which therefore draws on linguistic theory not so much as a model but as a set of (tentative) findings about the language system. In theory, a structuralist analysis need use no linguistic data at all; its data are those of the material being analyzed, and it is only the general methodology which is borrowed from linguistics. Conversely, stylistics may have no use for a model derived from linguistics; a stylistic analysis may retain the traditional assumptions of literary criticism but apply them to features of language defined in accordance with linguistic theory. In practice, of course, the two approaches are seldom as easily separated as this would imply – we have already seen how Jakobson straddles both. Since the application of a general model from another discipline to one's own field is an easier form of borrowing than mastering the detail of that discipline, stylistics has been less influential within literary studies than structuralism or post-structuralism, and has more often been practised by linguists interested in literature than by those with a predominantly literary training. (A wider definition of stylistics makes it the study of discursive features in any use of language, without giving literature a special role, and in this form it is closely related to text grammar, discourse analysis, pragmatics, and other branches of linguistics concerned with utterances in their contexts.) As a result, the goals of stylistics are varied, and do not always coincide with those of literary theorists or critics; the aim of a stylistic study may be an understanding of language mechanisms, or a demonstration of the validity of a particular linguistic theory, or the development of a method of language teaching which employs literary texts. One goal that has motivated a number of stylistic projects – including, as we have seen, Jakobson's – has been the identification, on an objective, empirical basis, of the features of literary texts that give rise to judgements of value; none of these has convinced a wide literary readership, however, and it may well be that literary evaluation is too closely entwined with cultural and political processes to allow for objective and disinterested conclusions. (In any case, success in this project would make possible the mechanical

²¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 30–73; *Positions*, pp. 18–36. A good account of Saussure's fruitful contradictions is given in Weber, 'Saussure.'

creation of art, and this itself would contradict one of Western culture's most cherished assumptions.)

The origins of stylistics are also more diverse than those of structuralism, since the term denotes an area of study rather than a particular methodology. Saussurean dichotomies, Bloomfieldian taxonomies, Chomskian transformations, and many other varieties of linguistic technique have been employed in the analysis of literary texts. A European tradition of philological stylistics descends from the work of Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach. American stylistics has been eclectic, as the work of Samuel R. Levin, Seymour Chatman, Michael Riffaterre, and Ann Banfield indicates, though there is a strong Jakobsonian cast to much of it. Riffaterre, for instance, takes issue with Jakobson's method of poetic analysis but makes the same assumption – derived from Romantic aesthetics – that the analyst's task is to demonstrate a complex organic unity in a poem. In British stylistics, the linguistic theories of Michael Halliday (particularly systemic grammar and functionalism) have played an especially important role, and Halliday himself has made notable contributions (see, for example, 'Linguistic function'). Speech act theory, a branch of philosophy bordering on linguistics which derives from the work of J. L. Austin, has also been put to work in literary theory, notably in Mary Louise Pratt's *A Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. Pratt's argument is that literary discourse is not an imitation of other kinds of discourse, but is itself a mode of discourse (exemplified outside the strictly literary domain as well as within it).

Any study of the linguistic features of literary texts – syntax, phonetic or phonological properties, vocabulary, representations of speech or thought – could be said to fall under the heading of stylistics, though the degree to which linguistic theory is employed in such studies varies widely. One area that has always existed on the borders of linguistics (or, in earlier periods, the formal study of grammar) is prosody. The analysis of metre and rhythm in any language relies upon prior assumptions, implicit or explicit, about that language's use of sound, and twentieth-century linguistics, in a variety of forms, has fed continually into prosodic studies. Literary scholars have turned to linguistics for objective data to give the study of metre a solid basis, though more often than not the promised objectivity has proved to be an illusion. We might note the use earlier in the century of the findings of acoustic phoneticians measuring the durations of syllables, the influence of David Abercrombie's account of phonetic quantity upon a number of English prosodists, the appeal of Trager and Smith's taxonomy of English suprasegmentals (mentioned above) to metrical theorists in search of a more detailed mode of scansion, and the flurry of claims made for generative metrics, especially in the United States and France, in the wake of Chomsky's model. The germ of

this last movement was an essay by Jakobson's student and collaborator, Morris Halle, together with Samuel Jay Keyser, on 'Chaucer and the study of prosody'. There followed a number of revisions and alternatives, each attempting to formulate simple generative rules which would account for all the existing lines of regular verse in a given language. True to the Jakobsonian inspiration of the movement, the ultimate goal in such work is often taken to be the specification of metrical universals, underlying verse form in all languages.²²

Linguistics itself has continued to change rapidly, and the difficulty with which Saussure began – how does the linguist define an object to study? – has once more become acute. Continuities have been established with sociology, with cognitive science, with neurobiology, with cybernetics, and the notion of elementary formal structures underlying a mass of complex detail has become more and more problematic. Structuralism itself has made possible a sharper awareness of the socially constructed nature of disciplines and institutions, including those of linguistics and literary studies, and has contributed to the exposure of androcentric or ethnocentric assumptions masked by the universalist claims once characteristic of the sciences of language. These shifts have altered the relation between linguistics and literary studies. As the hopes of a scientific account of literary techniques, literary interpretation, and literary value have dwindled, an awareness of the limitations and self-contradictions of the scientific model has grown; and the heavy traffic from linguistics to literary studies characteristic of the middle decades of the twentieth century may be giving way to a more evenly balanced pattern of exchange.

²² See, for instance, the studies of rhythm in English by Kiparsky ('The rhythmic structure') and Hayes ('A grid-based theory'). The major schools of metrical theory are assessed in Attridge, *Rhythms*.

4

SEMIOTICS

Defining the field

The term 'semiotics', derived from the Greek word for 'sign', represents not one particular school or tendency within the recent development of criticism, but a loosely connected group of schools and tendencies. Moreover these associated practices contribute to the development of a critical method that is far from being confined to the literary text as its primary subject matter. In the preface to a recent anthology sub-titled 'Semiotics around the world', the editors begin by quoting Eisenstein: 'The forward movement of our epoch in art [. . .] must be to blow up the Chinese Wall that stands between the primary antithesis of the "language of logic" and the "language of images".' In their view, the distinctive feature of semiotics is that it considers 'the process by which things and events come to be recognized as signs by a sentient organism' (Bailey, Matejka and Steiner, *The Sign*, p. vii). As we shall see, this very broad definition inevitably implies that semiotic investigation takes place over a wide spectrum of cultural practices, involving visual as well as verbal signs and extending from the specialized analysis of the literary text to the consideration of a great diversity of signifying phenomena.

Semiotics is therefore an imperialistic critical practice. Even though it may be based securely within the traditional areas of literary study, it has a tendency to outstep previously established boundaries in its quest for meaning. Jonathan Culler was no doubt justified in claiming in 1981 that: 'Literature is the most interesting case of semiosis for a variety of reasons' (Culler, *Pursuit of Signs*, p. 35). But his later published work takes the study of the sign out of the domain of literary analysis and into the field of related cultural practices: he is concerned not simply with the institutions and professional bases of critical study, but also with such intriguing related issues as "The semiotics of tourism" (Culler, *Framing the Sign*, pp. 153–67).

This essay will in fact range no less widely. It will take for granted the inner dynamic of semiotics, which is to overcome the time-honoured

division in the Western tradition between the verbal and the visual sign,¹ and to side-step in the literary domain from the study of the traditional canon of poetry, drama and the novel to related areas such as historiography. Semiotic criticism of film and the visual arts will be taken into account here, as well as the dimension of critical historiography, which has developed over the last two decades. All of these promises of diverse and novel material may, however, provoke the question of how far semiotics does indeed have an identifiable unity, within the present spectrum of critical approaches. Is it in fact no more than a convenient general term used to camouflage a whole number of disparate activities?

The short answer to this question is that semiotics has indeed established a claim to be considered on its own terms, as an orientation within contemporary criticism which could not easily be redescribed in terms of the other existing labels. Culler himself draws attention to the galvanizing effect of the First Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, which took place in Milan in 1974. Even if the 650 people who attended this congress failed to learn anything, or were simply bemused (he suggests), the symbolic importance of the event was clear. 'Semiotics, the science of signs [became] something to be reckoned with, even for those who [rejected] it as a Gallic or a technological obfuscation.' (Culler, *In Pursuit of Signs*, p. 19) Yet the question which immediately follows this attestation is an important one. To have come together under the banner of semiotics, this large group of participants must have felt a certain dissatisfaction with other existing directions, as well as an inclination to the new approach. How did (and how does) semiotics define itself, in relation to the various other critical modes, or schools, competing in the same territory?

This can only be answered if we pay attention to the fact that semiotics asserted its identity both in relation to tendencies which it claimed to supersede, and in relation to tendencies which continued to exist side by side – as well as those directions which were eventually to claim to supersede semiotics. Culler, for example, envisages semiotics as the critical practice, distinctively set within the province of literature, which will supersede the orthodoxy of the Anglo-Saxon New Criticism, replacing the undue emphasis on interpretation and the proliferation of individual 'readings' by the question: 'how is it that literary works have the meaning they do for readers?' (Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 48) On the other hand, he does not see any relation of mutual exclusion between semiotics, as a 'metalinguistic enterprise', the critical school of deconstruction, associated with such figures as Jacques Derrida and the late Paul de Man (p. xi).

¹ For discussion of this issue, see Mitchell, *Iconology*, esp. pp. 95–115 (chapter entitled 'Lessing's Laocoon and the politics of genre').

In his view, deconstruction established a creative and necessary tension in the practice of the semiotic critic, since he is made aware that his metalanguage is simply 'language piled on language' and cannot remain uncontaminated.

For Culler, therefore, semiotics as a critical activity involves a decisive break with New Criticism, and a salutary symbiosis with deconstruction; it also implies, one might add, a natural development from the preoccupation with 'Structuralist Poetics' which gave him the title for an earlier book in 1975.² A similarly syncretistic approach might be detected in the work of the French critic, Tzvetan Todorov, who introduced the French public to the work of the Russian Formalists in 1964 and published widely on narrative theory in the following years. Todorov has himself become one of the foremost scholars of the semiotic tradition. His own preferred general term for 'theory of literature' is, however, 'poetics', which he sees as comprising the numerous strands of poststructuralist critical investigation (Todorov, 'French poetics', p. 3). On the other hand, he is ready to use the term 'semiotics' for an investigation that deals with a wide variety of textual and visual sources within a determinate historical context, such as his fascinating exploration of the linguistic systems of the Spanish *conquistadors* and their Indian victims (Todorov, *Conquête de l'Amérique*).

Yet there is an equally important strand of development which takes for granted a decisive rupture in the continuity of critical modes, and opposes semiotics to the prior orientations of structuralism and semiology. Victor Burgin, writing about the development of 'postmodern' attitudes in visual art and criticism, puts the point clearly:

Within the area of theory today the term 'semiology' is most commonly used to refer to the early approach, with its almost exclusive emphasis on (Saussurian) linguistics; the word 'semiotics' is now most usual to designate the ever-changing field of cross-disciplinary studies whose common focus is on the general phenomenon of *meaning* in society. (Other, more or less equivalent, expressions for its current forms include: 'textual semiotics', 'deconstructive analysis', and 'post-structuralist criticism'.)

(Burgin, *End of Art Theory*, p. 73)

Peter Wollen, who (as we shall see) was one of the first British critics to adopt a semiological approach, concurs with this general judgement that there is a decisive shift between the prior, structuralist semiology and the later semiotics. For him, this can be located precisely in the aftermath of the May 1968 events in France, and the attempt by the *Tel Quel* group 'to bring semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalysis into one field of discourse.' (Wollen, *Readings and Writings*, p. 210). This view was certainly shared, in

² See Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975). Other books by Culler which are relevant to the subject of this essay include *Saussure* (1976) and *On Deconstruction* (1982).

the early 1970s, by the British critics around the film journal, *Screen*, which took as axiomatic the difference between the classic semiology of cinema represented by the work of Christian Metz, and the new possibilities emerging from the writings of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva.

The implication of these remarks is that we can locate the emergence of semiotics in the period of the early 1970s, following on from (and in the view of some critics, radically departing from) the structuralist/semiological preoccupations of the previous decade. In this respect, the figure of Roland Barthes is exemplary, since he not only provided, in *Elements of Semiology* (1964) and *System of Fashion* (1967), the textbooks of the earlier mode, but also gave concrete expression to the new approach in *S/Z* (1970) and *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971). He was also generously willing to recognize the possibility that work such as that of Julia Kristeva could transform the semiological approach.³ Yet it is impossible to pursue this argument further without proceeding beyond the debate of the past three decades, and looking at the more remote origins of the critical movements whose intersections we have been discussing: at the role of Saussure who predicted the emergence of a 'science of signs', and Peirce who pioneered the establishment of a 'semiotic'.

Indeed it will become obvious that the emergence of semiotics requires not merely a brief retrospective glance of this kind, but a substantial detour through the Western intellectual tradition. Umberto Eco, who has been one of the most usefully systematic writers on semiotics, recalls that 'since the Second Congress of the [International Association for Semiotic Studies, Vienna 1979, he has] advocated a revisitation of the whole history of philosophy . . . to take back the origins of semiotic concepts' (Eco, *Semiotics*, p. 4). Recalling Culler's reference to the First Congress in 1974, we might say semiotics hardly had time to come of age before it was searching for the evidence of its paternity. As a necessary preliminary to any estimate of the contribution which semiotics has made to criticism, it is important to set the historical context for the study of the sign.

Historical antecedents

Virtually all writers on semiotics accept that the possibility of a science of the sign has arisen intermittently throughout the cultural history of the Western world, but that it has only come to fulfillment in the twentieth century, and particularly in the post-war period. In this respect, it differs

³ See Paul Willemen's editorial in *Screen*, 14, no. 1/2, p. 5, which quotes an interview with Barthes in *Signs of the Times* (1972). In relation to the 'epistemological break' posited by Althusser in his studies of Marx, Barthes says: 'I am not sure, of course that semiology is at the moment in a position [to disengage science from ideology] except perhaps in the work of Julia Kristeva' (p. 5).

radically from the tradition of rhetoric, or 'poetics', which has its origin in the writings of Aristotle, but has been kept alive, despite periods of neglect, through the maintenance of the classical tradition.⁴ Consequently, there have been a number of attempts, parallel to those of Eco, to reconstruct the history of the Western preoccupation with the sign. There is general agreement that this must be sought for as far back as the ancient world, and more recently, in the evolution of philosophy and linguistics at the turn of the present century. But there are inevitable differences of emphasis, and it is worth bringing these out, rather than trying to identify a specious unity. The editors of *The Sign* (Bailey *et al.*), for example, cite St Augustine, Locke, Freud and Eisenstein as, in their different ways, pioneers of the semiotic approach, and Mukařovský, Greimas, Lotman and Kristeva as their contemporary avatars (p. viii). It is worth keeping this eclectic field in view, even if we eventually focus on a more restrictive notion of tradition.

As a guide to the origins of the semiotic approach in the ancient world, Kristeva provided an invaluable service in her early writings, which have been supplemented by fuller accounts in the works of Todorov and Eco. Kristeva draws attention explicitly to the 'well known' fact that the Stoic philosophers 'were the first to construct a theory of the sign (*sēmeion*)', whereas 'there is no such theory in Aristotle' (Kristeva, '*Semiotic Activity*,' p. 26). Todorov, while giving careful attention to Aristotle's use of the concept of the 'symbol',⁵ concurs with the view that Stoic thought marked a distinctive stage in the evolution towards a theory of the sign, even if he concedes that our indirect access to their ideas makes any precise correlations difficult. He quotes their opponent Sextus Empiricus as claiming: 'The Stoics say that three things are linked [together]: the signified, the signifier, and the object.' (Todorov, '*Occidental semiotics*,' p. 4) From the same, overtly hostile source, he also quotes several further passages which show that the Stoics were concerned with the classification of signs into different types: for example, 'commemorative signs', working through recall (like the scar for the wound), and 'revealing signs', working indicatively (like the effect of sweating pores) (p. 11). All of these passages are highly

⁴ This is not to imply, however, that the discipline of rhetoric has been without its vicissitudes. On the drastic contraction of its vocabulary in the nineteenth century, see Genette, '*Rhétorique restreinte*', pp. 21–40. On the connections between rhetoric and structuralist criticism, see Bann, '*Structuralism*'.

⁵ The conclusion of this discussion is worth quoting. 'We can hardly speak of a semiotic conception: the symbol is clearly defined as something larger than the word, but it does not seem that Aristotle seriously considered the question of non-linguistic symbols, nor that he tried to describe the variety of linguistic symbols' (Todorov, '*Occidental semiotics*', p. 4).

suggestive, even if they do not enable one to reconstruct the theory in all its details.

Todorov also pays close attention to the tradition of hermeneutics in the ancient world, recalling the oracular communication which is epitomized in a famous fragment of Heraclitus: 'The master, whose oracle is at Delphi, says nothing, hides nothing, but signifies' (Todorov, 'Occidental semiotics', p. 15). However he is in no doubt that the first genuine synthesis of ideas on the sign comes in the work of St Augustine in the fourth century AD. During his lengthy career as a Christian apologist St Augustine returns insistently to the problem of the sign, and his achievement is a summation of previous tendencies of thought:

[. . .] a rhetorician by profession, Augustine first submits his knowledge to the interpretation of a particular text (the Bible). Hermeneutics thus absorbs rhetoric; in addition, to it will be annexed the logical theory of the sign – at the expense, it is true, of a shift from structure to substance, since instead of the 'symbol' and the 'sign' of Aristotle, we discover intentional and natural signs. These two conglomerations come together again in *On Christian Doctrine* to give birth to a general theory of signs, or semiotics, in which 'signs' coming from the rhetorical tradition become in the meantime hermeneutic, which is to say 'transposed signs', find their place. (Todorov, 'Occidental semiotics', p. 40)

Eco holds a similar view of the crucial role of St Augustine, but is inclined to emphasize the particular achievement of his treatise, *De Magistro*, in which he 'definitely bring[s] together the theory of signs and the theory of language. Fifteen centuries before Saussure, he will be the one to recognize the *genus* of signs, of which linguistic signs are a *species*, such as insignias, gestures, ostensive signs' (Eco, *Semiotics*, p. 33). This proleptic estimate of St Augustine's contribution anticipates one of the major issues of debate in our own period: whether linguistics is indeed a part (albeit a highly developed part) of the overall field of semiotics, or whether semiotics is merely a province of linguistics. As Eco admits, the history of semiotics has tended to foster the second view, as 'the model of the linguistic sign gradually came to be seen as the semiotic model *par excellence*' (p. 34).

In order to appreciate what is at issue in this distinction, it is necessary to focus on the coming of age of contemporary semiotics, which takes place as a result of the contribution of two figures whose fields of study were in effect highly disparate: the Swiss pioneer of structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, and the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. John Sturrock has commented wittily that the very existence of these two alternative traditions operates as a simple code. 'If I say "I am a semiologist" I declare my loyalty to the Saussurian or European model of sign study; if, on the other hand, I say "I am a semiotician",

then I ally myself with the North American model, inspired by the great pragmatist philosopher C. S. Peirce' (Sturrock, *Structuralism*, p. 8). But, as has already been emphasized here, the binary model is complicated by the fact that semiotics has, in certain respects, superseded semiology, as a term denoting a new orientation for the science of the sign. There is bound to be some confusion here, but a clear estimate of the contribution of the two pioneers, and the schools which they initiated, will help to resolve it to some extent.

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, which was published after his death in 1915 from notes taken by his students (see also chapter 3), offered a promissory note about the future science of signs which has to be quoted here, however well worn it may have become:

*A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek *sēmeion* 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts.*

(Saussure, *Course*, p. 16)

In principle, Saussure is ready to concede that linguistics is simply a department of semiology: immediately before the above statement, he suggests that language is 'comparable' to a series of sign-making activities such as 'polite formulas, military signals, etc.' which do not necessarily involve spoken or written words. But the very fact that his *Course* involved an unprecedented rigour in the description of the linguistic system in effect powerfully aided the process whereby linguistics became the paradigm structure for semiological analysis. Barthes summed up this development in his *Elements of Semiology* (1964: English translation 1967): 'we must now face the possibility of inverting Saussure's declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics.' (Barthes, *Elements*, p. 11)

What exactly was involved in this distinction? We can certainly say that it implied a certain reluctance of early semiology to go extra-territorial, or at least the tendency to focus upon the linguistic aspect of whatever discourse was selected. Barthes' *Système de la mode* (1967) confined itself explicitly to 'clothing in its written form' (*le vêtement écrit*), that is, the language used by fashion commentators to describe and advertise garments. In *S/Z* (1970), by contrast, Barthes so to speak goes out of his way to include Girodet's painting of *Endymion* in the intertextual discussion, and his increasing interest in the non-verbal systems of painting, photography

and music might seem to indicate that he had had second thoughts about the 'inversion' of Saussure's declaration.⁶

None the less, there has continued to be a strong case made for the continued 'inversion' of Saussure's principle. In its most non-contentious form, it can simply follow Culler's view that 'literature is the most interesting case of semiosis', and that in 'dealing with physical objects or events of various kinds', the issue of meaning is much more equivocal. (Culler, *Pursuit of Signs*, p. 35) It should be noted that, in practice, the argument over whether language is a special case of semiosis, or *vice versa*, makes relatively little difference. A much more radical view is that defended by the anthropologist, Dan Sperber, who has tenaciously argued that linguistic activity and what he calls symbolic activity are totally disparate in kind. There is, in his view, an innate capacity for symbolization which can be focused on any object whatsoever, and has no special connection with the habits of language-use: hence it is illegitimate to subsume both 'semantic and symbolic representations . . . under one "deciphering" mode . . . called the semiotic function' (Piatelli-Palmarini, *Language and Learning*, p. 245).⁷

This question applies more exactly to the later part of this essay, which deals in a more specific way with the semiotic analysis of both verbal and non-verbal communications. For the present, we must move on from Saussure to the other half of what Culler calls the 'ill-sorted couple' who helped to engender the modern semiotic method. Saussure's great contribution to linguistics and semiotics was the formal distinction which he established between the system of language (*langue*) and the meaningful events produced by that system (speech or *parole*). The description of linguistic phenomena, which had been impeded by the failure to distinguish analytically between these two levels, developed a considerable potential from his binary approach, which was also reflected in the decision to isolate the 'system as a functioning totality (*synchronic* analysis)' from the 'historical provenance of its various elements (*diachronic* analysis)' (Culler, *Pursuit of Signs*, pp. 22–3). By contrast, Peirce proceeded as a 'wayward philosophical genius' from the overwhelming revelation that 'the entire universe is perfused with signs if it is not composed entirely of signs' (p. 23).⁸ His method was not to establish binary distinctions,

⁶ Barthes' writings on music, photography and painting are collected together in *L'Obvie et l'obtus* (1982). His own drawings and watercolours form a fascinating supplement to his critical work, and are reproduced in Barthes, *Dessins* (1981).

⁷ Sperber's ideas on symbolism are further discussed in *Rethinking Symbolism* (1975).

⁸ Peirce's theory of signs is dispersed throughout his writings, which have been edited as *Collected Papers* (1931–58). A useful compendium which brings together some of the most important passages, under the title 'Logic as semiotic: the theory of the sign', is to be found in Buchler, *Writings of Peirce*, pp. 98–119.

but to construct a taxonomy, or mode of classification, which would account exhaustively for this proliferation of types of signs. Culler has commented shrewdly on the way in which Peirce's contribution to the fledgling discipline differed from that of Saussure, though he is ready to admit that the two influences become complementary in the long run:

By conceiving semiotics on the model of linguistics, Saussure gave it a practical program, at the cost of begging important questions about the similarities between linguistic and non-linguistic signs . . . But by attempting to construct an autonomous semiotics, Peirce condemned himself to taxonomic speculations that denied him any influence until semiotics was so well developed that his obsession seemed appropriate. While Saussure identified a handful of communicative practices that might benefit from a semiotic approach, and thus provided a point of departure, Peirce's insistence that everything is a sign did little to help found a discipline, though today his claims seem an appropriate if radical consequence of a semiotic perspective.

(Culler, *Pursuit of Signs*, pp. 23–4)

There is certainly no denying that Peirce's eagerness to exhaust the possibilities of a semiotic taxonomy – with no less than ten trichotomies and an overall figure of 59,049 different types of sign – proved a difficult example to follow. Although there now exists a fundamentalist Peircean school, which adheres to the logic of his sub-divisions, his influence has been communicated mainly through the devastating success of one of his trichotomies: that which divides signs into *icons* (relating to their referent by resemblance), *symbols* (relating by convention) and *indices* (relating existentially, as 'traces'). It should be said at this stage that visual analysis has benefited enormously from the suggestive possibilities of these distinctions, which avoid the taint of linguistic imperialism that may infect the semiological (Saussurean) analysis of art.

Of course, it would be foolish to pretend that Saussure and Peirce were uniquely responsible for the emergence of a semiotic method in the present century. The previously quoted anthology which used Eisenstein for its introductory text also mentioned in its enumeration of precursors St Augustine, Locke (for concerning himself with 'the philosophical consequences of the semiotic'), and Freud (for his 'assignment of tokens to sign systems in psychosis') (Bailey, Matejka and Steiner, *The Sign*, p. viii). Culler has offered a usefully broad characterization of the field in which semiotics arose and started to prosper, pointing to the publication in the interwar period of such texts as Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–31), Whitehead's *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927), and Suzanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) – all of them closely concerned with the symbolic dimension of human experience. He also

points back to the seminal figures of Marx, Freud and Durkheim, who 'dramatically showed that individual experience is made possible by the symbolic systems of collectivities, whether these systems be social ideologies, languages, or structures of the unconscious' (Culler, *Pursuit of Signs*, pp. 25–6).

The particular contributions of Saussure and Peirce therefore need to be set in a well-defined cultural context, which gives added significance to their special concentration on the possibility of a 'science of signs', and explains why it was that such relatively isolated figures should have been hailed as the progenitors of a new method. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the gap between the time of their activities, at the turn of the century, and the burgeoning of semiology and semiotics from the 1960s onwards, was not filled only by texts on the general subject of symbolism, like those of Cassirer, Whitehead and Langer. Two schools in particular, one in Europe and the other in America, were able to refine and develop the implicit propositions of Saussure and Peirce, so that the two approaches could be evaluated and clearly distinguished from one another.

The American contribution to the development of semiotics, largely if not exclusively based on the work of Peirce, took on a marked character of its own with the investigations of John Dewey, George H. Mead and, in particular, Charles Morris, who gave a behaviourist orientation to Peirce's pragmatic philosophy. In tracing the history of semiotics in America between 1930 and 1978, Wendy Steiner lays stress on the different, and fundamentally incompatible views of symbolic activity which were held in the interwar period by groups such as the immigrants of the Vienna School (Carnap, Reichenbach and Neurath) who represented a logical empiricism, the New Critics who viewed the semiotic treatment of art as anti-humanistic, and such neo-Kantians as Cassirer and Langer whose investigations into the symbolic dimension of human experience have already been mentioned. (Steiner, 'American semiotics', p. 99) However, she credits Morris with the achievement of a synthesis which brought together at least some of these antagonistic strains, particularly in his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, published in 1938. According to a disciple of Morris, his work unified the 'entire empiricist development from Locke to Carnap':

Whereas the older form of empiricism concerned itself mainly with the first [the semantic dimension of semiosis], pragmatism with the second [the pragmatic dimension], and logical positivism with the third [syntactic] of these dimensions of meaning, Morris thinks that, by considering all of them equally, a synthesis may be reached which signifies at the same time an expansion of the concept of meaning and an associated extended form of empiricism which he calls 'scientific empiricism'.
(Steiner, 'American semiotics', p. 101)

Unfortunately, the very scope of Morris's thinking, with its implicit programme of unifying science and humanities under the rubric of semiotics, caused it to be unpopular in critical circles within the humanities. The polemic of the New Critics against what they conceived as the dehumanizing tendency of the semiotic approach (whose echoes can still be sensed in Culler's reasoned advocacy of the method) was, in Steiner's view, a mishap which 'set back the development of American semiotics by decades.' Arguably it was only in the 1960s that progress was resumed, a factor aptly commemorated by Thomas A. Sebeok's point that it was in 1962 that Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, first coined the term 'semiotics' as a singular word, parallel to ethics, mathematics, etc.⁹ (Steiner, 'American semiotics,' p. 100). It will be clear that this resumption of activity in the 1960s was not solely due to the fading prestige of the New Criticism, but also to the galvanizing power of French critical theory, which, in the work of figures like Barthes, Todorov and Kristeva, gave a strong contemporary focus to the study of the sign.

The evolution towards semiotics on the other side of the Atlantic was subject to the same pattern of opposition and interruption, although remarkable progress was made towards the constitution of a science of the sign. Russian Formalism, reaching its peak of activity in the 1920s, powerfully renewed the tradition of rhetorical studies, or 'poetics', but the official Marxist position on the philosophy of language proved a barrier to any attempt at extending their insights through acquaintance with Saussure's structural linguistics. An exception must be made, however, in the case of the work of V. N. Voloshinov (generally accepted to be the Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin writing under a pseudonym), who continued to publish with little or no response up to the end of the 1920s, and vanished from view in the purges of the next decade. With Voloshinov, there is a rare understanding, not only of the character of Saussure's innovations, but also of the way in which they were compromised by his implicit reliance on the Cartesian tradition. 'Saussure's views on history', he claimed, 'are extremely characteristic for the spirit of rationalism that continues to hold sway in the philosophy of language and that regards history as an irrational force distorting the logical purity of the language system' (Matejka, 'Russian semiotics', p. 166). His solution to this problem (parallel to that of Bakhtin in the realm of poetics) was to emphasize the

⁹ Sebeok's own writings, from the edited volume *Approaches to Semiotics* (1964) to *The Sign and Its Masters* (1979), reflect the continuing influence of Morris: in the opinion of Culler, semioticians in this tradition 'desire above all that semiotics distance itself from literary theory and become a science' (Culler, *Framing the Sign*, p. 177). However, the scope of the journal *Semiotica*, which he has edited since the late 1960s, shows a more catholic conception.

crucial importance of dialogue in human communication, bringing out the features not only of 'the speech event with its physical and semantic aspects in relation to another speech event but also the opposition of the participants of the speech event and the conditions of their verbal contact in a given context'.

Voloshinov's vision was of a philosophy of the sign which would unify the different fields of cultural activity, making possible 'an objective enquiry into the human mind, on the one hand, and human society, on the other' (p. 167). But his historical position condemned his work to oblivion, at least in the short term. The infusion of Russian Formalism into central European culture, symbolized by the Russian critic Roman Jakobson's adherence to the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930s, was, however, more immediately productive. Indeed, in the work of the Czech critic and theorist Jan Mukařovský (see also chapter 2), we have perhaps the first example of a continued attention to the possibilities of a semiology of art, in the most general sense, and thus the most solid bridge between the aims envisaged by Saussure and the proliferating semiological criticism of the 1960s. In the early 1930s, as Thomas G. Winner has explained, Mukařovský was inclined to defend the Formalist point of view that each art form had its own specific system (Jakobson had recommended that the literary critic should concentrate on the 'literariness' of literature). From 1934, however, his approach changed, as he began to regard art as 'one aspect of social communicative phenomena, with the latter described as multiple structures, each of which has its own autonomous evolution, but all of which interact in complex ways' (Winner, 'Prague semiotics', p. 229). This realization amply justifies the choice of Mukařovský as perhaps the most perceptive recent precursor of the semiotic approach, in so far as it can serve as a basis for comparison within the whole spectrum of cultural and social activity. In 1946–7, he wrote:

It becomes clear that if we want to understand the evolution of a certain branch of the arts, we must examine that art and its problematics in connection with the other arts . . . Furthermore, art is one of the branches of culture, and culture as a whole, in turn, forms a structure, the individual elements of which (for example art, science, politics) are in mutual, complex and historically changeable, relations to each other.

(Winner, 'Prague semiotics', p. 229)

Mukařovský's assurance that the semiotic approach offered a method for determining the structures of the individual art forms, as well as of 'culture as a whole', was amply borne out by the contributions of other Prague semioticians from the mid-1930s onwards. These extended from studies of costume, folk song and folk theatre, to cinema, poetry, the novel and the visual arts (See Majetka and Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*). The continuing

fertility of Mukařovský's own work is demonstrated by the fact that his essay on 'Art as semiological fact' is republished as the first contribution to a recent collection of 'Essays in New Art History from France'. In explaining his decision to make Mukařovský 'an honorary Frenchman for the occasion', Norman Bryson points out that '[his] remarks on the sign are in a sense prior to everything that follows' (Bryson, *Calligram*, p. xvii).

It would be possible to include in this brief sketch of the historical antecedents of the semiotic approach a number of other schools and centres of activity. For example, the development of a distinctively Russian semiotics, from the work of Alexander Potebnja in the mid nineteenth century to the outstanding contribution of Jury Lotman in the post-war period, is worth closer attention than it can be given in this context. (See Matejka, 'Russian semiotics', and Shukman, 'Lotman'.) At the same time, it is necessary to stress the fact that such far-flung centres of activity would, in all probability, not have combined to generate a world-wide movement if the French critical culture of the 1960s had not offered a fertile breeding ground. Kristeva demonstrates the point very well, in that her writings show not only the widest acquaintance with the different types of study of the sign, but also her conviction that semiotics needs to shift into a new key. In 1971, she clearly enumerated the various sources that we have touched upon, specifying the differences between Morris's view of semiotics as an 'epistemological control point' and the attempt of the Prague School to set up 'a typology of signifying systems.' Her own view was that semiotics had, by this stage, reached a level at which it could become self-critical: she envisaged 'an *analytical* semiotics, a *semanalysis* [which would] attempt to analyse, that is, to dissolve, the constitutive centre of the semiotic enterprise such as it was posited by the Stoics . . .' (Kristeva, 'Semiotic activity', p. 34). In tracing this direction, Kristeva aligned herself with a rich variety of approaches: with 'the Marxist concept of "work" within the context of dialectical materialism; the Freudian concept of the "unconscious"; the dramatic eruption of long-oppressed nations such as China and India with their linguistic and scriptural systems', as well as with the modernist literary practice of Joyce, Mallarmé and Artaud, and the philosophical enterprise of Derrida. The fact that in the early 1970s so many such ideas were being made incandescent, within the crucible of semiotics is a fair indication that the discipline had come of age.

Semiotic practice: film and the visual arts

In moving from a general survey of the antecedents of semiotics to the consideration of specific works and approaches, we should still bear in mind the difficulty of distinguishing satisfactorily between the approaches

of 'structuralism', 'semiology' and 'semiotics'. Our guiding principle will simply be the point which was made in the earlier stages of this argument: that structuralism and to some extent semiology represented the first moves in an interpretative strategy, which was directly if not exclusively based on Saussurian linguistics, while semiotics implied the integration of other dimensions (specifically, that of Peirce), and the general evolution to what Burgin calls 'cross-disciplinary studies whose common focus is on . . . *meaning* in society'. In choosing to look first of all at visual modes of artistic communication, rather than at literary texts, we are no doubt accentuating the effect of this process. In the cinema, and to a lesser extent in the visual arts, the advent of a criticism based on the study of the sign had a markedly catalytic result (because of the relative paucity of other theoretical discourses), and its development was accelerated in consequence.

The development of a semiotic approach to the study of film was, in effect, largely the achievement of one man, the French scholar Christian Metz, and the panorama of its implications can first be glimpsed in the collection of articles which he brought together in 1967 under the title, *Film Language – A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Metz had digested a large number of contemporary French influences in working towards this position: among them, the photographic studies of Barthes, the considerations of the ontology of the filmic image developed by André Bazin, and the refinements of semiological method carried out by A.J. Greimas.¹⁰ His own recommendations were neatly summed up in the conclusion to one of his articles:

The concepts of linguistics can be applied to the semiotics of the cinema only with the greatest caution. On the other hand, the methods of linguistics – commutation, analytical breakdown, strict distinction between the signified [i.e. signified] and the signifier, between substance and form, between the relevant and the irrelevant, etc. – provide the semiotics of the cinema with a constant and precious aid in establishing units that, though they are still very approximate, are liable over time (and, one hopes, through the work of many scholars) to become progressively refined.

(Metz, *Film Language*, p. 107)

Metz's own specific contribution to film criticism was his notion of the 'large syntagmatic category' (*la grande syntagmatique*): that is to say, 'the organization of the major actual relationships among units of relation in a

¹⁰ Metz's debt to Greimas is apparent at the beginning of an important essay where he quotes the principle that 'the minimum structure any signification requires is the presence of two terms and the relation linking them' (Metz, *Film Language*, p. 16). Metz proceeds from there to arguing that, as 'signification presupposes perception . . . the main interest of structural analysis is only in being able to find what was already there'.

given semiological system' (p. x). In more concrete terms, he was positing the existence of a 'grammar' of cinema, which could be identified through the isolation of 'autonomous segments' – although the very autonomy of the segments isolated for the purpose of analysis could not be taken for granted. His study of Jacques Rozier's film, *Adieu Philippine*, was at the same time an essay in method, and a consideration of the acute difficulties involved in establishing analytical divisions within the complex communication of cinema, where 'autonomous shots' as well 'scenes' and 'sequences' fitting into a narrative mode had to be taken into account.

The reception of Metz's work into the English-speaking world can be equated very precisely with the publication (a year before the appearance of *Film Language* in an English translation) of a special issue of *Screen* on 'Cinema Semiotics and the Work of Christian Metz'. In this rich collection of texts, which includes the essay of Kristeva already quoted, the conjunctural importance of Metz's work becomes clear: in anticipation of the appearance of an English translation of the cinema aesthetics of Jean Mitry, which is described as 'the concluding stage . . . of a particular history of thought about the cinema', the editorial by Paul Willemsen describes Metz's work as 'providing the framework for any future study' (*Cinema Semiotics*, pp. 2, 4). However, Stephen Heath's introduction indicates that Metz's emphasis must, in effect, be revised if such study is to develop. He defines Metz's approach as taking into account the imperative that film semiology should be 'the *total* study of the filmic fact' (p. 10). At the same time, he asserts the need to go beyond 'the study of cinematic language' and encounter 'the general enterprise of semiology as analysis of forms of social practice grasped as signifying systems'.

The programme of film semiotics envisaged by the *Screen* special issue on Metz was a highly ambitious one, and yet it was largely carried out two years later with the publication in the same journal of Stephen Heath's two-part essay on Orson Welles' film, *Touch of Evil*. In this absorbing analysis, an initial break-down of the film in terms of Metz's 'large syntagmatic' (involving some significant modification of terms) is followed by a searching investigation of its psychoanalytic implications, which uses the new insights of Kristeva's *La Revolution du langage poétique* (1974) as well as the general matrix of Lacanian theory. Heath brings together in one synthesis many of the tools of 'classic' semiology, such as Greimas' analysis of narrative functions and Metz's own syntagmatic divisions of the text, and yet his culminating point is that textual analysis must be supplemented by an attention to the theory of the subject:

[. . .] the analysis of the filmic system demands an understanding of the process of the construction of the subject (the area of psychoanalysis) but grasped in relation to the modalities of the *replacement* of that construction in the specific

signifying practice (the area of semiotics) . . .

(Heath, 'Film and System', II, p. 110)

Heath's essay on *Touch of Evil* is a unique example of the extended semiotics to which his earlier writings had looked forward, and in this respect it relates not only to the preceding 'syntagmatic' analyses of Metz, but also the exhaustive study of codes which had been carried out with regard to a fictional narrative by Barthes in *S/Z* (1970). It would, however, be wrong to see it as the first evidence of the reception of semiotics in film theory, as far as the English-speaking world was concerned. Peter Wollen's essay, 'Cinema and semiology: some points of contact', which was first published in 1968, was a highly competent review of the possibilities inherent in Metz's work, and included the recognition that Peirce's legacy could also be of value to students of the cinema – once it had been rescued from the behaviourist psychology to which Morris had annexed it (Wollen, *Readings and Writings*, p. 3). His book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, published in the following year, ended with a strikingly original review of the possible applications of Peirce's trichotomy of icon, index and symbol. He argued that Peirce's triadic model duplicated the movement of film theory in the post-war period. From Bazin's film aesthetic, which privileged the indexical nature of the photographic image, criticism had moved on to Metz's approach, 'which assumes that cinema, to be meaningful, must refer back to a code, to a grammar of some kind, that the language of cinema must be primarily symbolic' (Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 136). Yet there was a third possibility, according to Wollen: close study of directors like Von Sternberg and Rossellini demonstrated that 'the richness of the cinema springs from the fact that it comprises all three dimensions of the sign: indexical, iconic and symbolic' (p. 141). It was only through considering the interaction of these three different dimensions that the 'aesthetic effect' of cinema could be understood.

The effect of semiotics within the field of the visual arts is less easy to trace than its impact within the comparatively young discipline of film studies. For one thing, it is important to recognize the fact that history of art already possessed, by the beginning of the post-war period, its quasi-linguistic interpretative strategy. Mention has already been made of the relevance to semiotic theory of Cassirer's notion of 'symbolic forms', and Cassirer's work was an acknowledged influence on the development of Panofsky's methods of analysis, from the publication of his important essay on perspective in the mid-1920s to the emergence of his theory of 'iconography and iconology' in the post-war period. The hegemonic position of Panofsky's techniques within the domain of art history has,

in part, served to exclude other methods, of a more orthodox semiotic character. But equally, it has served as a challenge. Iconographic method is, indeed, highly vulnerable to a critique which employs the more rigorous concepts of semiotics and semiology.¹¹

This being said, the spread of semiotic interpretation in the visual arts demonstrates a number of the features already noted in the case of film studies: development of a basic semiology in France in the 1960s, critique and extension of this mode in the early 1970s under the effect of influences such as Kristeva's *semanalysis* and Derrida's deconstruction, and (last but not least in importance) the emergence of a Peircean strain in the course of the 1970s, with its geographical base in the United States and its primary focus on the category of the index.

Semiology of art, as opposed to the more general analysis of visual communications pursued by Barthes in his essays on photography and advertising,¹² developed comparatively late and suffered from its retarded status. Its indubitable summation came in a dense and fascinating book by Jean-Louis Schefer, *Scénographie d'un tableau* (1969), which was concerned almost exclusively with the semiological system of a single painting: Paris Bordone's *Game of Chess*. Although Schefer contrives to show that this work is emblematic of the Renaissance's close linkage between space and power, his analysis seems in the last resort over-fastidious, and it is hardly surprising that the author himself has largely repudiated this approach, preferring to continue his absorbing studies of the Western tradition in painting with a less technical vocabulary and a much greater degree of avowed subjective investment.¹³

Hubert Damisch's *Théorie du nuage* (1972) is a less extreme example of semiological method, and it also clarifies the options which the semiotically inclined French art historian was able to take, in the existing state of the discipline. Much the most influential French art theorist of the previous generation had been Pierre Francastel, whose writings on Renaissance anticipated the dangers of a linguistic approach to pictorial meaning almost in advance of its development (Francastel, 'Seeing . . . decoding'). Damisch takes account of his critique, but persists

¹¹ For a full account of Panofsky's early intellectual affiliations with Cassirer and others, as well as an estimate of his whole career, see Holly, *Panofsky*.

¹² Barthes greeted the appearance of Schefer's *Scénographie* in 1969 with the recognition that this was 'a first' (un travail *princeps*) for the semiology of art (Barthes, *L'obvie*, p. 141). His own essays on the painters Erté, Masson, Cy Twombly and Réquichot date from the 1970s, but 'The world as object' (his evocative discussion of Dutch painting) is included in *Essais critiques* (1964). It is republished in Bryson, *Calligram*, pp. 106–15.

¹³ See his work on Uccello, where he equates the linguistic status of painting with that of the *hapax* – a word for which the dictionary possesses only one recorded instance (Schefer, *Le Déluge*, p. 45). In his most recent study, on the paintings of El Greco, Schefer accentuates the stake of subjectivity, asking even: 'How does painting (this particular one) come to represent "what I have lived" or to anticipate it, to awaken something which can only return by way of images?' (Schefer, *El Greco*, p. 47).

none the less in arguing that the system of representation initiated at the Renaissance had (in Saussure's terms) a 'semiological life' of its own, which could not be prised apart from its sociological dimension (Damisch, *Théorie*, pp. 205–6). Damisch's subsequent writings, up to and including his monumental *L'Origine de la Perspective* (1987), have continued to bear out the fertility of his idea that perspective forms a generative system, evolving historically and passing through a series of potential transformations. His fine essays on the art of the twentieth century indicate the conclusion of this process.¹⁴

The Peircean contribution to semiotics of the visual arts is no doubt more diffuse, but its influence has been considerable. Meyer Schapiro's remarkable address to a conference in 1966, subsequently published in the journal *Semiotica* (1969) and later translated in the French *Critique* (1973), takes as its subject the non-mimetic features which help to determine the constitution of the iconic sign – such features as framing, relations between high and low, left and right (Schapiro, 'Field and vehicle', pp. 133–48). The appearance of this highly original study in the special number of *Critique* devoted to 'Histoire/Théorie de l'Art' supplies a rare instance of semiotic theory passing from America to France rather than the other way round. Schapiro's approach is particularly relevant to a collection of texts which involves the 'archaeology' of the iconographic approach (in Cesare Ripa's original seventeenth-century introduction to his *Iconologia*) as well as a revisionist study, by Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, of Panofsky's essay on Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* (Lebensztejn, 'Un tableau de Titien'). Yet, even if it can be claimed that Schapiro endorsed a semiotic approach which would potentially replace the iconology of Panofsky, it was a considerable time before mainstream History of Art in the English-speaking world woke up to this possibility.¹⁵ The polemical character of Norman Bryson's successive books, and particularly *Vision and Painting* (1983), is amply justified by the fact that neither Panofsky's method, nor the perceptualist reading of art history introduced by Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960), had been seriously challenged within the art-historical community. For Bryson, quite understandably, it is still necessary to go to French sources (and the work of Mukařovský) for readings of the visual image as sign which, having 'relocated painting within the social domain . . . [make it] possible to think of the image as discursive work that returns *into* the society' (Bryson, *Calligram*, p. xxvi).

Outside the mainstream of art history, it was possible for some of the

¹⁴ See Damisch, *Fenêtre jaune*, for his collected essays on French and American contemporary painting, dating originally from between 1958 and 1983.

¹⁵ For Schapiro's subsequent writings on the semiotics of art, see *Words and Pictures* (1973). An indication that his semiotic concepts are now being taken up and extended by young art historians can be found in Camille, 'The book of signs', pp. 133–48.

tools of Peircean semiotics to enter into general use at an earlier stage. The conclusion to my own study, *Experimental Painting* (1970), made explicit reference to Wollen's writings in proposing a semiotic classification of contemporary pictorial modes (Bann, *Experimental Painting*, pp. 130–8), and drew some of its further implications in a series of articles.¹⁶ In America, the New York-based journal *October* used the Peircean concept of the *index* to illuminate the convergence, from many different angles, of distinctive forms of art and criticism which eschewed the traditional iconic mode. Rosalind Krauss' 'Notes on the index' established a reading of twentieth-century art, and particularly 'Seventies art in America', which grouped practices such as photography and 'the registration of sheer physical presence' in 'installation pieces' under their common indexicality. Her approach was effectively complemented by the investigation of Georges Didi-Huberman into the semiotic status of the Turin Shroud (Krauss, 'Notes on the index', p. 15; Didi-Huberman, 'Index of the absent wound', p. 39 ff.). The introduction to a recent anthology of texts from *October* has commented effectively on the significance of the index in the programme of the journal, and in so doing, provides a paradigm for the usefulness of semiotic categories in the visual arts, and indeed elsewhere:

Almost from the outset the index . . . appeared to us as a particularly useful tool. Its implications within the process of marking, its specific axis of relation between sign and referent, made of the index a concept that could work against the grain of familiar unities of thought, critical categories such as medium, historical categories such as style, categories that contemporary practices had rendered suspect, useless, irrelevant.

(Michelson, Krauss, *et al.*, *October*, p. x)

Semiotic practice: literature, cultural criticism and historiography

Despite Culler's point that 'literature is the most interesting case of semiosis', I have chosen to place the semiotic analysis of visual images first in sequence in this study. This decision can be defended for a number of reasons. In the first place (as the foregoing editorial remarks from *October* demonstrate) the availability of semiotic categories has had a much more dramatic and identifiable effect on the analysis of visual images. In a discipline which is still largely governed by the unquestioned assumptions of positivism, or by the unexamined procedures of iconography, the science of the sign can bring not only a more refined interpretative method, but also (as in Bryson's approach) a renewed ability to appreciate the image as 'discursive work' within society. In the second place, the very

¹⁶ See Bann, 'Language in about' and 'Malcolm Hughes'.

complexity of the history of literary criticism in the years under discussion makes it exceedingly hard to single out a development which could be called, without equivocation, 'semiotic'. This section will therefore keep to my original plan of treating semiotics as the late, self-conscious and critical stage of the movement originally known as structuralism and/or semiology. What makes the semiotic approach not so much a historically defined attitude, but a method of continuing validity, is this critical component, dedicated to the revision of existing categories of thought.

This point can be developed in relation to a sensible survey of 'The state of literary semiotics' published in 1983. The author summarizes the well-known antecedents of the approach (Russian Formalism, Prague School, etc.), and finally singles out three French scholars of importance whose work can be seen as integral to the development of a literary semiotics. They are: A.J. Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov and Roland Barthes (Tiefenbrun, 'Literary semiotics', pp. 7-44). Of these three figures, Greimas would be the least relevant in terms of my definition. The achievement of his *Sémantique structurale* (1966) was to develop and revise the theory of narrative sketched out by the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp, and he thus provided an influential model for future studies. However, (see chapter 5) although his new categories were to be incorporated in such subsequent analysis (for example, the study of *Touch of Evil* by Stephen Heath; see above), they remained essentially structural and grammatical in character. By contrast, Todorov has shown himself capable of a continued development of his critical range. From the classic narrative theory of *Littérature et signification* (1967), he proceeded to a highly original investigation of the structure of a literary genre in *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), and his more recent work has included both the literary history of *Théories du symbole* (1977) and the comparative study of sign systems within a historical context which we have already mentioned: *La Conquête de l'Amérique* (1982).

If Todorov indicates the creative versatility of a semiotic approach, Barthes (see chapter 6) has probably been more influential than any other figure in ensuring that semiotics did not perpetuate the more academic and scientific aspects of structuralism. In the first issue of the journal *Poétique*, set up by Todorov with Hélène Cixous and Gérard Genette to ensure an opening for critical theory in France, Barthes began his opening article with a didactic guide for 'a student [wanting] to undertake the structural analysis of a literary text' (Barthes, 'Commencer', p. 3). By the end of the article, however, he has gently dissuaded the student from imagining that such an analysis will reveal the 'truth' of a text, and suggested that the role of 'formal science' is not to detect contents within forms but, on the contrary, to 'dissipate, keep at bay, pluralise and relegate' those contents (p. 9). Even if the analyst starts with a few

familiar codes, he must exercise the right to depart from those codes in the furtherance of his own work.

These ideas are considerably expanded in *S/Z*, which emerged from Barthes' teaching at the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes in 1968/9 and was published in 1970. In the introduction to a work which was, essentially, an investigation of a single short story by Balzac in terms of a series of overlapping codes, Barthes insists that attention to the 'plural' element in the text requires a departure from the practices of classical rhetoric and conventional teaching method, where it is a question of 'structuring by large masses' – of 'constructing' the text (Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 18). Where previous structural analysis has stopped at the 'large structures' of narrative, the new approach will undertake to go into extreme detail, on the grounds that 'the single text is good for all the texts of literature . . . [it is not] the access to a Model, but an entry into a network with a thousand entries'.

Barthes' insistence that the new semiotics implied a radical mutation of the attitudes of the previous decade was further vindicated in his adventurous study, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971). Here it was a question not of exploring one text in detail, but of juxtaposing, in a kind of comparative semiotics, the discourses of the libertine, the visionary and the saint, whose common feature was that all were 'founders of language' (Barthes, *Sade*, p. 11). The stress which is laid, in the case of *Sade*, on the multiple meanings of the term 'dissemination' calls to mind, however, the fact that an even more radical reversal of critical practice was being effected in the early 1970s by the critics and philosophers associated with the *Tel Quel* group.¹⁷ Derrida published his seminal study *La dissémination* in 1972, while in 1974 Kristeva followed with *La révolution du langage poétique*. Both were substantial treatises, with great methodological significance for the future, and both devoted considerable space to the exegesis of Mallarmé. Yet if Derrida's work is no doubt the first mature specimen of deconstructive critical practice, Kristeva is concerned with a revision of linguistic and psychoanalytic categories that belongs more appropriately within the domain of semiotics. The long opening section of her study is a powerful synthesis of Marxist and Lacanian concepts with the linguistic approach derived from structuralism and semiology. Kristeva asserts that the 'gravedigger of imperialism' is not (as Marx thought) the proletariat, but 'the non-subjected man, the man-in-process who . . . displaces all laws even including those – and perhaps above all those – of signifying structures' (Kristeva, *Révolution*, p. 99). This prepares the way for a stalwart defence of the historical and political importance of *avant-garde* poetry in the nineteenth century, and for a new inflection to be given to

¹⁷ See Bann, 'Tel Quel'.

the 'semiotic'. Kristeva argues that it is characteristic of poetic language to be animated by the contradiction between 'the sign and the pre-symbolic processes' (p. 607). To the latter processes, which develop through the child's somatic awareness before the acquisition of speech, she gives the title of 'semiotic *chora*'.

In the foregoing account, the development of literary semiotics has been equated with a critical and exploratory tradition which consciously revises the positions of the earlier, structuralist semiology, and restores to the sign its many different cultural dimensions: philosophical, psychoanalytic and political. This was the particular achievement of what I have called the 'crucible' of French critical thought, from the late 1960s onwards. However, if we look at the same period from an American point of view, the critical force of semiotics has a rather different incidence. De Man was no doubt right to argue that, in France, the lack of any advanced movement like the Anglo-American 'New Criticism' made the confrontation between existing practice and the onset of new ideas all the more dramatic: 'a semiology of literature was the outcome of the long-deferred but all the more explosive encounter of the nimble French literary mind with the category of form' (De Man, 'Semiology', p. 123).

De Man therefore identifies especially with the critical and revisionary stage to which I have been drawing attention. However, his affiliation is clearly not with the synthetic semiotics of Kristeva but with the deconstructive approach of Derrida. He detects in the normative literary analyses of 'Barthes, Genette, Todorov, Greimas, and their disciples' a tendency to let 'grammar and rhetoric function in perfect continuity' (p. 124). It is not clear whether this critique would extend to the later writings of Barthes, but it certainly applies to studies cited by De Man, like Genette's article on 'Métonymie chez Proust' where the combined presence of metaphorical figures and metonymic structures is indeed 'treated descriptively and nondialectically without suggesting the possibility of logical tensions' (p. 125).

It is interesting that De Man confutes this tendency of French criticism with a restatement of the classic position of semiotics. In his view, Peirce appreciated fully that 'the interpretation of the sign is not . . . a meaning but another sign; it is a reading, not a decodage, and this reading has, in its turn, to be interpreted into another sign, and so on, ad infinitum' (pp. 127–8). The apparently mystical notion of Peirce that the universe is 'perfused with signs' here becomes the guarantee of an intensified attention to the signifying process, which de Man's own scrupulous treatment of the conflict of grammar and rhetoric in Proust makes amply justifiable. Semiotics may not be in a position to offer to literary criticism an *ultima ratio*, or an *Organon*, which will resolve all its problems, but at least it can show the results, in a number of different fields, of a productive

suspicion. To the precursors already mentioned, there should be added the progenitor of the deconstructive approach, Friedrich Nietzsche.

After considering in broad outline the semiotic approach to literature, it is worth looking finally at the ways in which semiotics has annexed new areas – previously outside the reach of an academic literary criticism, but arguably reinstating the long-standing literary tradition of the essay. Barthes was again a significant precursor here, since his brilliant *Mythologies* (1957) launched a type of lapidary comment on the codes of contemporary culture which could take on some of the attributes of method without sacrificing all its charm. Among contemporary scholars who have learned to carry their semiotics lightly, the name of Umberto Eco comes irresistibly to mind. Coming in the wake of his international success as a historical detective novelist, Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality* (first published in English in 1986) appears with a comic disclaimer that its author would wish to illuminate what an American newspaper described as the 'arcane discipline' of semiotics. Eco simply claims that he tries to 'look at the world through the eyes of a semiologist', interpreting signs which may be 'forms of social behaviour, political acts, artificial landscapes' (Eco, *Travels*, p. xi). Yet the consistency of his approach, in the large opening section which carries the same title as the book, is exemplary. If the contributors to *October* defined their *avant-garde* position in the 1970s by reference to the category of the index, Eco has examined the other America – the America of San Simeon and Disneyland – in terms of the alternative semiotic category. 'Knowledge can only be iconic, and iconism can only be absolute' (p. 53). This is the refrain prompted by an uproarious cortege of exercises in the 'hyperreal'.

Eco's explanation, in his preface, that in Europe it is not thought unusual for a university professor to be also a 'columnist', recalls another taboo area that semiotics has a chance of breaching. Just as Barthes put across the notion that criticism was not exclusively a matter of 'scholarship' or 'research' but at the most basic level a practice of *writing* ('écriture'), so Eco demonstrates that entertaining, ephemeral journalism can be informed by theoretical insight. It is a possibility which has not yet been fully exploited in the English-speaking world. McLuhan's fine study of American advertizing in the 1940s, *The Mechanical Bride*, lacks the theoretical structure that would expand its acute comments into a coherent analysis; and the same is true for the scintillating essays of Tom Wolfe.

Of course the cultural analysis prompted by the semiotic approach need not only exist on the borderlines of serious writing. Eco himself makes an approving reference, in his study of Disneyland, to the essay of Louis Marin, 'Disneyland: a degenerate utopia', originally published in his *Utopiques* (1973). Marin has certainly shown that a patiently conducted

semiotic analysis can open up the areas of contemporary exoticism, as well as facilitating our access to the systems of representation which existed in the past. His impressive *Portrait of the King*, originally published in French in 1981, is an extended meditation on the linkage between 'the power of representation' and 'the representation of power', which takes as its initial basis '*an iconic effect: the body of the young Louis, but in truth constituted as royal body.*' As Marin explains: '*Louis suddenly becomes king as the portrait of the king*' (Marin, *Portrait*, p. 13). The portrait is his *real presence*, in the sense in which that phrase is used in the doctrine of the Eucharist.

Marin's investigations into Louis XIV include a fascinating chapter where the role of the royal historiographer in forming the image of kingship is finely analysed. And this leads us to a concluding note about the effect of semiotics on historiography, which has notoriously lagged far behind literary criticism in its responsiveness to any theoretical considerations. Here again, Barthes no doubt pointed the way, in the study *Michelet par lui-même* which first appeared in 1954. This is, however, the pre-structuralist Barthes, who is moreover observing the conventions of a series in which quotations from the original author take pride of place.¹⁸ Although Barthes also made a contribution to the structural analysis of historiography in his article, 'Le Discours de l'histoire' (1967), it was necessary to wait until 1973, the publication date of Hayden White's *Metahistory*, for a critical analysis of historical texts that had the same claim to exhaustiveness as the literary studies of the structuralist period. *Metahistory* was, however, essentially a rhetorical analysis, considering a series of nineteenth-century historians and philosophers in terms of the four tropes of metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and irony, and Northrop Frye's notion of emplotment. White's thoughts on semiotic analysis had to wait until a subsequent article, in which he used Peirce's trichotomy to show how a historical text was '*a complex of symbols which gives us directions for finding an icon of the structure of those events in our literary tradition*' (White, 'Historical text,' p. 287).

Although these remarks remained on the metacritical level, White has continued to refer to the semiotic approach, not simply as a way of describing the complex mode of operation of the historical text, but also as a solvent to the contaminating effects of ideology. In a recent essay, he has formulated this second possibility in a way that coincides with the objectives of many of the semioticians cited here, and can hence serve as a valediction to this survey of their works:

¹⁸ Regrettably, this fact was not mentioned in the English translation of the work (1987), and the method assumed to be of Barthes' devising.

A semiological approach to the study of texts permits us to moot the question of the text's reliability as witness to events or phenomena extrinsic to it, to pass over the question of the text's 'honesty', its objectivity; and to regard its ideological aspect less as a product . . . than as a process. It permits us, more precisely, to regard ideology as a process by which different kinds of meaning are produced and reproduced by the establishment of a mental set towards the world in which certain sign systems are privileged as necessary, even natural, ways of recognizing a 'meaning' in things and others are suppressed, ignored, or hidden in the very process of representing a world to consciousness.

(White, *Content of Form*, p. 192)

 NARRATOLOGY

Narratology is a theory of narrative. Rather than being concerned with the history, meaning, or function of particular (sets of) narratives, it examines what all and only possible narratives have in common as well as what enables them to differ from one another *qua* narratives and it aims to characterize the narrative-pertinent system of rules presiding over narrative production and processing. The term ‘narratology’, which prevailed over such (near-)synonyms as ‘narrativics’, ‘narrative semiotics’, and ‘structural analysis of narrative’, is a translation of the French term ‘narratologie’, introduced in 1969 by Tzvetan Todorov who wrote in *Grammaire du Décaméron*: ‘this work pertains to a science which does not yet exist – let us say *narratology*, the science of narrative’.¹ As for the theory, it falls historically into the tradition of French structuralism. Narratology exemplifies the structuralist tendency to consider texts (in the broad sense of signifying matter) as rule-governed ways in which human beings (re)fashion their universe. It also exemplifies the structuralist ambition to isolate the necessary and the optional components of textual types and to describe the modes of their articulation. As such, it constitutes a subset of semiotics (see above, chapter 4), the study of the factors operative in signifying systems and practices. If structuralism generally focuses on the *langue* or code underlying a given system or practice as opposed to focusing on a *parole* or instantiation of that system or practice, narratology concentrates specifically on narrative *langue* as opposed to narrative *parole*. If structuralism can be said to extend the notion ‘unconscious’ (the economic unconscious of Marx, the psychological unconscious of Freud, the linguistic unconscious of the grammarians) to every realm of symbolic behaviour, narratology can be said to delineate a kind of narrative unconscious.

¹ ‘Cet ouvrage relève d’une science qui n’existe pas encore, disons la *narratologie*, la science du récit.’ See Todorov, *Grammaire du Décaméron*, p. 10.

Antecedents

Narratology has few historical antecedents. Plato, in *The Republic*, did make some suggestive remarks about narration (which he contrasted with representation) and, in *The Poetics*, Aristotle, who viewed telling as one kind of mimetic mode, did provide an account of (tragic) plot structure that proved exceedingly influential; but the entire tradition of rhetoric was almost silent and singularly vague about narrative.² At the end of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, several interesting precursory efforts can be mentioned: Joseph Bédier's study of the French *fabliaux* and his attempt to distinguish between their invariant and their variable elements, for example (*Les fabliaux*); André Jolles' demonstration that complex narratives can be said to derive from simple forms (*Einfache Formen*); Lord Raglan's work on the fundamental traits of mythic heroes (*The Hero*); Etienne Souriau's outline of the basic constituents of dramatic situations (*Situations dramatiques*); the exploration of such topics as narrative distance and point of view by French, Anglo-Saxon, and Germanic critics (Jean Pouillon and Claude-Edmonde Magny, Henry James and Percy Lubbock, Norman Friedman and Wayne C. Booth, Eberhart Lammert and Franz Stanzel); and, above all, the structural investigation of myth by Claude Lévi-Strauss and the development – in the 1920s – of a poetics of fiction by the Russian Formalists (Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Boris Tomashevsky, Vladimir Propp, etc.).

Narratological activity 'proper' – explicitly taking narrative rather than narratives as an object of study – becomes fully systematic after the appearance in 1958 of the English translation of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (first published in 1928 as *Morfologija Skázki*) and it assumes many of the characteristics of a discipline in 1966, with the publication of a special number of *Communications* entirely devoted to the structural analysis of narrative (no. 8, 'Recherches sémiologiques. L'analyse structurale du récit'). In 1960, for instance, Lévi-Strauss reviewed Propp's book and, after praising it, he criticized it by comparing its formalist abstraction to structuralist concreteness and its study of superficial syntactic relations to that of deep logico-semantic ones ('La structure'); in 1964, with 'Le message', Claude Bremond began a recasting of the Proppian schema that would culminate in his *Logique du récit* (1973); the following year, Todorov published a French translation of several Russian Formalist texts, including one by Propp (*Théorie*); finally, A. J. Greimas' *Sémantique structurale*, much of which concentrated on refining Proppian views about narrative, appeared in 1966 and the special number of *Communications* (which featured contributions by Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Greimas,

² Cf. Mathieu-Colas' outstanding 'Frontières', pp. 91–110.

Bremond, Todorov, etc. and which contained many references to Propp) came close to constituting a narratological research programme as well as a manifesto. By the late 1970s, narratology was an international movement with representatives in, for example, the United States, the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy and Israel.

Narratology: story

One important starting-point in the development of narratology was the observation that narratives are found and stories told in a variety of media: oral and written language (in prose or verse), of course; but also sign languages, still or moving pictures (as in narrative paintings, stained-glass windows, or films), gestures, (programmatically) music, or a combination of vehicles (as in comic strips). Furthermore, a folktale can be transposed into a ballet, a comic strip turned into a pantomime, a novel brought to the screen and vice versa. This arguably means that narrative (or, more specifically, the narrative component of a narrative text) can and should be studied without reference to the medium in which it occurs.

Now, within the same medium – say, written language – a given set of events can be presented in different ways, in the order of their (supposed) occurrence, for example, or in a different order: consider ‘Mary left before John came’ and ‘John came after Mary left’. The narratologist should therefore be able to examine the narrated (the story reported, the events recounted) independently not only of the medium used but also independently of the narrating, the discourse, the *way* in which the medium is used to present the *what*. In *Grammaire du Décaméron*, Todorov does not eliminate the narrating from the domain of the ‘science of narrative’ he envisions. Much of his other work (e.g. ‘Les Catégories’ and *Poétique*) is in fact devoted to the study of topics such as narratorial mediation. None the less, his analysis of Boccaccio’s tales focuses on the (syntax of the) narrated and his main goal is the development of a grammar to account for it. Similarly, most of Barthes’ influential ‘Introduction’ is devoted to story rather than to discourse structure. Indeed, given the (apparent) autonomy of the narrated, given too that the latter defines to a considerable extent what narrative is (without narrated, no narrative), and given the fact that, beside being transposable (*War and Peace* as a movie), translatable (*War and Peace* in English), and summarizable (*War and Peace* in *Reader’s Digest*), narrated sequences of events take very different shapes (in the verbal domain alone are the novel and the short story, history, biography, and autobiography, epics, myths, folktales, legends and ballads, news reports, spontaneous accounts in everyday conversation, etc.), many (early) narratologists viewed the narrated as particularly pertinent to the exploration of

narrative and attempted primarily to characterise its possibilities.

In so doing, these narratologists were following a path taken by Propp and Lévi-Strauss. Propp, in *Morphology* (perhaps the most fertile modern account of story structure), disregarded the narrating in Russian fairy tales (the particular class of tales he actually studied) and sought to describe their specificity in terms of the narrated. He was able to show that the basic constituent unit determining the structure and nature of a tale was the *function*: an act defined in terms of its role in the course of action of the tale. The same act can have different roles (be subsumed by different functions): 'John killed Peter', for instance, might constitute a villainy in one tale and the hero's victory in another. Conversely, different acts can have the same role (be subsumed by the same function): 'John killed Peter' and 'The dragon kidnapped the princess', for example, might both constitute a villainy.

Propp calculated that the functions needed to account for the narrated structure of all and any Russian fairy tales were limited to thirty-one, which he described as follows:

- 1 One of the members of a family absents himself from home (*absentation*).
- 2 An interdiction is addressed to the hero (*interdiction*).
- 3 The interdiction is violated (*violation*).
- 4 The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance (*reconnaissance*).
- 5 The villain receives information about his victim (*delivery*).
- 6 The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings (*trickery*).
- 7 The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy (*complicity*).
- 8 The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family (*villainy*).
- 8A One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something (*lack*).
- 9 Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched (*mediation, the connective incident*).
- 10 The seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction (*beginning counteraction*).
- 11 The hero leaves home (*departure*).
- 12 The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper (*the first function of the donor*).
- 13 The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor (*the hero's reaction*).
- 14 The hero acquires the use of a magical agent (*provision or receipt of a magical agent*).

- 15 The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search (*spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance*).
- 16 The hero and the villain join in direct combat (*struggle*).
- 17 The hero is branded (*branding, marking*).
- 18 The villain is defeated (*victory*).
- 19 The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated (*liquidation of misfortune or lack*).
- 20 The hero returns (*return*).
- 21 The hero is pursued (*pursuit, chase*).
- 22 Rescue of the hero from pursuit (*rescue*).
- 23 The hero, unrecognised, arrives home or in another country (*unrecognised arrival*).
- 24 A false hero presents unfounded claims (*unfounded claims*).
- 25 A difficult task is proposed to the hero (*difficult task*).
- 26 The task is resolved (*solution*).
- 27 The hero is recognized (*recognition*).
- 28 The false hero or villain is exposed (*exposure*).
- 29 The hero is given a new appearance (*transfiguration*).
- 30 The villain is punished (*punishment*).
- 31 The hero is married and ascends the throne (*wedding*).

Propp maintained that no function excludes any other and that, however many of them appear in a single tale, they always appear in the same order (given the set *a, b, c, d, e, . . . , n*, should *b, c, and e* appear in a particular tale, they will appear in that order). He also maintained that all tales comprise the function Lack or Villainy and proceed from it to another function usable as a denouement (e.g. Liquidation of misfortune or lack, Rescue, or Wedding) and that some tales result from the combination of two or more tales (contain two or more Lacks or Villainies). Finally, he noted that some of the functions could be paired (e.g. Interdiction and Violation) and he isolated seven basic roles assumable by the characters, seven *dramatis personae* each of which corresponds to a particular sphere of action or set of functions: the hero (seeker or victim), the villain, the princess (a sought-for person) and her father, the dispatcher, the donor, the helper, and the false hero. The same character can play more than one role and the same role can be played by more than one character.

In his review of *Morphology*, Lévi-Strauss extolled Propp's achievements but found him guilty of underanalyzing the links between the thirty-one functions and, more generally, of favouring surface linear form rather than deep logical structure and focusing on manifest as opposed to latent content.

Lévi-Strauss was primarily interested in mythical thought, not (mythical) narrative. For him, the meaning of a myth is independent of particular

narrative arrangements and the analyst has to go beyond the latter to an underlying pattern of articulation. Myth is an instrument thanks to which one kind of irreconcilability (contradiction, opposition) is made simpler to contend with by being connected to another, more common kind. Specifically, the structure of myth can be expressed through a four-term homology relating two pairs of opposite or contradictory terms (A and B; C and D): A is to B as C is to D. Whereas Propp practised syntagmatic analysis (selecting functions as basic units and studying their syntactic, sequential order), Lévi-Strauss – as early as 1955, in ‘Structural study’ – practised paradigmatic analysis (isolating fundamental semantic elements that may be widely separated on the syntactic chain and grouping them into paradigms or classes on the basis of their similarities and differences).

Taking the myth of Oedipus as an example, Lévi-Strauss extracted from it the following classes of elements:

A	B	C	D
Cadmos seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus	The Spartoi kill one another	Cadmos kills the dragon	Labdacos (Laios’s father) = lame
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta	Oedipus kills his father, Laios	Oedipus kills the Sphinx	Laios (Oedipus’ father) = left-sided
Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition	Eteocles kills his brother, Polynices		Oedipus = swollen-foot

The elements in column A have to do with the overrating of blood relations (Cadmos’ quest, Oedipus’ incest, Antigone’s sisterly devotion) and those in column B with the underrating of these relations (family killings); column C, which involves the slayings of half-human monsters born of the earth, denies the autochthonous origin of humankind while column D, by emphasizing problems in walking straight and standing upright, asserts this origin. Thus, according to Lévi-Strauss, the myth deals with the difficulty for the culture in which it appears to reconcile the belief that human beings spring ‘from the land itself’ and the knowledge that they are born from man and woman. It relates this opposition concerning origins to the more acceptable (because readily observable) opposition concerning family ties.

Though Lévi-Strauss’ analysis can be faulted for its lack of methodological rigour and modelling adequacy as well as for the heterogeneity

of the classes it isolates (there is no way to predict the shape of the object analyzed – the Oedipus story – on the basis of the structural description provided; there seems to be a significant difference between the elements in column D and those in the other columns), it had the merit of underlining the importance of exploring systematically intratextual relations and, more crucially, of sketching general structural conditions that texts have to satisfy in order to belong to a particular type (e.g. the homological relation governing the structure of myth). Along with the author's monumental *Mythologiques* and with other essays in his *Anthropologie structurale* and *Anthropologie structurale II*,³ it influenced countless ventures in (literary) structuralism and narratology.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Greimas found much to admire in Propp's *Morphology* but he also found much that could be further analyzed, theorized, and generalized. In *Sémantique structurale*, Greimas, who was investigating discourse signification, refined Propp's notion of *dramatis persona* and developed an actantial model which involved six actants or basic roles and which has proved very influential: Subject (looking for the Object), Object (looked for by the Subject), Sender (of the Subject on its quest for the Object), Receiver (of the Object to be secured by the Subject), Helper (of the Subject), and Opponent (of the Subject). One actant can be represented by several different actors and several actants can be represented by one and the same actor. In an adventure story, for example, the protagonist may have several enemies, all of whom function as Opponent; and in a simple love story, the boy may function as both Subject and Receiver while the girl functions as both Object and Sender. Moreover, not only human actors but also animals, things, and concepts can fulfill the roles described by the actantial model: a diamond can represent the Object of the Subject's quest and an ideological imperative can function as the Sender. According to Greimas, narrative is a signifying whole because it can be grasped in terms of the structure of relations obtaining among actants. Greimas also performed a paradigmatic analysis of Propp's thirty-one functions and concluded that basic narrative developments represent transformations from negative beginnings (disruption of order and alienation) to positive ends (establishment of order and integration). These transformations are effected through a series of tests undertaken by a Subject who has made a contract with the Sender.

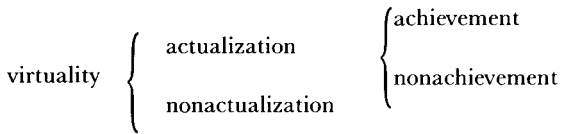
Greimas and the researchers associated with his seminar at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales were to revise, refine, and elaborate many times the actantial model and the account of narrative

³ See 'Structure et dialectique' in *Anthropologie structurale*, pp. 257–66 and, in *Anthropologie structurale II*, 'La geste d'Asdiwal', pp. 175–233 and 'Quatre mythes Winnebago', pp. 235–49.

development proposed in *Sémantique structurale* (cf., for example, Greimas, *Du sens, Maupassant, Du sens II*; Claude Chabrol, *Le récit féminin*; François Rastier, *Essais*; Joseph Courtés, *Introduction à la sémiotique*; Anne Hénault, *Narratologie*; Greimas and Courtés, *Sémiotique*). The efforts of this so-called Semiotic School of Paris yielded a model that lacks a strong empirical foundation, pays too little attention to the temporal dimension of narrative, does not avoid *ad hoc*ity, but nevertheless constitutes perhaps the most complex and ambitious narratological characterization of narrative, one which can be summarized as follows. At the most general ('deepest') level, any narrative represents the transformation of a given state into its contrary or contradictory. At a more specific (more shallow) level, the global transformation represented (the basic narrative programme) can itself be effected through a number of local transformations and only three categories of elements are needed to generate all possible transformational scenarios: the Subject–Object category, constituted by the two fundamental actants in any transformation; the Doing–Being category, defining the basic types of links that obtain between Subject and Object, that is, the basic types of narrative units; and the Modal–Descriptive category, allowing for a distinction between simple and complex links (e.g. *X makes Y be Z* as opposed to *Y is Z*) and for a characterization of the ways in which simple links can be made complex. The Subject may be conjoined with or disjoined from the Object (*X is with* or *without Y*; *X has* or *does not have Y*); it may come into conflict with an anti-Subject or antagonist; it is launched on its quest by a Sender (an actant whose role is to guarantee and communicate values and who may come into conflict with an anti-Sender); it acts for the benefit of a Receiver; it goes through one or more tests (in the canonical narrative schema, there is a qualifying test leading to the acquisition of a certain competence, a main test leading to the acquisition of the Object, and a glorifying test leading to recognition by a collectivity); and it follows a certain path articulated in terms of the formal positions it can occupy (in the canonical narrative schema, it is established as Subject by the Sender, qualified along the axes of desire, power, knowledge, and duty, realized as a performing Subject, recognized as one, and rewarded). At an even more specific level (the 'surface' level that is manifested through a given semiotic medium: linguistic, pictorial, and so on), actants are actorialized (particularized as actors), narrative units are spatialized and temporalized, and the narrative programme is thematized (it deals with 'cognitive' notions: freedom, joy, sadness, and so on) and figurativized (it illustrates these notions by evoking various elements of the 'real' world).

If Greimas criticized Propp's functional model for being insufficiently abstract and insufficiently theorized, Bremond questioned the very conception of narrative structure set forth in *Morphology*. Bremond noted that,

at each point in a narrative, there are different ways in which the story might proceed. An adequate structural account should capture that fact but Propp's claim that functions always follow the same order makes it impossible. In such works as 'Le message', 'La logique', and *Logique du récit*, Bremond pointed out that there are three stages in the unfolding of any process – (1) virtuality (a situation opening a possibility); (2) actualization or nonactualization of the possibility; (3) achievement or nonachievement. For him, the basic narrative unit is an elementary sequence or triad of functions corresponding to these three stages:



More specifically, a given triad might consist of 'villainy, intervention of the hero, success' and another triad might be made up of 'villainy, intervention of the hero, failure'. Within a triad, a posterior term implies an anterior one: there is an intervention of the hero, for instance, only if there was a villainy, and there is a success only if there was an intervention. On the other hand, every anterior term offers a consequent alternative (this underlines the choices made along a narrative path): a villainy may or may not lead to an intervention of the hero and an intervention may end in success or failure. Triads can combine – for example through enchainment (the end of one is the beginning of another) or embedding (one is embedded into another) – to yield more complex sequences. Bremond also developed an intricate typology of roles based on a fundamental distinction between patients (affected by processes and constituting victims or beneficiaries) and agents (initiating the processes and influencing the patients, modifying their situation, or maintaining it).

Bremond patterned his model of narrative structure on the logic of action. Todorov patterned his on grammar. In an early work (*Littérature et signification*), Todorov had used Lévi-Strauss' homological scheme to characterize plot but had concluded that it yielded overly abstract and often arbitrary descriptions. In *Grammaire du Décaméron*, he developed a grammar to account for (basic aspects of) Boccaccio's tales and to lay the foundations of narratological science. Todorov distinguished three dimensions in narrative: a syntactic one (the links obtaining between narrative units), a semantic one (the content or world represented or evoked), and a verbal one (the sentences making up the text). Like Propp, he chose to deal mainly with the syntactic dimension (the most fundamental and narrative-specific one, according to him). The elementary syntactic units are the propositions (or narrative statements

concerning actions). They combine into sequences (or minimal narratives) which, in turn, make up larger sequences. Their primary constituents are proper names (agents or characters), adjectives (attributes), and verbs (acts). From the perspective of plot structure, proper names have no intrinsic properties and are linked to (any number) of attributes or acts; adjectives include states (e.g. happy/unhappy), qualities (virtues or faults), and conditions (e.g. male/female); as for verbs, they comprise three major types: to modify a situation, to commit a misdeed, to punish. Todorov's propositional grammar also specifies that any proposition will be in one of several modes: the indicative (what took place), the obligative (what must happen, according to the collective social will), the optative (what characters would want to happen), the conditional (if you do A, I will do B), the predictive (if A, then B), and the visionary (the subjective and mistaken perception of one character or another).

In subsequent works (e.g. 'Les transformations'), Todorov introduced the important notion of transformation to account for paradigmatic links in narrative: a transformation is a relation obtaining between two propositions that have a predicate P in common, and it can be simple (in one of the propositions, an operator – of modality, negation, and so on – modifies P: 'X drinks a beer every day' → 'X *does not* drink a beer every day') or complex (in one of the propositions, a predicate is grafted onto P: 'X drinks a beer every day' → 'X [or Y] *says* that X drinks a beer every day'). For a narrative sequence to be complete, it must contain two distinct propositions in a transformational relation.

Todorov's grammar was not sufficiently powerful (for instance, it proved unable to characterize adequately certain tales in Boccaccio's collection) and it was not always convincing (for example, it is not clear why 'to commit a misdeed' or 'to punish' should not be subsumed under 'to modify a situation'). But it did capture a number of regularities in *The Decameron* and, more importantly, it made clear that, just as linguistics aims to establish the grammar of language, narratology should aim to establish the grammar of narrative. As such, it constituted an inspiration for many narratologists (see, for example, Teun van Dijk's *Some Aspects* and 'Narrative macro-structures', Gerald Prince's *A Grammar of Stories* and 'Aspects of a grammar', Thomas Pavel's *La syntaxe narrative* and *The Poetics of Plot*, Gérard Genot's *Elements of Narratives* and *Grammaire et récit*).

In his 'Introduction,' Barthes drew on the work of Todorov, Bremond, and Greimas and, like the latter, combined syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis. Barthes isolated three hierarchically related levels in narrative, two of them pertaining to the narrated or story (the level of *functions* and the level of *actions*) and one to the narrating or discourse (the level of *narration*). Barthes distinguished between two types of functional elements (minimal narrative units linked syntagmatically or paradigmatically with other

units): the functions proper and the indices. Each type itself comprises two kinds of unit. The functions proper, which are related to other units in terms of consecution or consequence, include cardinal functions (kernels, nuclei, units that are logically essential to the narrative action and cannot be eliminated without destroying its causal-chronological coherence) as well as catalyses (rather than constituting crucial nodes in the action, these units fill in the narrative space between the nodes, and their elimination does not destroy the coherence of the narrative action). As for indices, which imply metaphoric rather than metonymic relations and thus are linked to other units in paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic terms, they include indices proper (referring to an atmosphere, a philosophy, a feeling, a personality trait, and signifying implicitly) as well as informants (providing explicit bits of information about the time and space represented). Functional elements acquire their 'ultimate' meaning insofar as they are integrated at the level of actions, that is, insofar as they are subsumed under a particular actant's line of action (a Subject's quest, for example). In turn, actions acquire their 'ultimate' meaning at the level of narration (the telling, ordering, and evaluation of the various lines of action in the narrative).

Barthes' article was not without weaknesses. For instance, his discussion of the narrational level, with its distinction between a personal mode – one in which the stance is (like) that of a first person or 'I' – and an apersonal (or impersonal) mode, was both sketchy and confused. Nevertheless, the article had several impressive features. It presented a global model of narrative analysis; it took into consideration 'non-narrative' elements (settings, themes, atmospheres) as well as more strictly narrative ones (happenings, actions); and it provided useful starting-points for a taxonomy of narrative texts (for example, adventure novels are predominantly functional whereas psychological novels are predominantly indicial). A few years after the article's publication, however, the very attempt to develop a science of narrative and describe narrative *langue* was dismissed by Barthes himself in *S/Z* (1970) as an exhausting and spurious enterprise, incapable of capturing a text's *difference* and value. *S/Z* is usually viewed as a poststructuralist rather than a structuralist work: in this famous 'writing of a reading' of Balzac's 'Sarrasine,' Barthes characterizes the text as a productive *structuration*, not as a structured product; and he considers Balzac's novella not as a homogeneous object that is constituted once and for all but as heterogenous signifying matter that differs from itself. Still, much of *S/Z*, specifically, the interest in the way texts make sense and the demonstration that 'Sarrasine' (or any narrative) is readable in terms of a number of codes, represents a development of the 1966 'Introduction' ('proairetic' description, for example, is similar to functional analysis and 'semic' characterization resembles indicial analysis). In fact, *S/Z* has

constituted an important reference point for narratologists ever since its appearance (see Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* and Prince's *Narratology*).

Narratology: discourse

Though much work in narratology thus centred on the narrated instead of the narrating and characterized narrative primarily in terms of it, some narratologists considered narrative as essentially a mode of (verbal) presentation (the telling of events by a narrator as opposed to, say, the enacting of them on stage) and they defined their task as the study of narrative discourse rather than story. They had tradition on their side: the opposition between *diegesis* and *mimesis*, recounting and representing, epic and drama, narrative and theatre goes back to Plato and Aristotle and is still very common. Furthermore, they could argue that focusing on the narrated and its structure results in a failure to account for the many ways in which the same set of events can be told (compare 'Mary ate before she slept' and 'Mary slept after she ate'). Finally, in pursuing their task, they were able to profit from the insightful work on literary narration that a number of critics had already done.

Genette is probably the most eminent representative of this important narratological tendency. In 'Discours du récit' (1972) and *Nouveau discours* (1983), Genette distinguished between the narrative text, the story it recounts, and the narrating instance (the producing narrative act – as inscribed in the text – and the context in which that act occurs). Disregarding the level of story proper (the level of the existents and events making up the narrated), Genette focused on three sets of relations: between narrative text and story, between narrative text and narrating instance, and between story and narrating instance. More specifically, Genette investigated problems of *tense* (the set of temporal relations between the situations and events recounted and their recounting), *mood* (the set of modalities regulating narrative information), and *voice* (the set of signs characterizing the narrating instance and governing its relations with the narrative text and the story). Even more specifically, he examined the links between the order in which events (are said to) occur and the order in which they are presented, those between the duration of the narrated and the length of the narrative, and those between the number of times an event happens and the number of times it is mentioned; he explored the focalizations or points of view in terms of which narrated events can be rendered, the basic kinds of narratorial mediation, and the fundamental modes of depicting characters' thoughts or utterances; and he studied (the distinctive features of) narrators, narratees – the ones who are narrated to – and narrative situations.

Genette's outstanding discussion of narrative discourse, which was partly based on earlier studies (Lämmert on temporal order, Günther Müller on duration, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren on point of view) and which was contemporaneous with such work as Jean Rousset's on first-person narration or Prince's on the nature and function of the narratee, inspired many narratologists to investigate further the topics he had explored and to refine his treatment of them (cf. Mieke Bal or Pierre Vitoux on focalization and Chatman on narrative speed). Indeed, his 'Discours du récit', which also functioned as a narratological study of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, proved so exemplary that both the *Grand Larousse de la langue française* and the *Grand Robert* give 1972 as the date of appearance of the term 'narratologie'.⁴

Defining narrative by its mode of presentation (and insisting on the role of a narrator) instead of defining it by its object (events) leads to a neglect of narratorless stories. Besides, it disregards the fact that the story too makes narrative whatever it is. A number of narratologists consider both the narrated and the narrating pertinent to narrative and to the study of its possibilities. Chatman in *Story and Discourse*, Prince in *Narratology*, Jean-Michel Adam in *Le texte*, for example, have attempted to integrate the study of the *what* and the *way*; and recent Greimassian models of narrative make room for aspects of discourse as well as for story (see Henault's *Narratologie*). This 'generalized' or 'mixed' narratology, as Michel Mathieu-Colas calls it in 'Frontières', can be said to correspond to the 'science' that Barthes evoked in his 'Introduction.' It can also be said to conform to the present scope of narratological activity.

The achievements of narratology

It is perhaps the area of narrative discourse that narratologists have explored most thoroughly. Genette but also Todorov, Bal, Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and others have described the temporal orders that a narrative text can follow, the anachronies (flashbacks or flashforwards) that it can exhibit, the achronic (undatable) structures that it can accommodate. Furthermore, they have characterized narrative speed and its canonical tempos:

Ellipsis: there is no part of the text corresponding to or representing pertinent events that took time and the narrative can be said to reach infinite speed.

Summary: a relatively short part of the text corresponds to a relatively long narrated time.

⁴ See Mathieu-Colas' discussion in 'Frontières', pp. 91–110.

Scene: there is some sort of conventional equivalence between the length of the text and the duration of the narrated.

Stretch: a relatively long part of the text corresponds to a relatively short narrated time.

Pause: there is a stretch of narrative text corresponding to no elapsing of narrated time and the narrative can be said to come to a stop.

They have, moreover, investigated narrative frequency:

Singulative narrative: I recount once what happened once.

Repeating narrative: I recount more than once what happened once.

Iterative narrative: I recount once what happened more than once.

They have examined narrative distance (the extent of narratorial mediation) and narrative perspective (the perceptual or conceptual position according to which the narrated events are depicted: zero focalization obtains when the story is presented in terms of a nonlocatable, indeterminate position; internal focalization obtains when the story is presented in terms of the knowledge, feelings, or perceptions of a single character or several different ones; external focalization obtains when the story is presented in terms of a focal point *in* the world of the events recounted but *outside* any of the characters. They have studied the types of discourse that a text can adopt to report the utterances and thoughts of characters: narratized discourse when they are represented, in a language that is the narrator's, as acts among other acts; tagged indirect discourse when they are integrated into another set of words or thoughts, accompanied by a tag clause like 's/he said,' and reported with more or less fidelity; free indirect discourse, which involves no tag clause and contains mixed within it markers of two discourse events (a narrator's and a character's), two styles, two languages, two voices, two semantic and axiological systems; tagged direct discourse when a character's words or thoughts are given in the way s/he formulated them and are accompanied by a tag clause; and free direct discourse when such words or thoughts appear without any narratorial introduction, mediation, or patronage whatever. They have also studied the major kinds of narration and their modes of combination: *a posteriori* narration follows the narrated events in time and is characteristic of 'classical' or 'traditional' narrative; an anterior narration precedes them in time, as in predictive narrative; a simultaneous narration occurs at the same time as they do; and an intercalated narration is temporally situated between two moments of the action presented and is characteristic of epistolary and diary narratives. Two different acts of narration can be linked through a simple conjunction, the embedding of one into the other, or the alternation of elements from the first with elements from the second. They have investigated the set of relations

between narrator and narratee and the story narrated: in a first-person narrative, the narrator is a more or less important character in the story; in a third-person narrative, s/he is not a character; and in a second-person narrative, the narratee is also the protagonist. Finally, they have specified the signs referring to the narrator (who may be more or less overt, knowledgeable, reliable, self-conscious) and the narratee and they have delineated their respective functions and the possible distances – temporal, linguistic, intellectual, and so on – between them as well as the distances separating them from the characters and events in the story.

The investigation of story structure has also yielded notable results. For example, narratologists have examined the minimal constituents of the narrated (goal-directed actions and mere happenings, states and processes) and, following the insight of Barthes (and the Russian Formalists), they have distinguished those constituents essential to the coherence of the story from those constituents not essential to it. They have studied the relations (syntagmatic and paradigmatic, spatiotemporal, logical, thematic, functional, transformational) between the minimal units and drawn attention to the mechanisms underlying narrative surprise and suspense. They have also demonstrated that narrative sequences can be said to consist of a series of minimal constituents the last one of which in time is a (partial) repetition or transform of the first; and they have proved that ever more complex sequences can be said to result from the linking of simpler ones through such operations as conjunction, embedding, and alternation. Moreover, apart from showing that situations and events, states or processes, actions or happenings can be grouped into basic (functional) categories and that participants in them can be categorized according to (actantial and thematic) roles, they have explored the nature of characters and settings and the various techniques through which they are constituted and described. Characters, for instance, can be more or less textually prominent, dynamic or static, consistent or inconsistent, and simple, two-dimensional, and highly predictable or complex, multi-dimensional, and capable of surprising behaviour; they are classable not only in terms of their conformity to standard types (the braggart, the cuckold, the *femme fatale*) or their corresponding to certain spheres of action but also in terms of their acts, words, feelings, appearance, and so on; and their attributes can be directly and reliably stated (for example, in a set-piece presentation) or inferred from their (mental, emotional, and physical) behaviour. As for settings, they too can be textually important or negligible, consistent or inconsistent, vague or precise, typical or unique; they can also be utilitarian (have a role in the action), symbolic (of a conflict to come, of a character's feelings), 'realistic' (mentioned simply because 'they are there,' as it were); and their constitutive features can be presented subjectively or

objectively, contiguously (a description is then said to obtain) or not, in an orderly fashion (from left to right, top to bottom, inside to outside) or a disorderly one.⁵ Lastly, narratologists have analysed how a story can be characterized semantically as a world consisting of domains (sets of Moves or actions pertaining to a given character, called for by a Problem, and representing an effort toward a Solution), each of which is governed by (alethic, epistemic, axiological, or deontic) modal constraints. The latter determine ‘what happens’ by establishing what is or could be the case in the world represented, regulating the characters’ knowledge, setting their values, obligations, and goals, and in general guiding their course of action (see, for example, Lubomír Doležel’s ‘Narrative semantics’, Pavel’s *The Poetics of Plot*, and Marie-Laure Ryan’s ‘The modal structure’).

As for the integration of the study of story and discourse, it has usually followed the direction indicated by the Russian Formalists’ work on the relations between *fabula* (basic story material) and *sjuzet* (plot) and it has sometimes assumed the shape of a grammar (or series of statements and formulas linked by an ordered set of rules). Ultimately, such a grammar might consist of the following interrelated parts: (1) a syntactic component whereby a finite number of rules generate the macro- and microstructures of all and only stories; (2) a semantic component interpreting these structures (characterizing both the global macrostructural and the local microstructural narrative information or content); (3) a ‘discursive’ component whereby a finite number of rules operate on the interpreted structures and account for narrative discourse (order of presentation, speed, frequency, and so on); and (4) a pragmatic component specifying the basic cognitive and communicative factors affecting the production, processing, and narrativity of the output of the first three parts. These four components, which constitute the narrative grammar proper, would be articulated with a textual component allowing for the translation into a given medium (say, written English) of the grammatical data provided.

A response to criticisms of narratology

In spite of the results it has achieved, narratology has not been immune from criticism.⁶ Some of this criticism – directed at the universalizing ambitions of narratology, its scientific bias, the cumbersomeness of the apparatus it needs to account for even the simplest narratives, the ‘naive Platonism’ (presumably) evident in its very distinction between story and

⁵ For narratological accounts of character and setting, see Chatman, *Story and Situation* and, especially, Hamon, *Le personnel and Introduction à l’analyse*.

⁶ See, e.g., Booth, *Rhetoric*; Brooks, *Reading*; Chambers, *Story*; Culler, *Pursuit*; Martin, *Recent Theories*; and Smith, ‘Narrative versions’, pp. 209–32.

discourse, and the reductiveness of its models – is not especially powerful given its generality, its predictability, and, at times, its misguidedness. Any universalizing gesture can be met with a localizing or historicizing counter-gesture, any recourse to nature with a recourse to culture (it is the ‘ethnographer’s reflex’: some group or other, some system, some practice always turns out to be *essentially* different). Besides, if it is true that a universalizing stance can lead the analyst to ignore his or her own biases and to disregard important local differences, it is equally true that the universalizing stance of narratology does not lack a foundation: everyone may not know how to produce ‘good’ narratives but (practically) everyone, in every human society known to history and anthropology, knows how to produce narratives, and this at a very early age; moreover, everyone distinguishes narratives from non-narratives, that is, everyone has certain intuitions, or has internalized certain rules, about what constitutes a narrative and what does not. Furthermore, there is often agreement as to whether a given set of signs constitutes a narrative or not and people of widely different cultural backgrounds often produce narratives that are very similar; in other words, it seems that, to a certain extent at least, everyone has the same intuitions, or has internalized the same rules, about the nature of narratives.

Similarly, it may be true that narratology’s infatuation with science, and, more specifically, with the science of language, gave it an exaggerated faith in the explanatory powers of linguistic terms and made it cling to notions and procedures that had been contested in and eliminated from the ‘mother discipline’ (narratology remained under the influence of structuralist strategies well after they had been abandoned by linguistics). On balance, however, the emulation of linguistics and of its scientific concern for conceptual rigour and methodological sophistication proved narratologically fruitful. In any case, charges of scientism have regularly been made against a number of humanistic enterprises aiming at explicitness and systematicity and representing a (possible) challenge to established ‘disciplines’ or ‘undisciplines.’ History (with a capital H), the Text (with a capital T), the work of genius, the unique creation, the ineffable quality of any experience, the specificity of any event, good breeding and good taste are then called to the rescue. Of course, the object of narratology is not the ‘creation,’ the ‘experience,’ or ‘good taste’ but, rather, narrative.

As for charges of cumbersomeness or Platonism, it is probably sufficient to note that even the simplest narratives may be very complex (as are many ‘simple’ things) and that few if any narratologists believe that stories exist prior to and independently of discourse and text (to say, for example, that two different narratives – one in English and one in French – tell the same story in no way implies that the latter sometimes does or can exist by itself).

Finally, the argument that narratological models are reductive and that they fail to characterize many (important) aspects of narrative texts does not take into consideration the fact that the map is not the territory and the model not the thing itself. More crucially, it does not take into consideration the fact that narratology is not so much a theory of narrative as it is a theory of narrative *qua* narrative: it tries to account for all and only narratives to the extent that they are narrative. Indeed, narratologists have frequently made it clear that there is much more than narrative in a narrative text (wit, for instance, pathos, philosophical force, psychological insight) and that they are interested above all in capturing those textual elements that are specific to or characteristic of narrative.

Some of the criticism directed against narratology is more pointed and more provocative (see Peter Brooks' *Reading* and Ross Chambers' *Story*). For example, it is argued that narratological models are too static and unable to describe the very engine that drives a narrative forward to its end, the very dynamics that determines its shape. It is, no doubt, true that Lévi-Strauss, given his interest in the achronic logic of myth, paid little attention to the syntagmatic arrangement and movement of narrative, that Greimassian accounts took narrative deep structure to be atemporal, that the seminal Proppian model, with its fixed order of functions, was static, and that narrative grammars have frequently concentrated on isolating minimal story units and their modes of combination rather than on capturing the dynamism of story configurations. On the other hand, it could be pointed out that Lévi-Strauss never was (and never claimed to be) a narratologist, that much narratology has developed outside the Greimassian framework, that Bremond criticized early on the static aspects of Propp's *Morphology* (cf. 'Le message'), and that his own model of the narrated underlined the progressive logic of stories. Furthermore, recent attempts to characterize story structure have been explicitly concerned with its dynamic dimension. Pavel's *The Poetics of Plot*, for instance, emphasizes the primacy of action and transformation and sketches the system of energies, tensions, and resistances that plot constitutes. Similarly, Ryan's 'Embedded narratives' presents an artificial-intelligence inspired model that tries to incorporate the moments of suspense and surprise, advance and delay, trickery and illumination emblematic of plots.

It is also argued that narratology disregards the situation in which narratives occur, the context that partly dictates their form and contributes to their point, the pragmatic elements that partly govern their functioning. Once again, the criticism is not unjustified. The allegiance of narratology to arguments inspired by structural linguistics or generative-transformational grammar, the preoccupation with capturing the specificity of narrative (a lyric poem, an essay, or a syllogism may, after all, occur in the same context as a tale), the difficulty of incorporating contextual

factors into a systematic description, and the 'scientific' aspirations of the discipline (its desire, in particular, to isolate narrative universals, which transcend context) did result in the narratologists' reluctance to make pragmatics part of their domain of inquiry and in their neglect of the contextual dimensions of meaning production. Even in the early years of narratology, however, pragmatically based notions were not entirely ignored (in his 'Introduction,' for example, Barthes suggests that the most powerful motor of narrativity is the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, whereby what-comes-after-x in a narrative is confused with what-is-caused-by-x). More recently, perhaps because of the many (sociolinguistic) reminders about the significance of communicative contexts, because of the great interest among literary critics and theorists in decoding strategies, and because of the growing awareness that narrative should be viewed not only as an object or product but also as an act or process, as a situation-bound transaction between two parties, narratologists have begun to address more explicitly questions pertaining to pragmatics. Thus, Adam has tried to take into account the contract between sender and receiver that underlies an act of narration (*Le texte*); Susan Sniader Lanser, in calling for the development of a feminist narratology, has stressed the importance for narrative theory of being socially sensitive and of considering the role of gender in narrative production and processing; Prince has discussed a number of (textual and contextual) factors affecting narrative value (*Narratology*, 'Narrative pragmatics', 'The disnarrated'); and Ryan has argued that some configurations of events make better narratives than others: her formal model of plot predicts that tellability – the quality that makes a story worthy of being told – is a function of unrealized strings of events (unsuccessful actions, broken promises, crushed hopes, and so on), that it increases as the narrative goes back and forth between the competing plans of different characters, and, most generally, that it depends on the functioning of 'virtual embedded narratives' (any story-like representations produced in the mind of a character).

Finally, the very possibility of a coherent generalized narratology, one that successfully integrates the study of story and discourse, of events and their presentation, has been put into question by (poststructuralist) theorists and critics invoking the so-called double logic of narrative (see Jonathan Culler's *Pursuit*). This double logic consists of the two organizing principles in terms of which every narrative presumably operates. One principle underlines the primacy of event over presentation and the meaning resulting from it (insists upon event as the origin of meaning); the other emphasises the primacy of meaning and its requirements (insists upon event as the effect of a particular presentation and will to meaning). The first principle stresses the logical priority of story over discourse; the second stresses the reverse and makes story the product of discourse. Each

principle functions to the exclusion of the other but, paradoxically, both are valid and necessary to the development of narrative, its impact, its force. This means that a generalized narratology, however much it is developed and refined, will always be deficient: neither principle by itself can lead to a satisfactory account of narrative and the two principles cannot be synthesized. The argument is interesting but not entirely persuasive. For it conflates problems that should perhaps not be conflated: that of narrative veracity and its evaluation (can narrative be true?⁷ is there is difference between history and fiction?²), that of compositional and/or interpretive practices (with the beginning illuminated by the end and vice versa), that of the goals of narrative (one usually narrates in a certain way to make a certain point), and that of its effects or powers.

Whatever the deficiencies of narratology, its influence has been considerable. So much so that critical and theoretical work dealing with narrative corpora is frequently called narratological, even if it does not focus on traits that are specific to or characteristic of narrative and even when it has few links with or little regard for the narratologist's methods and aspirations. Narratology can help to account for the distinctiveness of any given narrative, to compare any two (sets of) narratives and to institute narrative classes according to narratively pertinent features, to illuminate certain reactions to texts (if *Madame Bovary* is aesthetically pleasing, perhaps it is partly because of the way Flaubert uses scene in the midst of summary and summary in the midst of scene), to support certain interpretive conclusions (the frequent recourse to iterative narration in *A la recherche du temps perdu* underscores Proust's quest for essence), and even – by providing certain points of departure – to devise (new) interpretations (so-called narratological criticism begins with and is based upon narratological description: François Mauriac's *Le noeud de vipères*, for example, features a first-person narrator addressing a series of different narratees; it could mean, perhaps, that the novel is ultimately about a human being in search of an understanding audience). In fact, the remarkable popularity that narrative as theme and as the privileged theme of narrative has enjoyed since the 1960s is, to a large extent, due to the development of narratology: by studying the constitutive elements of narrative, their modes of combination, and their functioning, narratology has supplied numerous entrance and reference points in the domain covered by the theme of narrative.⁷

Yet, as much of the above suggests, narratology is not mainly or

⁷ Perhaps the best known example of narratological criticism is Genette's work on Proust's *Recherche* in 'Discours du récit'. For other examples, see, among many others, Bal, *Narratologie* and Martin, *Recent Theories*.

primarily a handmaiden of interpretation. On the contrary, through its concern for the governing principles of narrative and through its attempt to characterize not so much the particular meanings of particular narratives but rather what allows narratives to have meanings, narratology has proven to be an important participant in the assault against viewing literary studies as devoted above all to the interpretation of texts. Narratology has also played a significant role in another battle affecting the shape of literary studies. Through its examination of the factors operating in all possible narratives (and not just great, fictional, or extant ones), it has helped to put into question the very nature of the canon by showing that many non-canonical narratives are just as sophisticated (narratively speaking) as canonical ones.

More generally, narratology has underlined the extent to which narrative inhabits not only literary texts and ordinary language but also scholarly or technical discourse; and narratological tools and arguments have been used in domains far exceeding the bounds of 'literary studies proper': in musicology, art criticism, and film studies, for instance, to investigate compositional and representational practices; in cultural analysis, to trace the ways in which various forms of knowledge and power legitimate themselves through narrative; in philosophy, to explore temporality; in psychology, to study memory and comprehension.⁸ Indeed, narratology has significant implications for our understanding of human beings. To explore the nature of all and only narratives, to account for the infinity of forms they can take, to consider how we construct them, paraphrase them, summarize them, or expand them is to explore one of the basic ways – and a specifically human one at that – in which we make sense.

⁸ See, for example, Newcomb, 'Schumann', pp. 164–74; Steiner, *Pictures*; Metz, *Essais*; Jameson, *Political Unconscious*; Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*; Glenn, 'Episodic structure', pp. 229–47; and Stein, 'The definition of a story', pp. 487–507.

6

ROLAND BARTHES

Barthes and theory

Ancient rhetoric, which Barthes revived and which has played a major part in recent literary theory, described strategies to propitiate the reader. They are urgently needed when one proposes to write on Barthes. One first needs to explain why a chapter, alone among those which describe whole movements, is devoted to a single individual. One must then point out difficulties arising from the fact that we are dealing here with a very problematic figure. Barthes' desire to preserve his freedom of direction, especially in mid-career when the theoretical picture became very confused for ideological and political reasons, sometimes generates a textual indeterminacy which calls for interpretive commitment on the part of the critic. Further, Barthes made his name as a critic and theorist of not only literature but society; and although these two activities were soon subsumed by him under the common label of semiology, the general science of signs postulated by the Swiss linguist Saussure at the turn of the century, they remain distinct to some extent. Should Barthes' work as a 'sociologist of the qualitative' be described in a history of criticism? Space forbids it, but reference will be made to overlapping concepts and themes. Furthermore, although one expects that an individual thus singled out has some wider social significance, should this be a chapter on Barthes, or only on Barthesianism? The term arose because the doctrines which have influenced two generations of literary theorists were clearly articulated by him, and propagated with the utmost polemical resourcefulness even when, in the latter part of his career, he yearned to see desire replace domination, putting an end to the 'war of languages'. Despite the limitations imposed by a brief presentation, an attempt will be made to convey the flavour of an author who thrives on thematic and stylistic tension, and thus defies summarizing.

This approach rests on the belief that a spiritual adventure so singular can also have exemplary value; Sartre's dictum, 'History makes us universal to the exact degree that we make it particular' was rediscovered by

Barthes when he finally turned more overtly to personal themes (*Inaugural, Rustle*, p. 290). It involves a partly contrapuntal approach rather than a purely linear one, in order to stress imaginative and formal constants: major aspects of some works will therefore sometimes be described out of context. But an awareness of chronology is indispensable when considering someone so alert to originality and topicality, and can alone reveal how early the main elements of Barthes' thought were formed, and how involved each of them was with his deepest personal concerns. For one of the main principles of contemporary thought, which urges us, following Barthes, to question the notion of metalanguage when it is applied to literature and even to the 'human' or social sciences inasmuch as they are conveyed through language, can work both ways. Metalanguages, being a logical necessity, are unavoidably used by Barthes and Barthesians; but while exploring their psychological and social roots as well as their semantic and formal structure can make them safely operational, denying their existence allows them to return like the repressed.

The choice between Barthes and Barthesianism is therefore a false dilemma: theory is an essential component of his distinctiveness as an individual writer. It is a crucial aspect of the tormented relationship between him and his self-image, which makes all his texts without exception dual messages where the intellectual meaning is overdetermined by an existential one. It is probably a subliminal awareness of this duality which suggested to him his main intuition: that every sign becomes a sign of itself, that it cannot signify without signalling that it is doing so. The original triggers of this intuition seem to have been both Barthes' fear of various social 'gendarmes', as in the analysis of left-wing discourse he gave in his first book, *Writing Degree Zero*, or his disgust at the semantic overkill aimed at making socio-historical phenomena look natural and therefore unchangeable which he identified in multiple aspects of bourgeois communication and described in his scintillating *Mythologies*.

Barthes cannot put pen to paper without sketching out a general remapping of intellectual boundaries, and is never short of suggestions for new 'sciences' cutting across established disciplines and instantly baptized with some Greek-sounding neologism: ergography, semiotropy, etc. One such putative science is bathmology, which would study the depth of commitment of speakers to their language. It might help us to interpret the role of theory in his discourse. Bathmology was originally suggested to him in relation to the gourmet Brillat-Savarin's art of enjoying successive waves of flavour (*Rustle*, p. 250), hence the idea of 'one of the most important formal categories of modernity', that of the staggered presentation of phenomena, and in particular the staggered effects of discourses, first direct, then allusive. By a typical slide (*Barthes*, pp. 66–8),

what was first an index of 'the quality of taste' became a 'tactical' weapon to 'abolish the good conscience of language', then an anguished meditation on the possibility of literature. For as Barthes realizes, 'each time I believe in the truth, I have need of denotation' or first-degree language. The only salvation from reductionism lies in poetry: 'The right metaphor would have to be invented, the one which, once encountered, would possess you forever' (*Barthes*, p. 67). And the lover, whose discourse Barthes endorses, is characterized as essentially incapable of speaking 'in the second degree' (*Lover*, p. 177).

Owing to an acute awareness of the layers of cultural history and the self-consciousness which accompanies it, as well as to a less admirable submission to the resulting paradigm, our time has almost lost interest in the age-old search for the markers of truth. Despite Barthes' major role in establishing this paradigm, and his sophisticated awareness of the plurality and unreliability of languages, there is however some point, as the above passages show, in coding our reading of his work for truth as well as for those other passages where he casts suspicion on its communicability or even existence. Such a reading does not invalidate what has now become the dominant one; but it relativizes it and in addition recognizes aspects which otherwise are left unsaid, or perhaps unseen and unthought, chiefly emotional intensity and its effect on not only the discourse of an oeuvre but its articulations and, so to speak, its plot.¹

Notions like sincerity, authenticity, serious or committed speech, should therefore not be abandoned – if only because of their heuristic value once they are purged of their normative undertone as well as their psychoanalytical and rhetorical naivety – just because they have been under intense critical bombardment in some quarters, following Barthes' lead. They show that the theoretical mode can correspond to different realities. In the early part of his career, it manifests an objective realization of an urgent need to update many critical and sociological tenets, and is an exuberant expression of his conceptual creativity. Despite a patent modesty, it communicates a buoyancy which comes from a sense of dominating to some extent the social machine, which at the time, and particularly in the educational and cultural field, was aggressively reactionary. In Barthes' later career, its function is more personal than social; it is part of a self-portrait, it expresses a continuity, it contributes to the literary texture, it is ludic, tactical, and even confessional, as in

¹ Very few of Barthes' commentators have dared to explore his relationship with committed language (or forms since, as we shall see, plot is one of them); see, however, Butor, 'La Fascinatrice', Doubrovsky, 'Une écriture tragique', Hillenaar, *Barthes*. On Lacan's denial of metalanguage, see M. Arrivé in Parret and Ruprecht, *Aims and Prospects*, and Macey, *Lacan*.

the following passage from the autobiographical *Barthes by Barthes* which cannot but be interpreted as a 'demand for analysis' and shows that discursive assertiveness can be double-edged:

He felt he was producing a double discourse . . . for the aim of his discourse is not truth, and yet his discourse is assertive. This kind of embarrassment started, for him, very early; he strives to master it – for otherwise he would have to stop writing – by reminding himself that it is language that is assertive, not he. (p. 48)

But Barthes speaks of this unease, and even fear, in the third person, in a 'novelistic' way which is a pointer to the deeper demand made on the reader: that of recognising him as a writer.

One Barthes or two?

Before we come to this crucial element for a portrait of Barthes, a last (but not least) problem has to be faced. For complex intellectual and personal reasons which can be only partly understood even after the appearance of an independent biography,² his life-long nervousness with his image dramatically increased in the late sixties until a sizeable part of his activity was devoted to its management and control. He therefore propagated what can only be called an authorized version of his career which now can function like what Gaston Bachelard used to call an epistemological obstacle. The summary of this version came out in the periodical *Tel Quel* in the first special issue ever to be devoted to him (1971), thus unavoidably objectifying his image. It is an article he inspired (M. Buffat, 'Le simulacre'), and where an extraordinary negative theology is used to justify his prior activities while demoting them in view of recent intellectual developments which are said to have caused a mutation in his thinking. This tactic involves a disparagement of the first and second moment in a career which Barthes stylized as a sequence of four phases, those of his involvement, first with existentialism and Marxism (until the mid-sixties), then with structuralism and semiology, the attempt to analyse all social and artistic phenomena scientifically using a linguistic model (this second period overlaps with the previous one and lasts until

² All the elements for Barthes' biography derived from him until the appearance of the biography by Louis-Jean Calvet (1990). A major cause of his desire to control his image was the political turmoil of 1968; see an article by Yves-Alain Bois in *Critique* (1982), alluding to a public incident which reinforced his phobia of contestation. See also Greimas, (1980) *Barthes*. Edgar Morin's 'Le retrouvé et le perdu' (*Communications*, 1982), on the other hand, plays down the political angle and stresses what Barthes owed to the permissiveness which compensated, in the sixties, for the intense politicization and 'publicization' of private life, which he loathed. See on this D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault*.

the late sixties). The third moment, associated with *S/Z* (1970) and *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971, but including earlier articles), is correspondingly highlighted, and some critics would not see the fourth phase – the last five years of Barthes' life – as a distinct period, despite its very innovative features.

We shall see that there was no mutation at the theoretical level in the late sixties since the linguistic and literary doctrines he now began to promulgate with the ardour of the newly converted could be traced to those he had preached to a startled and semi-incredulous world more than a decade earlier. But the idiosyncratic dimension of his intellectual activity and its uniquely innovative character were constantly fuelling self doubts which were not quelled, despite the rightness of his cause, by a bitter attack on him, in 1965, coming from the academic establishment (R. Picard, *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture*), whose positivistic ideology he had repeatedly denounced, notably in his book *On Racine*. Barthes, generous to the point of being starry-eyed about the contemporary 'master-thinkers' he admired, had not received from them, at the moment when it would have mattered, the reciprocal support which the acuteness and comprehensiveness of his criticisms deserved.

Then, by the late sixties, another kind of professional like Derrida and Kristeva, seemingly more sophisticated in matters philosophical and psychoanalytical, intimidated a Barthes conscious of his lack of recognized diplomas and of his relegation to marginal, albeit prestigious establishments³ and always ready to confess a weakness with 'algorithms'. He no more recognized his own teaching in its new guise than had Sartre, uncharacteristically intimidated in the same way, when he considered some of Barthes' tenets as wholly new instead of seeing them as standing in a dialectical relationship with his own doctrines⁴. The circumstances were not yet propitious for the adoption by Barthes of the stance of the amateur,

³ The Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, then the Collège de France. Tuberculosis prevented Barthes, like Camus, from taking the Agrégation which guarantees a post in state establishments. He speaks about his first degree in French and Classics as a 'meagre investment' ('Réponses'), but derived from his contact with Greek culture not only a vast fund of roots for neologisms but a sense of the 'chthonic', the magical, the otherworldly (*Lover*, p. 115).

⁴ Sartre did not recognize the ontological opposition he had described between poetry and prose in *What is Literature?* when he cited a distinction made by Barthes, in one of the *Critical Essays*, between two types of language-user, the *écrivain* (the writer, for whom language is a spectacle and a practice) and the *écrivain* (the mere scribe, for whom language is an instrument) in his *Plea for Intellectuals*. Both Sartre and Barthes at various times tried to account for stylistic effectiveness in terms of information theory, in typically different ways: Barthes pessimistically trusted only the notion of information for stylistic salvation; Sartre, optimistically showed (e.g., in his essay on Jean Genet) how even redundancy and 'noise', the random element, help the writer to say the unsayable.

which some five years later assumed in his eyes an equally valid cognitive value, thus guaranteeing a degree of theoretical and emotional security. He therefore saw himself 'in the rearguard of the avant-garde' ('Réponses', p. 102), adopted towards former disciples the stance of the pupil (made easy by Sartre's acting, in good Maoist fashion, as modest interviewer of the 1968 student leaders in order to learn from them), and hastily added in 1968, to an article he had written on Sollers' novel *Drame* in 1965, what he called a 'supplement' (*Sollers*, p. 62). This Derridian term, as Barthes uses it, explains why from now on we have to take yet another layer into account in anything he wrote: the tactical devices through which he seeks to impose his new outlook. He claims that the latter is neither a correction nor a censure; yet as Buffat puts it, 'the science of the text [the approach now recommended] does not arise after the "science of literature" [or poetics, shortly to be described, and the object of structuralist studies], it arises against it; it is what at once accomplishes it and makes it obsolete' ('Le simulacre', p. 112).

The poststructuralist gesture (as it came to be known, although Barthes never uses this term), seeks like a neutron bomb to kill the personnel while leaving the buildings intact, ready both to be used and to serve as an awful example of 'classical semiology' – for Barthes went on publishing, albeit with 'supplements', earlier works which, like the Sollers article, he now deemed ideologically incorrect, the most notable example being his *Fashion System*. The would-be victims of this unquestionably murderous or castrating gesture were acknowledged by him to be flourishing ten years later (*Inaugural*, pp. 457 and 471) and still are, although more in some countries than in others.

The belief in a break in the middle of Barthes' career is held chiefly in English-speaking countries, where a younger generation of readers came to him at the time of the translations of his later works. There, it is not rare to find his oeuvre redefined as a homogeneous whole starting with *S/Z*, as if this book, pivotal though it is, did not depend on the achievements of the earlier strata it is supposed to supersede. This view is by now the object of a considerable professional investment. In France and other continental countries, the formalist approach of the New Criticism never was hegemonic and the various theoretical gains covering two decades of what used to be called the 'nouvelle critique' have now been unproblematically absorbed into mainstream criticism regardless of the ideological framework to which they were assimilated. The term 'nouvelle critique' had in fact come to cover two different practices, inspired by humanist and anti-humanist principles, and Barthes' name was significantly associated with both trends, illustrated respectively by his thematic study of *Michelet* and his articles in praise of Robbe-Grillet's 'new novels', while his essay on 'Racinian Man' (in *On Racine*) partakes of

both approaches, in practice if not theory, since he clearly identifies with some of the characters.

The authorized version of Barthes' career will therefore be treated here as one of those good, 'pregnant' stories studied by the structuralist analysis of narrative, one, let us note, where the author's intention, normally shunned by the critics who propagate it, is mysteriously no longer held to be irrelevant. And this intention is often shaped by the logic Barthes himself described in his 'Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives' (in *Challenge*) as being that of traditional verisimilitude, characterized as 'Post hoc ergo propter hoc': a spurious sense of necessity is conferred *a posteriori* on statements which sometimes had for Barthes a simple tactical value. Yet, as he and other theorists often said at the time about some textual theories which were difficult to apply to actual texts past, present or future, the impossible is not the inconceivable (see, for example, C. Chabrol, preface to *Sémiotique narrative et textuelle*) and what can only be called theoretical romances became at that time a veritable genre. The one which Barthes evolved in the late sixties had a genuine performative value: it generated new forms as its referential correlate, and it lifted his spirits. These forms (for instance the systematic use of fragmented text) are less new to his work than is sometimes alleged, and his practical criticism was unaffected inasmuch as he simply added his new weapons to his existing arsenal, to the same incomparable effect of seemingly effortless originality. His masochistic assessment of his performance in this regard would therefore be incomprehensible if the engagingly smug tone did not give the game away: having achieved basic reassurance about his status as a writer, Barthes is gilding the lily by castigating himself for exhibiting all the disreputable traits traditionally associated with the man of letters as opposed to the scientist or scholar.⁵ Despite his growing fame, he often stated that he exerted no power; yet the apparently amusing conceit of having him review a book on himself by himself and which he had himself suggested to his publisher evokes the tautology and 'mastery' unconsciously implied by the editor's title: 'Barthes to the third power' (1975). A 'cortège' of friends and seminar members was needed to supply a sociological and ideological buffer, what his colleague Edgar Morin called a 'catholicity' ('Le retrouvé') while he

⁵ See Lavers, *Barthes*, chapter 15, on this tactic. On the subject of Barthes' practical criticism, let us note that articles collected in *New Critical Essays* and written between 1961 and 1971 are not perceptibly different from later ones on Proust (1979) or Stendhal (1980), and that 'Sade I' (1967) is as valid as 'Sade II' (1971) in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*: what matters is the constant invention of new angles of attack. On the passions aroused by theoretical debates, see Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, p. 10. On the turn of the screw applied by the media in intellectual life, see R. Debray, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France* and H. Hamon and P. Rotman, *Les intellocrates*. See also note 15 on the 'new philosophy'.

shifted his position as enunciative subject from modest critic anxious to respect deontological rules and pleading to be recognized as a writer, to self-assured reader challenging texts to come and please him, that is, stimulate in him the writing urge. Inevitably, this entourage ended up being rather oppressive, as appears in *Barthes* or 'Soirées de Paris' (in *Incidents*), and this gives his chronicler greater licence to intervene. Even if the claim, on the part of epigones, to hear the 'rustle of language' or the 'grating of codes' is an example of the magical appropriation which drives so many of them to actual pastiche, it cannot be bad if Barthes now stands as a symbol of freedom even if he was in fact no libertarian. Meanwhile, the same tolerance should be shown to those whose 'ecstasy' comes from a search for truth, and who 'fall in research' as one falls in love.⁶ As Barthes himself put it: 'Any law which oppresses a discourse is inadequately warranted' (*Barthes*, p. 32).

Criticism and truth

Considering therefore that the authorized version of events does an injustice to other types of textual approach, that it weakens its own argument, and that it misrecognizes the madness and genuine innovation in Barthes' last works, the philosophy adopted here is that which he enunciated, just before the period in question, in *Criticism and Truth* (1966), his dignified answer to the rearguard attack from academe. There he analyzes three stances which can be adopted towards literary texts. The first, the science of literature (now called poetics) studies the general conditions of literary meaning; it is objective like all sciences, and works from a corpus of actual texts. Without his extensive knowledge of the literature on Racine, or his personal implication in rival interpretations of Robbe-Grillet, Barthes might not have been so sensitive to the undoubted fact that the same work can bear many interpretations, a realization which generated, around 1960, the theory of literature which he held to the end. This plurality of meanings does not spring from 'the tendency that society has to err' but from 'a disposition of the work towards openness' (p. 67); it is for Barthes the major character of the object of poetics, what the Russian Formalists called 'literariness', that which makes a discourse literary. The second stance, that of criticism, 'speaks' with particular meanings the general 'language' described by poetics, fills its empty and general forms. Finally, reading is the unmediated contact with a work and as such irreplaceable.

⁶ The comparison comes from William Cooper's *The Struggles of Alfred Woods* (London, 1952), p. 194, a Flaubertian portrayal of a mediocre hero as inspired scientist, which shows heuristic processes working as 'mysteriously' as poetic ones, unlike what one reads in many contemporary caricatures of science.

This working division of labour does not solve all problems; but what matters for the moment is that Barthes realizes that the critic's discourse can be productive only if it is a 'discourse which openly and at its peril adopts the intention of giving a particular meaning to a work' (p. 73).

This acceptance of the risk inherent in positive interpretation is all the more remarkable because Barthes, whose sense of historicity and negativity is equal to Sartre's or Brecht's, usually cannot help giving expression to a fundamental hope, whose strength can be deduced negatively from the constant emphasis on language in his work, be it the 'language' of poetics, the language in which the critic writes his interpretation, or the final act of writing which for him is the natural conclusion of the reading intimacy (p. 94). This is the hope of doing without language altogether, without representation or mediation of any kind. In *Mythologies*, the intellectual who can only 'speak about a tree' is seen to envy the woodcutter who, according to Barthes, 'speaks the tree' – uses the immediate language of action (pp. 145, 156, 158); in *Critical Essays*, he dreams about a literature 'à ciel ouvert' (open-cast), without hidden depths and therefore beyond a decipherment which rival interpreters or passing time will supersede (p. 241). We shall see how the hope of having achieved stability in mutability through a combinatorial rearrangement of his basic tenets is the source of creativity in his later works.

Barthes and writing

The lyricism and euphony of *Criticism and Truth* show that it represents one such moment of harmonious balance. For Barthes' writing practice, rarely studied to his chagrin,⁷ can play an important interpretive role. One can distinguish roughly three types of Barthesian discourse. The first exemplifies his outstanding pedagogic gift, his art of grasping the main issue, expressing it clearly, modulating the register to suit an inaugural lecture or a chat in a popular women's magazine, and producing endless unforgettable concrete examples from everyday life: the profanities of Hébert, which signal his revolutionary status, at the beginning of *Writing Degree Zero*; the various ways of saying 'Beware of the dog' which embody the division of social discourses (*Rustle*, p. 106) or the hardened and golden fried potato chip to which he compares the hapless writer when he is subjected to interpretation, to the boiling surge of the systematic and image-making languages of criticism, despite all his attempts to remain a

⁷ See among exceptions Lavers' articles in *Tel Quel* (1971) and *Critique* (1982), van Dijk, *Text-Grammars*, Bensmaïa, *Barthes Effect*, Wiseman, *Ecstasies*.

'matte' object foiling all such attempts at interpretation (*Rustle*, p. 355).

The second type of discourse is essentially polemical, and is characterized by what Bakhtin called hidden polemics, a sense that a dialogue is being conducted with unidentified adversaries. A ludic element is present there, but subordinated to advocacy. Thus Barthes, disenchanted with the univocal discourses of politics and science, punningly condemns them for being ruled by a Cause and thus inimical to his current ideal of a Text in a state of infinite expansion. A great display of differentiation often seeks to impose a notion either difficult to grasp or not immune to criticism: his plea for his trusty weapon, connotation, the supplementary meaning added to a first message, which he had illustrated in *Mythologies* and sought to establish analytically in *Elements of Semiology*, but whose linguistic status was still far from clear by the time he wished to use it again in *S/Z* is a case in point (*S/Z*, pp. 7–9). Many texts of the 1970s exhibit these features ('The semiological adventure', in the collection of the same name; 'From work to text', in *Rustle*, and Buffat's article, inspired by Barthes).

A third category of texts cannot be described as a type of discourse at all, and it is this kind which makes Barthes' place secure among the greatest exponents of the French language. Like his speech, which caused wonderment in his friends despite his having fixated all negative connotations on the oral mode in his late career, it mesmerizes by a conjunction of exquisite aptness and unpredictability. Less obviously formulaic than the other two, it truly makes one contemplate the 'mysteries' of style, which it would be pointless to pin down since the effects, although not inaccessible to analysis, are endlessly varied and draw on all the planes of language and content at once. What is certain is that this type of text, whatever its ostensible subject, is invariably involved with Barthes' deepest concerns. The relaxed evocations of a utopian Japan in *The Empire of Signs*, the incantatory lyricism on abstract topics (style and poetry in *Writing Degree Zero*, the desire to write in the preface of *Critical Essays*), the descriptions of thematic 'substances' in *Michelet* or *Mythologies*, and above all, sublimely, the restrained lament over loss and oblivion in his article 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure', in parts of 'Délibération', and of *A Lover's Discourse*, 'Soirées de Paris' and *Camera Lucida*: it is Barthes' handling of language in passages such as these which early on gave authority to all his pronouncements, underwriting theories propounded in other texts, and whose grounding sometimes seemed obscure even to well-wishers like his *Tel Quel* friends. Whether it could play the same part for Barthes himself takes us to the heart of his theories.

Writing in society

Lévi-Strauss suggested, for a study of myth, a distinction between *armature*, a set of properties which are invariants in a corpus of myths; *code*, a system of functions assigned in each myth to these properties; and *message*, the content of an individual myth. We may apply this to Barthes' career. The *armature* is a matrix consisting of both his central intuition about the nature of social signs and his instinctive response, which is complex but fundamentally suited to this one project. Social signs, as we saw, involve an essential duality, even duplicity; recognition and alienation are intricately intertwined in them. Barthes' response to the coercive potential of this situation is accordingly ambiguous, and his ambivalence marks the triple activity it involves: a typology of discursive strategies (and soon a search for a discursive absolute weapon), a theory of creative language and a philosophy of literary studies, all contained within a speculation about various types of good society.

The *codes* are the system of positive or negative values attributed to these basic elements, which determine Barthes' attitudes (and cause much confusion when terms like *writing*, *style*, *speech* or *meaning* radically change their connotation depending on context and period). There are essentially two codes, each pervaded with ambivalence, centring around solitude and sociality. The *messages* are the individual works, infinitely varied in form and content, yet informed by these constants which supply a sense of tension, of orientation towards the fulfilment of psychological and strategic needs.

Barthes' search for the rationale of creativity is experienced from the start as problematic because it has to operate within the harsh conditions he finds at his point in history: social alienation on the one hand, and on the other, the scorched-earth policy of modernity, which makes originality both mandatory and 'unmentionable'⁸. Why unmentionable, since one has to mention this indispensable word all the time, as is demonstrated in the deeply personal preface to *Critical Essays*? The answer lies in the Marxist hegemony which existed when Barthes started to write. It had taken over from Christianity the injunction of placing the collective above the individual and this injunction had been further sharpened in the ideological model of *Writing Degree Zero*, Sartre's *What is Literature?* The latter essay presents the writer, whose condition is perforce bourgeois, living for a long time on a euphoric image of himself as progressive spokesman for

⁸ 'inavouable', which could also be translated as 'unspeakable'. All references to originality are couched as denials. Thus the famous distinction *lisible/scriptible*, in *S/Z*, belongs to a paradigm, which includes other notions derived from linguistics like 'acceptable' or 'receivable'. See below, p. 161.

the whole of humanity. This image was valid in the Enlightenment but became much less so during the course of the nineteenth century, when a series of failed revolutions in France demonstrated that the bourgeoisie, victorious since 1789, did not intend to spread its liberation to inferior classes, despite its universalist ideology. The 1848 revolution, in particular, marked a divide after which it became impossible for writers to ignore the choice offered to them: either to throw in their lot with the people, or distract themselves from this possibility by all manner of interesting but alienated strategies. Formal experiment is marked from the start by this fundamental guilt.

The view of the proletariat Barthes holds from beginning to end makes the prospect of a literature committed to its defence particularly dire: he sees it as devoid of any autonomous 'culture, art or morality' (*Mythologies*, p. 139). The bourgeoisie, oppressive economically and politically, is none the less the only artistically progressive class, and this is the cross progressive artists must bear. This view, startling in France, let alone in Britain, where nostalgic evocations of an independent working class culture are almost a genre, was no doubt suggested by the depressingly inferior communist novelists of the 1950s. When Barthes, who initially spoke with the voice of the uprooted, guilt-ridden intellectual, felt free, at a moment which coincides with his supposed 'mutation', to return to his bourgeois roots – or perhaps to affirm them, since he gives (in 'Réponses', which is more outspoken than *Barthes*) what is clearly a censored picture of an ambiguous social position – he retrospectively changed the target of his social criticism. The stylish and convincing *Mythologies* reviews all aspects of bourgeois life, its electoral strategies, colonial propaganda, films, advertising, sporting events, etc, as so many fables with the same lesson. In each of these social manifestations, the cultural, historical meaning of an object, institution, medium or event disappears and is replaced by a spuriously natural one, a pseudo-physis. The man-made character of society is presented as a God-given Nature, and this transmogrification is so pervasive and so subtle in its technical aspects that deconstructing it is a full-time occupation even for a dedicated semiologist, who is besides hampered by his anxiety at the idea of cutting himself off from the mass of the public. In what became the foundation of modern semiology, Barthes analyzed the whole process as the generating of an infinite number of messages sent through every possible medium (words, pictures, gestures, etc) from the same code, which he described as a double-layered structure. The original meaning of any communication (that of a text, a photograph, a film, a cooking recipe), is taken as a signifier, to which the same invariable signified, a dehistoricized and depoliticized version of its historical significance, is now added. Yet this double-layered structure can permit at will, and depending on

the conservative purpose of the moment, a tactical semanticization or renaturalization.

In *Mythologies*, the petite-bourgeoisie, like the communist writers who still practise the derided, over-wrought writing of naturalism, had been shown to be vainly running after the social and literary trend-setters who had built-in this double structure in the ideological superstructure as well as the economic base. In the texts of the early seventies, including a new preface to *Mythologies*, this unstable and alienated class has implausibly become responsible for the clogging-up of the social imaginary with stereotypes, and the bourgeois writer is shown as literally defending with the intractable originality of his body the right to a living artistic unconscious. In *Writing Degree Zero*, bourgeois writing was shown as helplessly reified, cut off from meaningful universality by the gaze of all those who don't speak that kind of language; after 1970, the proletariat is just mute, although this unnerving feature can give it the role of psychoanalyst, or at least unconscious of the intellectual (as in 'Réponses'). Later still, when the ideological picture became very confused, and probably because, under Foucault's influence, Nietzsche had become practically the only intellectual figure head left standing, we even find Barthes using an alarmingly feudal vocabulary, speaking of race, aristocratic readers and of being more a Ghibelline ruled by personal loyalty than a Guelf ruled by ideas, laws and codes (*Rustle*, p. 357).

Classical and modern

Whatever is thought of these reactions politically, they show that Barthes, when he reflected on the good society, used from the start a very original 'principle of relevance', based on the representation and use of signs in a given culture. It may well have influenced Foucault in *The Order of Things*, since the periodization he uses coincides with that which Barthes had first proposed in *Writing Degree Zero*. In that book, he selects as a classifying tool the presence or absence of a clear linguistic and rhetorical code or an ideal of permanent artistic revolution. The two types of society thus identified are called by him classical and modern, a neologism since classical society henceforth means for him 'the whole era of classic capitalism from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century' (*Essays*, p. 143). Classicism and modernity embody respectively conviviality and innovation, but can be connoted positively or negatively. To his evocations, in *Writing Degree Zero*, of two kinds of poetry, either coded or shatteringly creative, corresponds the description, in his later *Pleasure of the Text*, of a reader's two possible responses: either socialized, cultural, self-unifying 'pleasure', or disconcerting, self-dispersing 'ecstasy'. But (not too paradoxically since the title gives us the proper emphasis) the earlier work is more pervaded

with the dread and wonder of the unmediated contact with nature, and the later one fundamentally concerned with a reader's relaxed enjoyment of texts both ancient and modern, even if that pleasure can be modulated according to a general strategy of social communication.

Thanks to a heavily value-laden language, we see how for Barthes each type of communication, that of classicism and that of modern writing, has its own attraction but generates its own fears. Classicism is dominated by the desire for communication and the belief that it is possible; but being thus 'given over to a permanent intention to persuade' (*Writing Degree Zero*, p. 64), it tends to tolerate stereotypes for the sake of clarity in codes, and stereotypes kill in artistic terms. Modern poetry, on the contrary, is described as a 'discourse full of gaps and full of lights'; it is a language unmediated by rhetorical codes, dominated by a 'hunger for the Word', seen as a 'sign erect' because it stands 'vertically', big with all its lexical possibilities and independent from 'horizontal' semantic and grammatical links (*Writing Degree Zero*, pp. 43ff). This richness of the sign, however, also means indeterminacy, and thus poetry rapidly evokes all Barthes' ambivalence, being no longer appreciated for its 'freshness' but rather feared like a phallic mother, 'a rather terrible Imago of Literature' (*Essays*, p. 189).

Literature as language

This perspective on literature is easily understood if we examine the writer's situation for Barthes. In doing so, we can admire the efficacy of his didactic approach, even when, later in his career, he proposes distinctions which are meant to allow for unpredictable personal reactions: the 'readable' or 'writeable' texts in *S/Z* (p. 4), the 'third meaning' he sees in filmic stills (*Responsibility*, p. 41), or in the 'studium' and 'punctum' of photographs, which denote respectively a general cultural interest and what sometimes gives them an intense personal appeal for a given individual (*Camera*, pp. 26–7). This intrepid cutting of Gordian knots and provision of guidelines made Barthes particularly appreciative of Saussure's founding gesture when he isolated from the 'multiform and heterogeneous' reality of language a social object which he called 'langue' and, despite all objections one can make to this ruthless elimination of other aspects worthy of study, thereby at least gave linguistics a foundation. Barthes was to imitate this gesture twice, once when he extended it to all concrete aspects of social communication (food, clothing, cars, etc) in *Elements of Semiology*, and again in his 'Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives'.

When he began to write, the phenomenological model exemplified by Sartre (for instance in his book on 'the imaginary' (*The Psychology*

of *Imagination*) to which *Camera Lucida* is dedicated) helped Barthes to identify some starting points. Although Sartre also was chary of science and had embraced phenomenology partly to by-pass it, it purported to establish essences (Barthes signals these with numerous capitals) which in practice functioned as scientific postulates. And the essences Barthes described at the outset constitute a world as claustrophobic as might be expected from his inordinate search for a space for freedom.

The two main concepts he started with are those of language and style. Language (*langue*) comes from linguistics; his acquaintance with that discipline went back to the early fifties and his meeting with Greimas, a major figure in the modern study of semantics and the structural analysis of narrative. That of style was more traditional in literary studies but is given a new slant. Language and speech are conceived by Barthes as very constrictive realities, and as being oriented to horizontal and vertical axes. The language is a social horizon within which the writer has to stay if he is to communicate. The style is defined by Barthes as 'a vertical and lonely dimension of thought' (*Writing Degree Zero*, p. 17), a biological 'substance', an intimate reality which, far from expressing a person's desires as historically constructed, albeit on the basis of innate drives, can never be socialized. These axes serve as a fundamental shorthand in Barthes, who always endows them with values identified with freedom and constraint. These, however, can be switched, especially when they merge with two other couples coming from linguistics and semiology: paradigm and syntagm, the axis of selection and that of combination, and later, following an epoch-making article by Jakobson on two types of aphasia affecting the ability to handle vocabulary and syntax, the rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy.

The language and the style are two necessities, two 'natures'. The content is never allowed in Barthes to reach the reader through its own logic (he dismisses Michelet's 'thought' at a stroke of the pen), probably by virtue of the assertion, found from the start and never supported, that there is no thought without language.⁹ The first, spontaneous expression of thought is moreover for Barthes always banal. The only hope of reaching the reader is through a verbal effort which will convey this intention as well as, one hopes, the actual content (preface to *Essays*): in the eroticized vocabulary of his late period, this will be described as 'cruising'.

One can only wonder where verbal innovation (for the writer, since the common user, for Barthes, is never creative) can come from. There is no theory about this at all in his pre-structuralist period; one has to wait until his *Elements of Semiology* to find a suggestion about it, namely

⁹ See on the contrary Weiskrantz, *Thought Without Language*, especially on the distinction between 'thought' and 'thinking'.

a theory of transgression of potentially all the parameters of language, no doubt inspired by Jakobson's definition of poetry. For Barthes is far more concerned, at the start, with aspects of language which would be today put under the heading of pragmatics, the study of assumptions and all facets of language in use which affect interpersonal relations. Thus *Writing Degree Zero* derives its title from a practical aspect of the writer's calling, a new concept of freedom which Barthes, in good existentialist fashion, sees as commitment, in the brief and almost ideal moment when the writer chooses one mode from the plurality of modes of writing which followed the break-up of classical society. This choice is the only scope left to 'the ethics of form'. Having deprived himself of any means of explaining how these modes of writing came into existence, Barthes is none the less a superlative, albeit tactical, critic when it comes to analyzing them and awarding praise and blame. Praise depends on artistic merit and (early on) political efficacy; but mostly on a profoundly Barthesian criterion.

Figures of distance

This criterion can be summed up in the word 'distance'. It is the common denominator of his efforts to promote certain modes of writing; to recast every problem attached to questions of content or reception in terms of form or even language; to establish a continuity between the critic's discourse and the writer's; to propagate and develop structuralism; and finally, to attempt to deconstruct it.

Having discounted both the traditional grand manner (which he admired in Lévi-Strauss, for instance, but deemed a non-starter as a writeable practice for himself) and its worthy naturalist successor; having also effectively removed poetry from among communicative modes, Barthes had briefly embodied his ideal of stylistic innocence in the 'degree zero' of the title. 'Degree zero' is a metaphorical use of a notion derived from the linguist Viggo Brøndal, that of a neutral state between subjunctive and imperative. It purported to recommend 'a style of absence which is also an absence of style', of the kind found in parts of Camus's *Outsider*. However, this is rather a philosopher's stone and cannot be trusted 'to maintain [its negativity] in time's flow', as observed in *Writing Degree Zero* (p. 11). The counterpart of Saussurean langue – speech (parole) – also appears in that book, as a promise of a transparent sociability, whose 'secrets are dispelled by its very duration' (p. 17); but literature's reliance on languages actually spoken in some of the sectors of society can only reflect its divisions when this society is alienated, as we see in Proust's work. Despite the example of Céline, Barthes moreover thinks that actual speech can only be a kind of aria caught in the recitative of traditional novelistic language, as appears in Sartre's fiction.

Yet a way might exist to reconcile the writing subject with membership of our modern culture, and one, furthermore, which also holds a promise of unity for Barthes, would-be writer and semiologist. The latter cannot hope to right the wrongs in today's myth-ridden society, only to expose its spurious naturalization, its pseudo-physis, and recommend an anti-physis which may preserve a space for future practices. In the same way, a writer like Flaubert embraces the unfortunate similarity between myth and literature (they both introduce a supplementary signified in a complete sign now reduced to the status of signifier) and turns it to his own advantage. By deliberately adding a new layer of significance which conveys his own quizzical view of his heroes, he produces a second-order, artificial myth which is at the same time a demystification both of its object and of its own activity. Literature here, as in Descartes' motto, points to its mask as it goes forward.

As the author's point of view and that of the characters can only be conveyed through linguistic signifiers, we have a first example of meaning production where both the discrete nature of the building blocks and their multi-layered arrangement announce larger studies of literary semantics, like the essay on 'History or Literature?' (*On Racine*) and *The Fashion System*. Fashion for Barthes is a good model for literature because it is ruled by 'infidelity', a notion which covers both originality and difference. In both, the noted is by definition the notable, and there is neither redundancy nor random element or 'noise' to dilute the components of the artistic effect. One may or may not agree with this idea, which results from Barthes' conception of language-artefacts as participating in the totally assertive nature of language, and does not admit, for instance, of readers' ability to evaluate some aspects of the work as more successful than others. But there is no doubt that the analysis of larger units of fashion discourse, with which he wrestled over six years (1957–63), made him grasp in a practical way how a reader 'creates' a work by compiling, that is, cutting and re-arranging (*Criticism*, p. 92).¹⁰ The 'mask' solution also shows the benefits of turning the process of semiosis into an explicit act, as Brecht had done. The self-aware, reflective nature of much contemporary art was highly suitable as ammunition for Barthes' fight against all forms of fixed meaning, identification, analogy, depth and authenticity in literature and criticism. But it is obvious in retrospect that these profound characteristics of his thought could also be retained, in a suitably prophylactic way, a second-order, 'distant' fashion, by a theory of literary statements as

¹⁰ In *Criticism and Truth*, Barthes enumerates the four distinct 'functions' associated with books in the Middle Ages, those of scriptor, compiler, commentator and auctor, and reproduces the passage as blurb for *S/Z*, thus underlining the continuity between the books.

second-order myths, just as Flaubert had thereby managed to have his novelistic cake and eat it. It is as if Barthes already felt that they would be needed, in a purified form, in his latest work.

This clearly applies if we follow his advice and behave as active readers with what is the perfect Barthesian text 'sans le savoir': *Critical Essays*. The articles which compose it correspond to the essentially fragmented nature of his work (this aspect was later to be denounced by Barthes in a mock-shamefaced way, yet entrusted with ensuring an 'exemption of meaning' thanks to the more or less faked alphabetical order to which fragments are subjected in his later works). The chronological order of *Critical Essays* over ten years (1953–63) functions as a plot, whose lack of denouement is highly revealing of the 'fantasmatic' investments in his theory and practice. We first see him in his persona as stern Marxist censor, whose *vis comica* makes it all the more redoubtable, and reformer of literary studies. We then see him trying to solve the problem of his status as subject of writing. This can be tackled in two ways: first, the promotion of all the contemporary novelists who had elaborated techniques which held the problem of the writing subject at bay, demystifying characters, dislocating plot, discrediting realism, making meaning problematic and involving the reader; and second, the exploration of means whereby intellectual intervention could achieve both rigour and the 'compromising' of the author.

Barthes' seminal articles on not only the work of the 'new novelists' but writers such as Brecht, Queneau, Bataille or Kafka, generated around 1960 a doctrine of literature which is enshrined in his most famous formulae. Based on the idea that writing, unlike speech, has no context, it asserts that the author is 'untraceable', cannot be located or characterized from his production, being as good as dead in that regard. This view, which ignores all considerations of pragmatics and what Genette called paratextual realities (*Seuils*), is naturally very convenient whenever Barthes wants to move on to new, and possibly contradictory, positions! The author is also redundant in his work inasmuch as language is for Barthes, as we have seen, inherently assertive, dogmatic, and even 'terroristic' (his new allies, the *Tel Quel* writers, who were well on the way to replacing the waning existentialist school, had to be coached on this particular point; see *Essays*, p. 278). Barthes, a competent linguist, is well aware of the phenomenon called modality, and in fact all his definitions of the writer, let alone his suggestions that he is one, are modalized statements. But in spite of this – or perhaps because this is the subject nearest to his heart – he never grants to the qualifier the same force as the original statement, seeing it instead as an ineffectual prosthesis. Besides, his studies of fashion have shown – like the 'new history' of the Annales school, some members of which offered him an academic refuge – that

forms have an endogenous history, impervious to the subject's intervention or interpretation; this reinforces the writer's inclination to remain above the day-to-day fights supported by the existentialist or Marxist scriptors, and to shun their univocal, transitive language.¹¹

Of the writer's twin myths, which up till then had equally inspired Barthes, Orpheus and Prometheus, the former alone will now be retained. Literature is henceforth, for him, that God whose punning motto is 'Je déçois' – I deceive and disappoint – since it is seen as a technique for imposing any meaning on a strong empty structure. Literature is means, without cause or end; it is like Ashby's homeostat, a cybernetic model illustrating an 'ultrastable' system, homeostatically controlled and in addition capable of learning from circumstances; and whatever the truth about literature, such a description perfectly fits Barthes' 'ultrastable' theory of it from then on. There is no full 'exemption of meaning', since the work needs a thematic element to stage its own destruction, but the writer 'can bring to light only signs without signifieds' and certainly not a 'sovereign signified', an ultimate meaning which would silence the work (*Essays*, p. 135).

This conception, which obviously foreshadows Derrida, was psychologically necessary for Barthes yet coexists with another, which consists in welcoming a multiplicity of interpretations. In *On Racine* he had tried, in a synthesizing gesture found throughout in his work, from 'Myth Today' to *S/Z*, to conflate what he considered the 'deepest', that is the most serious, contemporary interpretations: those of psychoanalysis (Mauron), of Marxism (Goldmann), of anthropology (Freud's notion of the primal horde) and of budding linguistic structuralism, as we shall see. He had also reflected on possible hierarchies between rival theories, and tried to puzzle out possible links between world and text but lost interest in these connected problems (which in the same period also exercised Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and Althusser with his concept of a 'structure in dominance') when he settled – not without hesitation – for a conception of literature as fundamentally anti-mimetic.

There may have been another reason which determined this rupture with one side of his inspiration. A book by Bruce Morrissette, *Les romans de Robbe-Grillet* (1963), showing an Oedipal framework in this

¹¹ Barthes spoke as he wrote, as confirmed by Morin, yet in late career projected all negative connotations of language on the oral mode. Typically diffident definitions of the writer and of Barthes' own status include: 'He is a writer, who wants to be one' (*Essays*, p. 146), for whom writing is 'an intention' (*Criticism*, p. 64) or even 'a pretention' (*Essays*, p. xii) to be so; 'for whom language is a problem, who experiences its depth, not its instrumentality or its beauty' (*Criticism*, p. 64). Barthes also writes: 'A writer, assuming I am one . . .' (*Lover*, p. 98), and the subtle 'Were I a writer, and dead . . .' (*Sade*, p. 9), which contains its own denial. See, on such aspects, Whiteside and Issacharoff, *On Referring in Literature*.

arch anti-novelist, was unsettling, inasmuch as Barthes had boldly projected himself, as creative reader, into Robbe-Grillet's work. Robbe-Grillet looked a safe exemplar to identify with because of his ostensible anti-humanism but Morrisette had also linked a novelist's inspiration to his erotic status. If the Freudian plot was shown to have overdetermined his formalism, Barthes could feel implicated as well. This forged a link which was missing from his earlier analyses of fiction. From then on, all plots were interpreted by him as versions of the Freudian story or at least of the hermeneutic tension it generates. For instance, Barthes praises Guyotat's *Eden, Eden, Eden* for being a book 'containing no longer any Story or Sin (it is probably the same thing)' (my translation; see *Rustle*, p. 236). We shall see how his structuralist study of narrative later bolstered this idea by seeming to support the idea that narrative, the grammatical sentence and the Oedipus complex were 'invented' by the child at the same age (*Challenge*, p. 135). Meanwhile, his doctrine of literature acquired extra value as a means of preserving a space where personal as well as social problems could perhaps one day be faced; it taught, in short, that in the individual as well as the collective field, literature 'does not permit one to walk, but it permits one to breathe' (*Essays*, p. 267).

Fortunately, the advent of structuralism came at the right moment to revive Barthes' flagging optimism. It appeared above all as a theory of distance and mediation. In it, 'language is both a problem and a model' (*Essays*, p. 274), and he felt the desire and ability to be a major participant. Two articles collected in *Critical Essays*, 'The Imagination of the sign' and 'Structuralist activity', define this moment of equilibrium, and the same buoyant mood pervades the second part of the book. Yet, despite the intense activity which resulted in the writing of *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes made a point of stressing the unresolved character of his thinking in the preface of *Critical Essays* which, together with *Criticism and Truth*, is of major importance for a knowledge of him and his later work. There, the distance which he has made the prerequisite of the writer's status cannot be secured except through the very misrecognition which gives the critic distinct social existence. Since his calling involves speaking in his own name, since he is 'unwilling or unable' to achieve the distance which speech in the third person produces in the novel, his only salvation lies in intimating that his pronouncements are in fact 'the material of a secret work' (*Essays*, p. xxi). This proposition, which would certainly today seem acceptable about Maurice Blanchot's criticism, for instance, nevertheless defeats its own purpose when it comes to establishing the critic's equality with the writer, as Barthes notes, since it reduces the distance which makes the writer untraceable; the book therefore ends with this contradiction: the critic 'is condemned to error – to truth'.

Writing as a mode of Eros

Barthes was indeed unable as much as unwilling to achieve self-expression: hence the anathema on self and expression. And it is true that the traditional conception of a 'full' self conveyed by an independent and 'full' language had to be denounced, and replaced by a more dialectical view of subject and speech as mutually constructed agencies. But this theoretical need, met in part in the late 1960s by the work of Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva, could not fill the void Barthes mentions in his autobiographical essay when he evokes 'the inner emotion cut off from all expression' in his childhood (*Barthes*, pp. 22 and 86). Posthumous texts in *Incidents* have, so to speak, committed him in spite of himself; his *Barthes* and his *Lover's Discourse* are instead marked above all by their oblique evocation of his sexual tastes, and his long march towards the novel is therefore unusually implicated in the erotic sub-text discernible in works such as *Critical Essays* or even structuralist articles like his 'Introduction to the study of narratives' or his text on the Caravagesque woman painter Artemisia Gentileschi ('Deux femmes').

This sub-text is linked to the theme of aphasia or agraphia which pervades the whole of his work and determines his contradictory attitudes towards rhetoric. Supremely gifted in two of its aspects, 'dispositio' and 'elocutio', he was obsessed by the perils of 'inventio'. This fear made him literally unable to understand the liberating value of surrealism, happenings or other forms resurrected in 1968, a period he spent praising the strict codes found in Sade. This is because surrealism is seen by him as a technique of immediation, and mediation is said to facilitate discourse. Since Barthes' readers are never under the impression that he is on the point of drying up, this sense of impending aphasia can only come from the discrepancy between his awareness of his writing persona and his aspirations to novel-writing as 'a dawn, the original form of wanting-to-write' (*Essays*, p. xx).

On the other hand, the hybrid status Barthes had in his own eyes helped to shed light on truths normally shunned by the narrow truth of positivists. For him, Michelet's naive exhibiting of his sexuality in books on history or nature, his novelistic treatment of a figure like the witch, are 'quite different from a mere romantic expansion of subjectivity'; they aim 'magically to partake of the myth without ceasing from describing him' so that 'the narrative is both narration and experience, and its function is to compromise the historian' (*Essays*, p. 111). In so doing, Michelet prefigured the modern approach: his subjective, fictional treatment of the witch led him to grasp her objective status in myth as it is now studied by structural anthropology. Barthes is all the more encouraged by this functional role given to subjectivity since he believes that Michelet's

sexuality, as described by him, is not unlike his own as described in his *Lover's Discourse*: 'sublimated but in such a way that sublimation becomes itself erotic', eschewing the 'banal', 'ordinary' metaphor of penetration to the benefit of the 'utopia', the 'idyllic adventure' of an 'installation', 'a motionless penetration of bodies' (*Essays*, pp. 118–19). Barthes henceforth saw himself as an 'impure subject' of science (*Inaugural*) and in the figure of Michelet's witch of Lévi-Strauss' witch-doctor, included through his very exclusion in a society whose divided scientific and artistic discourses he both embodies and palliates.

Thus the speculations by himself and others in his last years about the possibility of his writing a novel presupposed the resolution of a problem encapsulated in Lacan's well-known saying: 'The patient at first either speaks to you or speaks about himself; when he can speak to you about himself, the treatment is finished.' Clearly, the possibility of writing a novel like Eco's *Name of the Rose* never was one of Barthes' preoccupations (and conversely, we see no desire on Eco's part to repudiate his status as exponent of semiology, a discipline which he, not Barthes, really put on the map for the general public). The novel he had in mind was modelled on Proust's, where despite notable uncertainties about the first person, the author is capable of a direct, authentic yet fictional expression. Let us note in this regard that Barthes' very ingenuity in his attempts to reconcile contradictions that long looked like antinomies both contributed to his fame and doubtless made his own work look like a Tantalus' feast in his own eyes. Devices like the constant invocations of the Lacanian 'Imaginary', in his late career, to keep all presumptions of committed speech at bay while giving free rein to a kind of self-revelation, or the injunction at the outset to read his *Barthes* as if it concerned a character in a novel are good examples of this ingenuity. But the more lavish the display, the more guaranteed the acclaim, the more unsatisfying it is as a solution of a basic problem (which is of course Barthes', not his reader's, who is only too pleased with the multiple views of the text and ways of reading devised), as is shown by the very persistence of his own urge to 'write' intransitively. It is evident in that sense that, whatever he intimated, he never achieved 'perversion' which, as he correctly stated, 'makes one, quite simply, happy' (*Barthes*, p. 64) by banishing a repression based on a scale of values in whatever domain.

From scientist to reader

Although the tripartite structure of poetics, criticism and reading proved useful, the very presence of reading, a silent 'discourse', was an element of instability, indicating that Barthes was restive at the very moment of negotiating the acceptability of his language. The constraints applied to

the critic were far too stringent. They were a literal transposition of the metaphor Barthes had used, that of the anamorphosis. An anamorphosis is a distorted projection of an object, so contrived that if viewed from a certain angle, the object appears correctly proportioned. Just as the draughtsman achieves this distortion through a systematic misuse of the laws of perspective, the critic had to transform the work under analysis through a consistent application of his own 'distorting' point of view, without 'forgetting' any details in the very general structure previously identified in the work by poetics.¹² The vocabulary Barthes uses there shows that he had in fact split the Chomskian model, which was reaching France at the time of *Criticism and Truth*; he had kept the generative part for poetics, and reduced criticism to the transformational aspect. When he began, under the influence of Kristeva, to doubt the Chomskian model, and besides to fear its concentration on the sentence, now identified for him with the Oedipal story, he integrated reading into criticism instead of coupling criticism with poetics. The *Pleasure of the Text* is in part the story of how he came to replace the syntactic model by a 'stereophony' of unattributed voices overheard in a café, making him a living text, and to ignore Oedipal conflicts to the benefit of pre-Oedipal semiotic impulses. He had been a dubious sender of messages; he now was an undoubted reader. Instead of the 'indifference' of science, he now had the pregnancy of desire, an infinitely rich silence from which anything could be born.

He had already stated that the meaning of any work is plural, and that this means not that it has one meaning for many men, but many meanings for one man. He added: 'We must read as one writes' (*Criticism*, p. 69). And readings can neither be disproved nor authenticated because the general symbolic code 'marks out volumes of meaning, not lines: it sets out ambiguities, not a meaning' (*Criticism*, p. 72). Eventually, therefore, this theory found its privileged application in one text (Balzac's *Sarrasine*). The difference between *Criticism and Truth* and *S/Z* is that in the earlier text Barthes still endorses his activity as compiler, having defined meaning as the 'cutting out of shapes'. This applies both to the fragmenting of a work for study and to the citation of contemporary discourse. In *S/Z*, his meticulous quoting of sources will give way to the Kristevian notion of intertext (derived from Bakhtin), with some very definite consequences, as will be seen.

His way of 'customizing' concepts, of which the change 'from work to text' is an example, ensured that every pronouncement showed signs of its author having been 'carried away' in the manner he professed later to miss in the practitioners of 'classical semiology'. The term 'carried away' had early on been used to refer to an experience of time which according

¹² Compare *S/Z*: 'It is because I forget that I read.' (p. 11).

to Barthes is peculiar to the writer who finds that, without maturation, a book like Proust's 'writes itself while seeking the Book'. The material text can therefore be considered inessential by him, 'and even, to some extent, inauthentic' (*Essays*, p. 11). This prepared him to propose the idea of the writeable text as ideal and immaterial, 'ourselves writing' (*S/Z*, p. 5), a 'volume' which is a metaphor of writing potential, evoking all the semantic and formal elements which are generated by the total mental structure, both material and historical, of the individual, and which later Kristeva called geno-text, as opposed to the visible and 'inessential' pheno-text. Barthes could also write that 'there are writers without books', whose language, body and practice produce the same effect because their desire for a certain end exceeds their concern for the present (*Sollers*, pp. 78 and 81).

Structuralist ideology

That Barthes was, even in the middle of his structuralist period, 'carried away' by what is, as he realizes, an 'eschatological' view of writing (*Sollers*, p. 7) is indubitable. He was speaking about himself without speaking to us. But he could also do the latter, even if, 'by a last silent ruse', he hoped to be heard even when expounding structuralist methodology. This gives a context to later pronouncements which traduced his former allies, although the same mitigating circumstances do not apply to those who parrot his description of this period as 'a euphoric dream of scientificity' ('Réponses', p. 97) without having experienced any dream, or evidenced any scientific productivity. But one can see what Barthes means. The ideology of linguistics which was in full cry during that period was of a kind which could exasperate. It represented as much truth as science can bear at a given moment, and was as a result wonderfully productive: no one who lived through that period can forget the excitement. But it was one-sided, often distorted in a simplistic way, and easy to exploit in a dogmatic quest for power. It is ironic that Barthes, for whom it was custom-built, came to feel threatened by it and to identify it with a cult of normality which even when liberally tolerant could only interpret invention as deviance.

Structuralists were both labouring under the weight of the phonological model and enjoying its benefits. Although genealogically minded and willing to trace their ancestry back to the Stoics and earlier, to Oriental cultures, they had essentially been inspired by the application to anthropology by Lévi-Strauss of Jakobsonian phonology. And the latter overdetermined Saussure's teaching, which, as well as being the fountain-head of modern linguistics, exhibited some specific individual traits, very much as Lacan in that same period overdetermined Freud's individual

preferences. Phonology had two advantages. It could be viewed as the hard scientific core of linguistics, and it offered a model of encouraging clarity, which could lend itself to fairly straightforward applications. Speech could be recorded on paper, unlike the mental components of semantics and the possibility of materialization loomed large (even a quarter of a century later some popularizations forget that signifiers are mental too, not to speak of the concepts which are our mediation to referents). Its binary principle, coming at the time of the first computers, seemed to hold a promise of unity in theories of Nature; this appealed to people like Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, who despite appearances are philosophical realists and physicalists. However, Barthes fairly quickly came to distrust its constrictive qualities, and miss the 'neuter' and 'complex' poles, all the more if one remembers his emotional investments in two pairs which are foregrounded in French: the two genders of sexual difference and the *tu/vous* alternative which modulates social exchanges according to needs for intimacy and distance (*Rustle*, p. 321; *Inaugural*, p. 460). Let us note in passing that structuralism miraculously satisfied these two desires. On the sociological level, the new groupings dedicated to the recent gospel (like the Centre d'Etudes des Communications de Masse and its review *Communications*, born at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in order to study mass culture) generated a gregariousness which suited Barthes, ever dependent on identifiable receivers for his message; while the contents of the doctrine involved a mediation between analyst and reality.

The structuralist theory of the sign also suited Barthes' ambivalence. The tenet of its arbitrary character kept life at a distance; but his belief that 'writers are on the side of Cratylus, not Hermogenes' (*Criticism*, p. 69) guaranteed a failure in rendering the real which ensures perpetual productivity (*Inaugural*, p. 465). As for the principle of synchrony, it was of major importance for Barthes. He experienced it as a liberation from the hegemony of 'History', the Marxist-existentialist myth which spread guilt over his first books. It could still be used by him after 1968 to ward off a wave of political dogmatism which left traces in the *Inaugural Lecture* and other texts. The spiritual disasters of so many Marxist regimes which had successively been invested in by intellectuals, the publication of Solzhenitsyen's *Gulag Archipelago* and the consequent emergence of the 'new philosophy' paved the way for the individualism of Barthes' later works. Marxism had for so long functioned as a general referent for intellectual discourse, however, that there were signs of it being missed as a code of intelligibility and an ethical lawgiver, leaving an empty place which Nietzsche could not quite fill.¹³

¹³ On *Tel Quel's* evolution, which closely parallels Barthes' see, for instance, Lavers, 'Logicus Sollers', 'Rejoycing on the left', and 'On wings of prophecy'.

The stress on synchrony was reinforced by the tenet of the primacy of *langue* and of its systematic character, which was greatly exaggerated by linguistic neophytes and underpinned Barthes' promotion of validity instead of truth. If the primacy of social *langue* could depress a Barthes anxious to avoid stereotypes, information theory, which at that time joined this synergistic cluster of doctrines, made originality mentionable again and consigned sociolects to the dustbin of entropy, chaos and death. The binary arrangement of *Elements of Semiology*, an outstanding achievement which is still the cornerstone of semiological research, invited the possibility of transgressions, and even suggested that these could be conceived, on the model of Jakobson's theory of poetry as the projection of the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic one, as absolutely basic to both language and literature, usage and creation. The resulting 'translinguistics', which would tackle any system of signs, whatever their substances and limits, 'images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex associations among them which form the content of ritual, conventions or public entertainment' (*Elements*, p. 9), none the less highlighted a paradox of semiology – that linguistics is both model and object. Besides, connotation and a concern for the speaking subject were two time-bombs which Barthes had already placed under the Saussurian notion of the closed sign before this became a stereotype of late sixties metaphysics.

For Saussure's theory was deficient in precisely the two sectors which generated the most important developments in structural and post-structural analysis, namely syntax and semantics; not to speak of the fast-developing sector of pragmatics, which casts doubts on the very notion of *langue*. Pragmatics keeps it only in conjunction with a study of those social positions which determine speech restrictions, even arguing that they should be placed at the centre, not the periphery, of a theory of discourse.

The central Saussurian tenet of the sign as a two-sided entity made up of a signifier and a signified and excluding the referent rapidly reveals its shortcomings for a semantic investigation, even if one follows the suggestion by Hjelmslev, one of Saussure's disciples and another founding father of semiology, of considering rather two planes of language, that of expression and that of content (see chapter 3). In addition to its practical merits, this notion has the advantage, as Greimas humorously pointed out, of recognising the existence of the content, which was then often fashionably denied, and thus permitting its study! This was duly rediscovered by Barthes in the course of his study of fashion language, despite the seductive game of cutting off a discrete and arbitrary unit from the world and defining it diacritically as pure difference without any positivity. He accordingly suggested the notion of sign-function, which

acknowledged the need for a neutral support for meaning in non-verbal systems; but by reducing his corpus from the working language of garments' description to a collection of fashion captions, redundant in relation to a drawing or photograph, he facilitated his return to the non-functional, 'assertive' language of literature. Besides, semantics itself has its ideology, inspired by the Peircian idea of the sign as incomplete and always requiring reference to an interpretant and suggesting the circularity of dictionary definitions.

Saussure himself had realised that language, as Hjelmslev put it later, functions as a system of signs, but is structured as a system of *figurae*, or minimal units of sound and sense. He had seen that although signs, and especially nouns, 'strike the mind', we communicate 'through groups of signs which are themselves signs' (*Course*, p. 123). This problem of semantics probably caused in him the procrastination and malaise which resulted both in his not publishing his *Course in General Linguistics*, and spending long hours trying to settle the question of whether some Latin poems had an anagrammatic structure which gave them a second meaning woven into the first. The publication of these *Anagrams* was one of the factors which precipitated a crisis of the sign which profoundly affected Barthes through the theories of Kristeva, herself inspired by Derrida's metaphysical exploration of sign structure. Derrida also had the merit, almost unique at the time, of selecting, among the problems at the interface of linguistics and psychoanalysis, questions of memory, which are of obvious importance but have been incomprehensibly neglected while a whole generation repeated trendy assertions about the existence of signifiers without signifieds.

Was Barthes a structuralist?

Barthes never disavowed his semiological work when applied to the joint analysis and demystification of social signs; but when we come to consider whether he ever was a structuralist in literary study, we have to define our terms. Let us first note yet another example of his ambivalence. Despite his being essentially a modernist (he consistently praises the self-conscious foregrounding of artistic labour and reader's participation in what Eco called the 'open work'), he never worships the modernist tenet of the indissolubility of form and content; rather, he characterizes them in a highly personal way which allows him to tackle many old problems from a new angle (in his essay on La Rochefoucauld, for instance – see *New Critical Essays*). He therefore does not object to the separate study of the narrative layer, that of the 'story' or 'fable', which became a major concern of structuralists in textual and filmic studies, and adopts in *S/Z* a mixed methodology whereby the unit of analysis, the connotation, is on the plane

of the signified, while the unit of exposition, which also has metaphorical value as a representation of the reading process and is for this reason called the *lexia*, is on the plane of the signifier. We can, however, expect different reactions from him to the various practices associated with literary structuralism, depending on whether he feels they cramp his freedom of action or on the contrary exemplify his inventiveness.

If we define literary structuralism as a more or less systematic attempt to explore literature by applying various linguistic notions, Barthes is undoubtedly one of the theorists whose work changed the face of literary studies almost overnight. Not only did he rigorously define the roles of philologist, historian, poetician and critic but he produced an abundance of concepts which brought an immense gain in precision. The 'reality effect', for instance, by which he explained the function of apparently plethoric details in realist literature as seeking to suggest a direct connection between signifier and referent, apparently by-passing a signified which is in fact the repository of realist ideology, is one of those concepts which have passed into daily use. Barthes always remained a structuralist in the sense that linguistic notions continued to mediate his reflection on the text of world and self to the end.

Another definition of literary structuralism is based on a Saussurian or Chomskian analogy whereby the work, or corpus of works, are considered as a system or code whose grammatical and rhetorical rules have to be discovered. We also find an abiding interest on Barthes' part in this approach, from his identification of a rhetoric ruling mythical speech in *Mythologies*, to his description of figures in the lover's discourse thirty years later, via his analysis of the Sadean code in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*.

Finally, a still more restricted definition of literary structuralism concerns only narrative. Let us remember, however, that Greimas and his school identified a narrative structure in all discourse, from cooking recipes to philosophical treatises: in all sequential descriptions of situational changes, since human beings tend to anthropomorphize the agents of such changes and indeed every object in the universe. The correctness of this intuition is proved negatively by Barthes' suspicions about discursivity in late career, which made him consider connected discourse as a dangerous give-away and made him promote a fragmented approach. Discourses can be analysed by semantic or syntactic models. The text can be seen as an expanded sememe, the meaning a word has in context, and be explored by an identification of its minimal sense units, or *semes*, and of their arrangements as isotopies or levels of coherence. Or one can postulate a homology between a text and a sentence, on the model adapted by Greimas from a suggestion by the linguist Tesnière, who compared the sentence to a miniature drama, and from work by both the folklorist Propp and the philosopher Souriau on basic combinations of the abstract figures

or actants which are the support of actions and underlie the psychological effects produced by characters (see above, chapter 5). Barthes' 'Racinian Man' had used such actants as linguistic items, first classifying them as paradigms then arranging them on various syntagmatic axes.

A few years later, his 'Introduction to the Structural Study of Narratives' shows his familiarity with this considerable corpus of research, many aspects of which feed the analyses of *S/Z*. His article was epoch-making but shows what must be a unique example of a theorist deconstructing his theses as he goes along because of his duality of aims. He states the methodological principle of a distinct narrative layer, yet presents the layer of discourse as indispensably integrative because he wishes to stress the role of language. He presents the building blocks of analysis, the 'cardinal functions' which articulate the narrative and the 'catalyzers' which speed up or spell out the different phases of these kernel actions as well as the 'indices' and 'informants' which deal with the semantic aspect of the content. Yet he cannot bring himself to deal with their indispensable correlates, the characters or at least the actants (which he had used in his article on Sollers' *Drame*, and even in 'Racinian Man') because of his fight against novelistic identification. As a result, the names he gives to the first two levels of his analysis, the 'functions' and 'actions', are tautological; the second level is evidently that of the agents (the actants and the characters or actors) who perform the functions or actions. Finally, the ending accomplishes the fateful confluence of narrative, sentence and human life, and is a veritable return of the repressed where Barthes' Oedipal preoccupations and the consequent intensification of his search for freedom are revealed as the cardinal functions of this particular *récit*.

It was inevitable that Barthes would attempt to split his abiding interest into 'good' and 'bad' aspects, and this is what we see in *S/Z*. The Oedipus story, which for him stops at castration, is the major concern of a code which he nevertheless calls 'symbolic', after Lacan, less because of its content than because its supposed escape from the arrow of time represents salvation for Barthes as individual and theorist. The irreversibility which he experiences as particularly threatening is confined to two other codes, those of actions and of enigmas, which are tactically depreciated.

Ironically, recent studies of character such as Hamon's owe a great deal to Barthes' earlier reflections on the problem. Characters are unique in being units both of the syntactic and the semantic planes; their study must therefore add to a syntactic actantial approach a semantic analysis which has to be carried out on planes of both content and expression from discontinuous signifiers, as indicated in 'History or Literature' or the *Fashion System*. In *S/Z*, characters are not even coded as such, despite their being freely mentioned and being in that sense actants not only

in Balzac's story but in Barthes' book (whose plot is the deconstruction of both traditional and structuralist analysis of fiction). They are coded only through the semes (semantic features) they have in common with the setting for instance, and through the discreet acknowledgement, in the summing-up at the end, that the semic code is the 'Voice of the person'. But Barthes' late article on the representation by Artemisia Gentileschi of Judith's killing of Holofernes shows how the semes can provide a backdoor to the analysis of a theme as riveting as a decapitation made to look like a castration. And his mention, in 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure . . .', of his feelings on reading about Tolstoi's Bolkonski and his daughter Marie when death is approaching (*Rustle*, pp. 286 and 288 – but the passage is expurgated in translation) is a moving denial of so much repression of the character, the incomparable operator of fantasies, whose ostracism in today's theory is understandable in the light of its absurd hero-worship in the past, but may well look perverse in its intensity to future ages.

Characters could be expected to be casualties in *S/Z*, a book which has acquired mythical status in some milieux by being presented as an absolute beginning and, together with the collection of essays which make up *Sade*, *Fourier*, *Loyola*, as an example of a radically new practice, of literature being the true science of literature. There is some evidence to show that such a radical break was not in Barthes' mind: the blurb presents the book as a contribution to both 'the structural analysis of narrative' and 'the science of the text'. The latter expression would today sound like an oxymoron, since Barthes elsewhere eschewed a definition of the text just as he had avoided a definition of the signifier in order to avoid its capture by the signified, 'its enemy', asserting that it is enough simply to use it ('Digressions', in *Bruissement*, p. 90 – omitted in *Rustle*). The avoidance here takes the form of ignoring the possibility of an overall syntactic model; this explains the strange inclusion of Propp, the Saussure of narratology, along with Derrida, Kristeva, Benveniste, Foucault and other theorists in the list he gives of the influences which made him aware of the dangers of such a normative idea: Propp represented the danger; they, the defensive weapons (*Challenge*, p. 6).

The book constitutes a striking gesture, by nature unrepeatable, the storming of a Bastille which is the hierarchy of languages in society. The fact that Barthes' credentials as a writer may ultimately rest on other books or that it can be used as just another source of weaponry for the academic panoply does not alter this initial significance. The idea of publishing *in extenso* an analysis of a whole text – Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* – mixing the critic's discourse with the writer's and suggesting by the choice of units and the plurality of their codes a new reading stance, alert to *signifiance*, 'a kind of infinite intersense which stretches between

language and the world' (*Grain*, pp. 73–4), does position the work in a site which cannot be recuperated as a simple new idiom for commentaries. There are problems, however, both for Barthes and his reader.

One is the character of the five codes he chose, which seem to cover most of the questions one expects to be dealt with in literary theory. Other essays by him, on the Bible or Poe's 'Mr Valdemar', do use other codes, but they are chosen, this time, in such an unrepresentative way that they would under another pen look like sabotage. The codes are in *S/Z* listed in an order which is clearly a hierarchy: a code for actions (based on Bremond's logical model of a sequence of alternatives, which Barthes prefers to less obviously dramatic ones), a code for suspense (the hermeneutic code), a code of semes (which, although called 'voice of the person', is in fact dispersed over 'characters, atmospheres, figures, symbols'), a code of cultural references (which gathers all the opinions Barthes does not hold) and a symbolic code or field (which gathers all the opinions Barthes does hold). My gloss on the last two is hardly ironic: there are indeed two world views here, two intertexts. One is the bourgeois doxa made up of all the stereotypes, of both content and form, which make Balzac such a happy hunting ground for the mythologist; the other is the synthesis of economics, psychoanalysis and literary theory with which, as we have seen, Barthes is anxious to underpin all his works at different times in his career, and which was already a common triadic framework and is the 'vraisemblable' of our time.¹⁴

The book is also meant to demonstrate the irrecoverability of author from text. One might argue that the derogatory treatment of *Sarrasine* despite admiration for its 'symbolic extravagance' comes from Barthes' knowledge that he is dealing with Balzac; certainly, his own voice is readily heard, if only when we recognize aspects and opinions also found in other works by him (for instance *A Lover's Discourse*), quite a few of which do not, whatever he says, come from other books. Indeed, this tenet contradicts the idea that, unlike what happened in *Criticism and Truth*, this is one reader's reading, the structuration due to the 'knife of value', which cares little for academic exhaustiveness, or even interlocution, and makes meaning ceaselessly by forgetting. The knife of value is naturally guided by Barthes' exacerbated sense of historicity, and the *lisible/scriptible* distinction expresses above all an artistic deontology which recognizes originality as the only value. Here, the point in history matters more than any content; what could be done in earlier, more naive times, can no longer be done

¹⁴ This triad had by then become the very rationality of our time. It supplies the framework of Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966), of F. Wahl, *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* (1968), of D. Hollier, *Panorama des sciences humaines* (1973) – and of course of Barthes' 'Myth Today' and *On Racine* twenty years earlier.

– in certain circles, at least, since Barthes at the end was visibly chafing under restrictions which often were a sign of his own success as theorist. Yet social repercussions cannot be shrugged off, since he always stuck by the scheme outlined in *Writing Degree Zero*, whereby a mode of writing an author finds acceptable commits him as someone who believes this particular practice can alter the status quo. A translation as ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ invests such notions, which are essentially labile, with a content, thus committing the critic to speechlessness when tackling other periods in Barthes’ output. Are we to deny a ‘writerly’ quality to *Mythologies*, ‘Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure’ or *Camera Lucida*, which are supreme examples of writing yet unlike what some theorists now routinely mean by that term?

Is *S/Z* an example of the ‘writerly’ in this new sense, the reversible text with 1,000 entries which was the object of Barthes’ desire at that time? Are the very extensive devices for controlling the text (typography, ninety-three short, theoretical chapters interspersed with the commentary, recapitulations and paraphrases at the end, redefinitions of problems) the results of practical considerations (since the book was meant for the general public) or to his eternal didactic urge? No one will complain about being given the choice of two models for reading, the polyphony of anonymous voices and their ‘immense fading’ transgressing and subverting the logico-temporal order, or Barthes’ horrified fascination with the arrow of time which rules the code of actions and that of enigmas, because they lead to the very subjects which constitute the ‘symbolic field’: class, creation and sex, which it suits him at this stage to view as disseminated by a ‘pandemic’ castration. If the 1,000 entries he wishes to give the text are limited by the strong intellectual framework chosen, so is his desire to achieve a reversibility which for him is that of dreams as ‘anti-nature’ ignoring logico-temporal restraints (*Challenge* p. 147). Subversive modern texts embodying this principle certainly exist, but they are neither *Sarrasine* nor *S/Z*, where the narrative pull is quite strong, nor the works of Sade, where powerful libertines occasionally indulge in masochistic reversals but are careful to conserve the two main privileges, that of speaking, and that of killing.¹⁵

¹⁵ In the English-speaking world, ‘poststructuralism’ refers not to what happened after structuralism but to a precise doctrine in literary studies (whose relations with another called ‘deconstruction’ and the ‘postmodern’ approach in culture and cultural studies must be carefully defined). In France, what came after structuralism was the ‘new philosophy’, whose stress on style, uninhibited use of the first person in philosophy and denunciation of the collective approach associated with the human sciences, and finally virulent anticommunism were welcomed by Barthes. See his letter to Bernard-Henri Lévy in Bouscasse and Bourgeois (1978), and also Aubral and Delcourt

Reversible/irreversible

The general disorganization of codes to which *S/Z* contributes according to Barthes, is often presented by him as a contribution to a political task whose immensity owes something to Derrida's appeals for the dismantling of Western metaphysics, which cannot however be destroyed, only deconstructed. Barthes, who thinks that 'the signifieds pass, the signifiers remain' (*Challenge*, p. 197) – actually, one of the hardest tasks of each generation is to redefine its signifiers – therefore presents this deconstructive programme in terms of extreme radicalism. He had partly contributed to it, in his estimation, in his *Empire of Signs*, although this one-sided, if charming, picture of Japan will hardly seem to the reader capable of bearing the awesome responsibility of 'splitting the very system of meaning' in the West (*Challenge*, p. 8). Japan is an index of utopian thinking, as is apparent in a passage where Barthes dreams of a discourse not only minimizing the lacunae of one language, as Mallarmé had observed of poetic speech, but drawing on the resources conjured up by writing practice in any and all languages in order to transcend their lacunae (*Sollers*, p. 63). For Barthes, needless to say, this negativity at the heart of langue, which is the root of discursive inventiveness, chiefly concerns the relation of the subject to his own utterance. He praises in this respect the Japanese language where the subject is not 'the all-powerful agent of the discourse' but rather 'a great stubborn space enveloping the statement and moving along with it' (*Sollers*, p. 45). Many readers will observe that the Japanese language is not essential to the argument and that this is exactly what Barthes did all his life in excellent French! What matters more is that Japan put him 'in a writing situation' and that as a result his book consists in 'happy mythologies'; it enshrines the luminous aspect of the 'mutation' in his late period, of which his mother's death is the dark sun (see 'Longtemps . . .', in *Rustle*, p. 286). His last decade witnessed the culmination of his long march towards fiction which, while still using the language of political or theoretical permanent revolution, brought in radically new features. *The Pleasure of the Text* was still presented as a response to the new pre-Oedipal vistas opened on to 'semanalysis' by Kristeva; but the theme of pleasure already assumed its lasting role in the latter part of Barthes' career: that of a pure affirmation in the face of powerful and warring discourses.

There followed a literal incarnation: not only with an increasing interest in 'substances' other than language: painting, music, food, photography,

(1978). Another example of Barthes' tactical writing is found in his 'Alors, la Chine?', and its postscript in the Bourgois edition, which claims the right to speak in order to say 'No comment'.

where Barthes stressed his active participation, but with the obsessive use of a 'mana-word', the body (*Barthes*, pp. 3, 4, 129). Its function was clearly that of other notions launched around the same time: the 'biographemes' of *Sade*, *Fourier*, *Loyola*, or the photographs and 'anamneses' in *Barthes* which keep meaning at bay and resemble what is called 'screen-memories' by analysts. This is stated antiphrastically: 'We now know thanks to psychoanalysis that the body exceeds by far our memory and our consciousness' (*Rustle*, p. 31). One could not state any better that the notion is meant to duplicate and thus avoid that of the unconscious!

Yet the radically new element is that Barthes, perhaps encouraged by a certain theoretical irresponsibility around him, marked by an increasingly rapid turnover of conceptual fashions, and the nadir of political nihilism, also probably finding a new strength in the sexual permissiveness which followed 1968 (not without generating new codes which he found irksome as we see in his *Lover's Discourse* or 'Soirées de Paris', in *Incidents*), and finally in a manifest depression and fatigue and a desire for a *vita nuova*, overcame his fear both of intellectual solitude and of the various discourses of fashion, and dared to hold a direct discourse.¹⁶ This happens together with a frank interest in psychoanalysis, which he had always held at arms' length, favouring instead Sartrean or Bachelardian analyses. *On Racine* presented his use of psychoanalytical language as justified by a superficial fit, because it was efficient at 'gathering the fear of the world'. This reluctant use of Freudianism resulted however in Barthes' missing an important point of interpretation in Mauron's book on Racine which was his model. He identified the Law with the Father, whereas Mauron's analysis – perhaps too near the bone – represented Racine's conflict as due to an inadequate father and an archaic mother as possessive as Bouchardon, the sculptor who smothers Sarrasine's sexuality in *S/Z*, and as frightening as that which sometimes appears in *A Lover's Discourse*.

The repression, in Barthes' early autobiographical works, of all Oedipal conflicts does not prevent a discreet nostalgia for a father, and this comes out in *A Lover's Discourse*. Psychoanalytic literature is quantitatively the most important intertext; the encyclopaedic layout of Barthes' book may even have been suggested by the psychoanalytical dictionary of Laplanche and Pontalis. But whereas previously Freud never appeared except in his Lacanian avatar (more phallic mother than good father), it is as the latter that he is encountered in *A Lover's Discourse*, seen through the eyes of his son Martin, and as 'a paragon of normality', that is, reassuringly

¹⁶ On Barthes' commitment in his late works and what he calls its 'mysterious' character, see his interview by Normand Biron, 'La dernière des solitudes', in *Revue d'esthétique* (1981).

neurotic! (*Lover*, p. 145). The other psychoanalytical books cited show an emphasis on child analysis, not surprising since lover and child merge throughout in ways which are sometimes disconcerting, for instance when the loved one is seen fading through a helpless fatigue. The violence of death ‘which comes by itself’ (*Rustle*, p. 354) sees as its sole recourse the energy located in the imaginary (*Lover*, p. 106). Barthes, who had avoided with such determination all kinds of *consistance* – thickness and consistency – now hopes for a kind of gradualism whereby, through diary-keeping, for instance, a Proustian work will ‘jell’ (*‘Ça prend’*). He still wonders whether his ‘I’, ‘swelling and stiffening’ is ‘as big as the text’ (*Rustle*, p. 372); but his late works show an irresistible and autonomous drift towards fictional forms, from fragments of *Barthes*, to others in ‘Deliberation’ in *Rustle*, *Incidents*, *A Lover’s Discourse*, until the frankly narrative structure of *Camera Lucida* accomplishes the confluence of his two drives, the scientific search and the self-exploration.

A Lover’s Discourse, whatever his supposed intentions in avoiding a plot, does embody a narrative inasmuch as it leads to a hope of surviving through an avoidance of passion and the renunciation implicit in the Zen notion of ‘not-wanting-to-grasp’ (pp. 18, 104, 155, 171, 222, 224, 232). But as the last page of *Barthes* stated, living and writing depend on desiring; what happens if there is, as Barthes’ last interview stated, a ‘crisis of desire’? What does one fall into when one falls ‘out of’ love? (*Lover*, p. 106). The threat of *acedia*, a new face of the aphasia theme, is pervasively combatted in his last works by an affective investment of psychosis, of which unrequited passion is but one example. Delirium is in that sense yet another figure of freedom in his work. He had already pleaded for it in *Criticism and Truth*, when he pointed out that yesterday’s delirium could be tomorrow’s Truth; in *Camera Lucida* when he showed the kinship of photography and madness; and in another way in his *Inaugural Lecture* when he described literature as a fundamental delusion since its unattainable object of desire is the real. Perhaps his work should be seen as a struggle between two instincts: one for ranging far and wide in search of a method which, as Mallarmé saw, could also be fiction, the other for an abandonment to the madness of the real, whose other name is poetry.

DECONSTRUCTION

The movement known as ‘deconstruction’ is, at the time of writing, not much more than twenty years old. It achieved self-consciousness only in the 1970s. In retrospect, however, it is often dated to 1966 – the year in which the French philosopher Jacques Derrida read a paper called ‘Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences’ (reprinted in *Writing*, pp. 278–94) at a conference on structuralism at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. That paper, which was marked by an explicit break with the assumptions of structuralism, was promptly heralded as the emergence of ‘poststructuralism’. But this term was, and has remained, hopelessly vague. It acquired whatever sense it had from a wave of the hand in the direction of Derrida and Michel Foucault.

These two profoundly original thinkers did not, however, think of themselves as belonging to a common movement, nor as motivated by some special hostility to structuralism. Each of them had a distinct agenda, reacting to quite different traditions and focusing on quite different topics. Derrida’s early work, the work which had the most influence on deconstructionism, was a continuation and intensification of Heidegger’s attack on Platonism. It took the form of critical discussions of Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, Saussure, and many other writers, including Heidegger himself. By contrast, though Foucault too was greatly influenced by Heidegger, the books which made him famous were histories of institutions and disciplines, rather than works of philosophy. These books had a distinctively political cast, whereas Derrida’s earlier writings only occasionally touched on political topics.

Different as these two men were, however, they served as two of the three principal sources of inspiration for deconstructionism – Derrida providing the philosophical programme and Foucault the leftwards political slant. Neither, however, thought of himself as a literary critic, nor dreamt of founding a school of literary criticism. Without a third source, the writings of Paul de Man, it is hard to imagine that school coming into existence.

De Man was a Belgian who had emigrated to America and studied at Harvard; he became Professor of Comparative Literature at Yale in

1971.¹ Well before encountering the work of Derrida (whom he first met at the 1966 conference at Hopkins), he had written powerful and original readings of literary texts, and influential theoretical discussions of the nature and purpose of literary criticism. He had been deeply influenced by philosophy, especially by Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger. His students became (unusually for American students of literature of that period) readers of philosophy; when the time came, they quickly appropriated Derrida and Foucault – an appropriation facilitated by Derrida's regular visits to Yale during the late 1970s and early 1980s. De Man's students formed the core of the deconstructionist movement, and deconstructive literary criticism owes much of its distinctive tone and its special emphases to de Man's example.

The term 'the deconstructionist movement' has both a wide and a narrow sense. In the wide sense it names a movement which stretches far beyond literary criticism. 'Deconstruction' is, at present, a watchword in political science, history and law, as well as in the study of literature.² In all these disciplines, it connotes a project of radical destabilization. To conservatives in these disciplines, the word suggests a sort of nihilistic trashing of traditional values and institutions. For them, 'deconstructionist' is roughly synonymous with 'political radical who writes perverse criticisms of accepted ideas in an impenetrable, jargon-ridden style'. In the work of future historians of ideas, however, the term 'deconstructionism' is likely to be used to name the results of a sudden infusion of Nietzschean and Heideggerian ideas into the English-speaking intellectual world. From that perspective, deconstructionist literary criticism will seem only one aspect of the intrusion of a certain tradition of European

¹ After de Man's death in 1984 it was discovered that, in his early twenties, he had contributed anti-Semitic articles to collaborationist newspapers in Belgium. Some enemies of deconstruction attempted to use this fact to discredit the movement. Many of de Man's friends (notably Derrida and Hartman) countered with sympathetic attempts to relate de Man's mature work to what he had done in his youth. For biographical material on de Man, see Lindsay Waters' introduction to de Man's *Critical Writings* 1953–1978. For references to, and discussion of, the controversy about de Man's early writings, see the 'Postscript' in Norris, *Paul de Man*.

² This sentence, like the rest of this article, was written in 1988. Now (1994) it is out of date. The use of 'deconstruction' as a watchword peaked in the course of the 1980s, and the movement which used this term in that way seems to be dissolving. Self-avowedly deconstructive readings of literary texts now appear much less frequently than they did ten years ago, though the kinds of readings that do appear often owe an evident debt to Derrida. There is some feeling in departments of literature that deconstruction is *vieux jeu*, having been supplanted by 'cultural studies', a movement which owes much more to the influence of Foucault than to that of Derrida. Derrida's own writings, however, are still a staple of courses in literary theory – his early work having attained a kind of 'classic' status. Since that early work, he has gone from strength to strength, and his writings continue to be very widely and very avidly read. But he now is read less as the hero and leader of a movement than as an original, if often baffling, philosopher whose thought is still developing, and whose trajectory cannot be predicted.

philosophical thought into an academic culture which had previously ignored it.

This chapter will be concerned with the deconstructionist movement narrowly construed, as a school of literary criticism. Despite this focus, however, it will be necessary to spend a good half of the available space on a fairly detailed account of deconstructionist philosophizing. This is because deconstructionism is perhaps the most theory-oriented, the most specifically philosophical, movement in the history of literary criticism. The catchwords which pepper its readings of literary texts – e.g., ‘metaphysics’ in its peculiarly Heideggerian sense – are unintelligible to those who lack a philosophical background. It is hard, perhaps impossible, to find a deconstructionist critic who is not widely read in philosophy, and who does not take part in theoretical discussions. Unlike many critical movements of the past, deconstructionism has not aimed at establishing a new, revised, literary canon; although some authors (e.g., Rousseau) are favoured examples, deconstructionist critics are not particularly concerned to re-evaluate canonical works and to pick and choose among them. As with Freudian critics, almost any work is equally grist for their mill. Just as Freudian criticism has its power base in psychoanalysis, deconstructionist criticism too has its power base outside of literature – in philosophy. Like logical positivism, this movement claims to offer much-needed philosophical assistance to *all* disciplines, not simply to the study of literature.

The term ‘literary theory’ (currently used to name a field of professional specialization for teachers of literature, on a par with ‘seventeenth-century German literature’ or ‘modern European drama’) is roughly synonymous with ‘discussion of Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, de Man, Lyotard, *et al.*’ In the universities of the English-speaking world, recent French and German philosophy is now much more taught in English departments than in philosophy departments. Further, the teaching of this kind of philosophy is almost always associated with attacks on the ways in which English departments have traditionally thought of their function, and with self-conscious and systematic attempts to politicize that function. So, after sections on deconstructionist theory and on the practice of deconstructive criticism, this chapter will conclude with a section on the relation of deconstructive literary criticism to political radicalism.

Deconstructionist theory

Most of Derrida’s work continues a line of thought which begins with Friedrich Nietzsche and runs through Martin Heidegger. This line of thought is characterized by an ever more radical repudiation of Platonism – of the apparatus of philosophical distinctions which the West inherited

from Plato and which has dominated European thought. In a memorable passage in *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche describes ‘how the “true world” became a fable.’ There he sketches an account of the gradual dissolution of the other-worldly way of thinking common to Plato, to Christianity, and to Kant, the way of thinking which contrasts the True World of Reality with the World of Appearance created by the senses, or matter, or Sin, or the structure of the human understanding. The characteristic expressions of this other-worldliness, this attempt to escape from time and history into eternity, are what deconstructionists often call ‘the traditional binary oppositions’: true–false, original–derivative, unified–diverse, objective–subjective, and so on.

In the texts which Heidegger composed after his turn away from the ‘phenomenological ontology’ which he had offered in his early *Being and Time*, he identified Platonism with what he called ‘metaphysics,’ and identified metaphysics with the destiny of the West. On Heidegger’s account, figures such as St Paul, Descartes, Newton, Kant, John Stuart Mill, and Marx are simply episodes in the history of metaphysics. Their visions remained Platonic visions, even when they thought of themselves as repudiating other-worldliness. For they all, in one way or another, clung to the distinction between reality and appearance, or between the rational and the irrational. Even empiricism and positivism took these distinctions for granted, and therefore, for Heidegger, were merely trivialized and degenerate forms of metaphysical thought. ‘All metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato’ (Heidegger, ‘End of Philosophy’, p. 386).

Heidegger counted even Nietzsche as a metaphysician – the metaphysician of the will to power, a philosopher who inverted the Platonic opposition between Being and Becoming by making Becoming, in the form of the endless flow of power from point to point, primary. Heidegger quotes Nietzsche as saying ‘To *stamp* Becoming with the character of Being – that is the *supreme will to power*’.³ Such passages provide the evidence for Heidegger’s claim that Nietzsche was ‘the last metaphysician’, and therefore not yet a *post*-metaphysical thinker, one able to twist free of Platonism altogether.⁴ Heidegger’s hope was to be such a thinker. He hoped to escape the destiny of the West by no longer having a view about what was really real, no longer thinking in terms of *any* of the traditional binary, hierarchical, oppositions.

What Heidegger called ‘Platonism’ or ‘metaphysics’ or ‘onto-theology’ Derrida calls ‘the metaphysics of presence’ or ‘logocentrism’ (or, occasionally, ‘phallogocentrism’). Derrida repeats Heidegger’s claim that this

³ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, sect. 617, quoted by Heidegger at *Nietzsche*, IV, p. 202.

⁴ See Heidegger, ‘The word of Nietzsche’, p. 84, and also *Nietzsche*, IV, pp. 202–5

metaphysics is utterly pervasive in Western culture. Both see the influence of the traditional binary oppositions as infecting all areas of life and thought, including literature and the criticism of literature. So Derrida entirely agrees with Heidegger that the task of the thinker is to twist free of these oppositions, and of the forms of intellectual and cultural life which they structure. However, Derrida does not think that Heidegger succeeded in twisting free. As he says:

What I have attempted to do would not have been possible without the opening of Heidegger's questions . . . But despite this debt to Heidegger's thought, or rather because of it, I attempt to locate in Heidegger's text . . . the signs of belonging to metaphysics, or to what he calls onto-theology.

(Derrida, *Positions*, pp. 9–10)

The principal sign of the persistently metaphysical character of Heidegger's thought, Derrida thinks, is his use of the notion of 'Being.' Heidegger described the gradual transition, over the course of 2,000 years, from Plato's Platonism to Nietzsche's inverted Platonism as a gradual 'forgetfulness of Being'. To forget Being, on Heidegger's account, is to confuse Being and beings. Plato, he claims, ran together the question 'what is Being?' with the question 'what is the most general characteristic of beings?' – an assimilation which obscures what Heidegger called 'the ontological difference', the difference between Being and beings. Heidegger treated that difference as parallel to the difference between a listening acceptance and a desire to schematize and control.

This mysterious notion of Being, something envisaged by the pre-Socratics but gradually forgotten as the West slid downwards towards Nietzschean power-worship and a culture dominated by means-end rationality and technological gigantism, is the element in Heidegger's thought which Derrida abandons. He regards the 'ontological difference' as a notion which is still 'in the grasp of metaphysics' (Derrida, *Positions*, p. 10) and says 'There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought' (Derrida, *Margins*, p. 27).

In order to distance himself from Heidegger, Derrida proceeds to invent bits of philosophical terminology (*trace*, *différance*, *archi-écriture*, *supplément*, and many others) designed to mock and displace Heidegger's own terminology (*Ereignis*, *Lichtung* and the like).⁵ Whereas Heidegger's

⁵ For an argument that notions like *trace* and *différance* come together to make up something rather like a philosophical system, see Gasché, *Tain*. This very thorough and impressive work argues that Derrida has been misread because of his appropriation by literary theorists, and that he needs to be restored to philosophy proper. (See especially p. 3 on this point). For criticism of Gasché, see Rorty, 'Transcendental'.

words express his reverence for the ineffable, the silent, and the enduring, Derrida's express his affectionate admiration for the proliferating, the elusive, the allusive, the ever-self-recontextualizing. He sees these features as exemplified in writing better than in speech – thus reversing Plato's (and Heidegger's) preference for the spoken over the written word. By constructing this terminology, Derrida is trying for the position for which Heidegger had implicitly nominated himself, that of the first post-metaphysical thinker, the prophet of an age in which the reality–appearance distinction has *entirely* lost its hegemony over our thought.

By abandoning Heideggerian nostalgia, Derrida freed himself from those elements in Heidegger's thought which chimed with Heidegger's own sentimental pastoralism and nationalism – traits which led him to Nazism. Derrida thus helped free Heidegger up for the use of the political left. Further, and more importantly for the purposes of deconstructionist literary critics, he turned from Heidegger's sentimental question 'How can we find traces of the remembrance of Being in the texts of the history of philosophy?' to the quasi-political questions 'How can we subvert the intentions of texts which invoke metaphysical oppositions? How can we expose them *as* metaphysical?' He turned from Heidegger's preoccupation with the philosophical canon to the development of a technique which could be applied to almost any text, past or contemporary, literary or philosophical. This was the technique which has come to be called 'deconstruction.'

The word *deconstruction* plays as small a role in Derrida's writing as *Abbau* and *Destruktion* played in Heidegger's. 'Deconstructionism' was, initially, no more Derrida's chosen label for his own thought than 'existentialism' was Heidegger's label for the doctrines of *Being and Time*. But, because Derrida was made famous (in English-speaking countries) not by his fellow-philosophers but by literary critics (who were looking for new ways of reading texts rather than for a new understanding of intellectual history), this label has (in those countries) become firmly attached to a school of which Derrida is, rather to his own surprise and bemusement, the leading figure.⁶ As used by members of this school, the term 'deconstruction', refers in the first instance to the way in which the 'accidental' features of a text can be seen as betraying, subverting, its purportedly 'essential' message.⁷

⁶ For a good discussion of the difference between Derrida's original interests and the interests of his English-speaking followers, see Gumbrecht, 'Deconstruction deconstructed'. For the claim that deconstruction should not have been extended from metaphysics to literature, that it was a mistake to have taken 'a legitimate philosophical practice . . . as a model for literary criticism', see Eco, 'Intentio', p. 166.

⁷ See de Man's reply to a request for a definition of 'deconstruction' by Robert Moynihan, in the latter's *A Recent Imagining*, p. 156: 'It's possible, within a text,

As a crude first example, of such betrayal, consider the claim 'I am determined to use only plain, exoteric, language'. Since 'exoteric' is a somewhat esoteric expression, the claim stumbles over its own feet, roughly in the same way as does 'I become terribly depressed when I think how much time I used to waste on remorse'. The manner of such statements, or their context, or the resonances of particular words they employ, interferes with their matter – with what they purport to say. As a less crude example, consider Derrida's discussion of the predicament in which Heidegger found himself when he tried to twist free of metaphysics, to say something about Being which would not merely be a generalization about beings. He had to resort to metaphors such as 'language is the house of Being', metaphors which hark back to the very notion of Being-as-presence which, Heidegger had claimed, lay at the root of the confusion of Being with beings. Derrida comments:

And if Heidegger has radically deconstructed the domination of metaphysics by the *present*, he has done so in order to lead us to think the presence of the present. But the thinking of this presence can only metaphorize, by means of a profound necessity from which one cannot simply decide to escape, the language that it deconstructs.

(*Margins*, p. 131)

One can generalize Derrida's comment on Heidegger as follows: anyone who says something like 'I must repudiate the entire language of my culture' is making a statement in the language she repudiates. She will be doing so even if she rephrases her repudiation in the form of a metaphorical, rather than a literal, use of the terms of that language. Alternatively: someone who wants not to talk about beings is compelled to spell out his intentions in – what else? – terms used to talk about beings. *Any* attempt to do *anything* of the sort which Heidegger wanted to do will trip itself up. So, Derrida concludes, we must try for something very similar to what Heidegger attempted, but also very different.⁸

Derrida thinks of Heidegger's attempt to express the ineffable as merely the latest and most frantic form of a vain struggle to break out of language by finding words which take their meaning directly from the world, from non-language. This struggle has been going on since the Greeks, but it is doomed because language is, as Saussure says, nothing but differences.⁹

to frame a question or to undo assertions made in the text, by means of elements which are in the text, which frequently would be precisely structures that play off rhetorical against grammatical elements.'

⁸ For Derrida's discussion of the similarities and differences between Heidegger's project and his own, see *Margins*, pp. 25–7 and 134–6. See also Megill, *Prophets*, chapter 7.

⁹ See Saussure, *Course*, chapter 4, sect. 4. The same point is made by Wittgenstein at many places in *Philosophical Investigations*.

That is, words have meaning only because of contrast-effects with other words. 'Red' means what it does only by contrast with 'blue', 'green', etc. 'Being' also means nothing except by contrast, not only with 'beings' but with 'Nature', 'God', 'Humanity', and indeed *every* other word in the language. No word can acquire meaning in the way in which philosophers from Aristotle to Bertrand Russell have hoped it might – by being the unmediated expression of something non-linguistic (e.g., an emotion, a sense-datum, a physical object, an idea, a Platonic Form).¹⁰

Derrida says of the logocentric philosophers who hold out this hope of immediacy: 'Univocity is the essence, or better, the *telos* of language. No philosophy has ever renounced this Aristotelian ideal. This ideal is philosophy.' (*Margins*, p. 247) To succeed in twisting free of the logocentric tradition would be to write, and to read, in such a way as to renounce this ideal. To destroy the tradition would be to see all the texts of that tradition as self-delusive, because using language to do what language cannot do. Language itself, so to speak, can be relied upon to betray any attempt to transcend it (see Derrida, *Writing*, pp. 278–81).

Such a view of language naturally attracted the attention of students of literature trained in the practice of close reading by the New Criticism.¹¹ Critics trained in this way had long been accustomed to spot ambiguities, and to see how something meant as literal could be taken as metaphorical (and conversely). They were also accustomed to set aside the poet, her intentions, and her historical context and to look instead at what they called 'the inner workings of the poem itself'. Derridean readings of philosophical texts suggested the possibility of similar readings of literary texts. But those readings would not display the 'organic unity' sought by New Critics but rather the opposite: an endless process of self-unravelling, self-betrayal, self-subversion. Given the Derridean claim that the language of metaphysics is utterly pervasive, such a reading ought to be possible even for texts which, at first sight, had nothing to do with any philosophical

¹⁰ This is not, of course, to say that there is no such thing as linguistic reference to non-language, but merely to repeat Wittgenstein's point that ostensive definition requires a lot of 'stage-setting'. The common-sense claim that 'There's a rabbit' is typically uttered in the presence of rabbits is undermined neither by Wittgenstein's point, nor by Quine's arguments about the inscrutability of reference, nor by Derrida's about the tendency of the signifier to slip away from the signified. For the impact of such arguments on the notion of meaning, see Stout, 'Meaning', and Wheeler, 'Extension'.

¹¹ For a discussion of the parallels between deconstructionism and New Criticism, see Graff, *Literature*, pp. 145–6 and *Professing*, pp. 240–3. On p. 242 of the latter book, Graff says: 'The New Critical fetish of unity is replaced [in deconstructionism] by a fetish of disunity, aporias, and texts that "differ from themselves", but criticism continues to "valorize" that complexity in excess of rational reformulation that has been the honored criterion [in American literary criticism] since the forties.' See also Bove, 'Variations'.

topic. De Man's own philosophical turn of mind led him and his students (such as Gayatri Spivak, a very influential translator and interpreter of Derrida) to treat Derrida as offering a method rather than an outlook, a method which could generate such readings. De Man's appropriation of Derrida was the crucial event in the development of deconstructionism.

Before discussing in more detail the way in which de Man mediated between Derrida and the study of literature in the American academy, however, it will be best to stop and consider Derrida's philosophical claims by themselves, apart from their appropriation by literary critics. These claims have been the subject of hostile, sometimes bitter, criticism, from Derrida's fellow philosophers. Jacques Bouveresse in France and Jürgen Habermas in Germany have criticized Derrida severely. But the fiercest criticism of him has come from British and American analytic philosophers, members of the philosophical school which has dominated the English-speaking academic world since the Second World War. For many of these philosophers, heirs of a tradition which began with the logical positivists' opposition to metaphysics (not in the wide Heideggerian sense of the term, but in a narrower sense in which 'unverifiable' metaphysical, theological and moral claims are opposed to 'verifiable' scientific claims) Derrida's work seems a deplorable, frivolous, wicked, regression to irrationalism.

There are two main lines of criticism of Derridean philosophy. Those who take the first line see Derrida's doctrines as a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of doubts about 'realism' – about the claim that our language and thought are structured and given content by the world, by non-language. They treat Derrida as a linguistic idealist – someone whose much-quoted slogan 'There is nothing outside the text'¹² is supported by nothing more than the bad old arguments of Berkeley and Kant. One such critic, David Novitz, says that Derrida believes that 'our use of language is never constrained by a non-linguistic world' ('Rage', p. 53), and that this conclusion does not follow from the fact that 'we cannot experience an object apart from our mental constructs', for that 'is just another way of saying that we cannot experience an object apart from our experience of it' ('Rage', p. 50). As Novitz says, 'We still observe non-linguistic or non-semiotic objects in order to ascertain whether we have described them correctly'. The fact that we do so, he thinks, shows that 'there must be a non-linguistic, non-semiotic, non-constructed world . . . one, moreover, which exercises some constraint on what we say, how we organise, differentiate and codify' (*ibid.*, p. 51).

¹² This phrase occurs at Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 158. In its context it has a more specific and complicated sense than that usually attached to it by hostile commentators.

The question raised by Novitz' criticism is whether the fact (which Derrida would hardly deny) that there are non-linguistic objects which constrain (in straightforwardly physical, causal ways) both our linguistic and our non-linguistic behaviour refutes the Derridean suggestion that, in Novitz' words, 'our concepts and meanings . . . do not represent, convey, or correspond to a non-linguistic reality, a "transcendental signified"' ('Rage', p. 49).¹³ There is obviously a gap between 'X constrains Y' and 'Y represents, conveys or corresponds to X'. 'Realist' philosophers think that they can cross this gap. They think that the causal influence of the environment upon linguistic behaviour enables us to give a clear sense to the claim that some bits of language 'correspond' to something non-linguistic. Their opponents, both 'anti-realists' and those who try to set aside the realism/anti-realism issue as misconceived,¹⁴ think that no such sense can be found.

A respectable body of opinion within analytic philosophy holds that the existence of causal relations between language and non-language does not suffice to give a sense to the notion of 'correspondence between language and reality'. This view seems implicit in Wittgenstein, and it is explicit in the work of contextualist philosophers of language such as Donald Davidson.¹⁵ So one can argue that Derrida's views are no more scandalous or absurd than those of these latter figures.¹⁶ On this argument, Wittgenstein, Davidson and Derrida have all preserved what was true in idealism while eschewing Berkeley's and Kant's suggestion that the material world is the creation of the human mind.

Many followers of Wittgenstein and Davidson, however, sympathize with a second, somewhat milder, line of criticism of Derrida. According to this criticism, Derrida starts off from a philosophical position which rightly emphasizes the self-contained character of language, rightly holds that (in Wilfrid Sellars' words) 'all awareness is a linguistic affair' (*Science*, p. 160), and rightly repudiates what Davidson calls 'the scheme-content

¹³ The phrase 'the transcendental signified' is one of Derrida's terms for an entity capable (per impossible) of halting the potential infinite regress of interpretations of signs by other signs. See Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 49, where he agrees with Peirce that nothing can stop such a regress.

¹⁴ For the distinction between these two types of philosopher, see Fine, 'Anti-Realism' and Rorty, 'Pragmatism', pp. 351–5.

¹⁵ See Davidson, 'Myth', p. 165: 'Beliefs are true or false but they represent nothing. It is good to be rid of representations, and with them the correspondence theory of truth.'

¹⁶ On Derrida and Wittgenstein, see Grene, 'Derrida and Wittgenstein'; Staten, *Wittgenstein*; Rorty, 'Nutshell'. On Derrida and Davidson, see Wheeler, 'Extension' and 'Indeterminacy'.

dichotomy.¹⁷ However, he sets out this position in such an extravagant, hyperbolic, way that his misled followers pardonably, though fallaciously, derive silly consequences from it. John Searle, for example, sensibly remarks that the fact that language is a system of differences ‘does nothing to undermine the distinction between presence and absence’ for

I understand the differences between the two sentences ‘the cat is on the mat’ and ‘the dog is on the mat’ in precisely the way I do because the word ‘cat’ is present in the first while absent in the second, and the word ‘dog’ is present in the second, while absent from the first . . . the system of differences is precisely a system of presences and absences.

(‘World’, p. 76)

More generally, one can argue, in the spirit of Wittgenstein, that philosophy ‘leaves everything as it is’ (*Investigations*, Part I, sect. 124) except for previous philosophy, and that abandoning the specifically metaphysical quest for univocity through confrontation with a non-linguistic referent (what Derrida calls ‘the *telos* of language . . . this Aristotelian ideal’) does not mean abandoning the every-day distinction between relatively univocal and relatively ambiguous uses of words.¹⁸ Again, to say that the objective–subjective distinction is relative to context and purpose is not to repudiate that distinction, but merely to caution against thinking that ‘objective’ can mean more than ‘intersubjective’. Searle speaks for many analytic philosophers when he says that ‘in the twentieth century, mostly under the influence of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, we have come to believe that this general search for these sorts of foundations [ontological, epistemological, or phenomenological foundations of the sort sought by Plato, Descartes or Husserl] is misguided’. But he insists that ‘this doesn’t threaten science, language, or common sense in the least.’ (‘World’, p. 77) For Searle, Derrida’s anti-foundationalism is neither new nor particularly interesting. On his view, only the philosophical naivety of Derrida’s followers lets them see anti-foundationalism as having startling consequences for literary criticism or for politics.

Searle here raises perhaps the most widespread objection to deconstructionism: why should we think that the abandonment of Platonic ideas and

¹⁷ See Davidson, ‘Myth’, p. 163: ‘Instead of saying that it is the scheme–content dichotomy that has dominated and defined the problems of modern philosophy . . . one could as well say it is how the dualism of the objective and the subjective has been conceived . . . [T]he most promising and interesting change that is occurring in philosophy today is that these dualisms are being questioned in new ways or are being radically reworked.’ Such passages in the writings of Davidson, Putnam and other analytic philosophers parallel the deconstructionists’ attacks on ‘the traditional binary oppositions’.

¹⁸ A similar point is made by Robert Scholes at pp. 67–73 of *Protocols*. Scholes is concerned to distinguish a metaphysical from a pragmatic sense of ‘presence’, and to argue that scepticism about the former is irrelevant to the latter.

strivings would have important ramifications for the rest of culture?¹⁹ Why, for example, should we believe that, as Derrida (following Heidegger) insists, science has been constrained by ‘metaphysical bonds that have borne on its definition and movement from its beginning’? Why not say instead (with, for example, Reichenbach, Popper and Dewey) that the natural sciences have done a lot to loosen those bonds, and to make possible a post-metaphysical culture? These questions cannot be pursued in this space, but raising them is useful for understanding Derrida’s relation to the philosophical world of his time as well as for understanding the reception of deconstructionism by dubious or angry spectators of the movement.²⁰ Returning from this excursus into Derrida’s relations with his fellow philosophers, we can now turn back to the way in which Paul de Man functioned as introducer and mediator of Derrida’s thought.

De Man had, well before encountering Derrida, suggested such a way of reading literary texts. In ‘Form and Intent in the American New Criticism’, written in the early 1960s, de Man deplored the ahistorical and aphilosophical character of New Criticism, and urged that American critics take account of ‘European methods’ (*Blindness*, p. 20) which they had hitherto largely ignored. De Man deplored the ignorance of Heidegger which persisted in America, and, more generally, the lack of any philosophico-historical background against which to place literary texts. He rightly thought that a whole world of European culture had become invisible to American intellectuals, as a result of the New Critics’ use of ‘literature’ in a sense which excluded history and philosophy and of the analytic philosophers’ arrogant refusal to read Hegel, Nietzsche, or Heidegger. The resulting blindness made it impossible to grasp what de Man called ‘the intentional structure of literary form’ (*Blindness*, p. 27). He claimed, however, that the New Critics had been led, despite their own theories of organic form, to recognize the self-unravelling character of literary texts:

As it refines its interpretations more and more, American criticism does not discover a single meaning, but a plurality of significations that can be radically opposed to each other. Instead of revealing a continuity affiliated with the coherence of the natural world, it takes us into a discontinuous world of reflective irony and ambiguity. Almost in spite of itself, it pushes the interpretative process so far that the analogy between the organic world and the language of poetry finally explodes.

(*Blindness*, p. 28)

¹⁹ See Stout, ‘Relativity’, pp. 109–10, and Rorty, ‘Circumvention’, pp. 20–1 for two ways of posing, and expanding on, this rhetorical question.

²⁰ For dubcity, see Abrams, ‘How to do Things’; for angrier reactions, see Hirsch, *Aims*, p. 13, and Bate, ‘Crisis’.

De Man's strictures against the New Criticism signalled the beginning of what was to prove a very rapid, almost violent, change in the language and assumptions of American literary criticism. The time, one can see in retrospect, was ripe. New Criticism had become, by the 1960s, *vieux jeu*. Furthermore, the 1960s was a period of increasing political radicalism within the universities. The associations of the New Critics with conservative political movements (Eliot's royalism, the Southern Agrarians' nostalgia) counted against them. An increasing interest in leftist political ideas led students first to Marxism, and then to realize the existence of a European intellectual tradition which had never ceased to read Marx, but had learned to read him against the background of Hegel and in the light of Nietzsche and Heidegger. The appearance in English translation, during the early 1970s, of Foucault's *The Order of Things* and Jürgen Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests* helped American students to realize that there was an intellectual world in which the study of literature had never been disjoined either from philosophy or from social criticism. So, even though Derrida did not subscribe to any particular leftist programme, he was treated as an honorary radical. In the English departments of American universities during the 1970s, it was often taken for granted that the deconstruction of literary texts went hand in hand with the destruction of unjust social institutions – and that deconstruction was, so to speak, the literary scholar's distinctive contribution to efforts toward radical social change.

After Derrida began his annual visits to Yale, it became customary to speak of a 'Yale School' of literary criticism, usually described as including Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, in addition to de Man and Derrida. This term was somewhat misleading, since although these five men were friends, their motives and their practice differed in many ways.²¹ Even though Hartman wrote the first book in English about Derrida (*Saving the Text*, 1981), his appropriation of Derrida was rather different from de Man's, and his own subsequent work can hardly be cited as an example of deconstruction. Bloom, who together with Hartman had led a revival of interest in the Romantic poets during the 1960s, turned in the direction of theory in the 1970s and published a series of startlingly original and very influential books, beginning with *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). But Bloom's theories of poetic influence and misprision had very little connection with what was being written by Derrida (though they

²¹ See *Deconstruction and Criticism*, p. ix, where Hartman writes 'Caveat lector. Derrida, de Man, and Miller are certainly boa-deconstructors, merciless and consequent, though each enjoys his own style of disclosing again and again the "abysm" of words. But Bloom and Hartman are barely deconstructionists.'

did gear in with de Man's theory of 'blindness and insight'). Bloom has subsequently taken pains to distance himself from deconstructionism.²²

Despite these dissimilarities among leading figures, however, the term 'the Yale School' does flag an important event in the history of American literary criticism. In the course of the 1970s, brilliant Ph.Ds poured out across the land from the Yale literature departments, carrying the ideas which became identified with deconstructionism. In retrospect, however, it becomes clear that the majority of these ideas were peculiarly de Man's. Despite the fact that most books of literary theory whose titles contain the word 'deconstruction' concentrate on Derrida, the texts most frequently cited as paradigms of deconstructive criticism all bear de Man's imprint. De Man was one of the most loved and admired teachers of his time, as well as one of the most intensely single-minded thinkers. If Derrida had never existed, or had never become known in America, de Man's students would still have formed a very important school, though that school would probably have borne some label other than 'deconstruction.' If it had not been for de Man, the processes described by Gumprecht as 'The transformations of the French criticism of logocentrism into American literary theory' (the subtitle of his 'Deconstruction deconstructed') would probably never have taken place.

These transformations were not entirely smooth. To understand the tensions within the deconstructionist movement one must see the tensions between Derrida's and de Man's positions. Both de Man and Derrida agree that texts deconstruct themselves – that because our language pretends to a univocity it can never attain, close reading of almost any text can detect some failure to attain a desired end, a more or less disabling contradiction between form and intent.²³ But de Man wanted to answer a question (What is special about literature, and about its language?²⁴) which Derrida never asked, and whose presuppositions he might well reject. These presuppositions include a Diltheyan distinction between the sort of language used in natural science and that used in literature, a distinction which anti-de Man Derrideans find overly reminiscent of some of the bad old binary oppositions of metaphysics (e.g., Nature–Spirit,

²² For a good sense of the differences between the members of the 'Yale School', see the excellent interviews with them conducted by Robert Moynihan, collected in his *A Present Imagining*. Note, in particular, Bloom's claim at p. 29 that 'Philosophy is a totally dead subject.'

²³ See, for example, a remarkably de Manian passage in Derrida where he approvingly quotes Bataille as saying that poetry needs to make itself capable of being 'the commentary on its absence of meaning' and goes on to say that 'Servility is therefore only the desire for meaning' (*Writing and Difference*, pp. 261–2)

²⁴ In *Resistance*, p. 11, de Man says that the definition of 'literariness' has become 'the object of literary theory'.

Nature–Freedom, Matter–Mind).²⁵ For de Man, literature is exempt from the self-deceptiveness which, on Derrida’s account, pervades language. The task of the literary critic is to make clear that literary texts, though not necessarily their authors, were *undeceived*. De Man describes the relation between the literature and philosophy in terms which it is hard to imagine Derrida using:

The critical deconstruction that leads to the discovery of the literary, rhetorical nature of the philosophical claim to truth is genuine enough and cannot be refuted: literature turns out to be the main topic of philosophy and the model for the kind of truth to which it aspires . . . Philosophy turns out to be an endless reflection on its own destruction at the hands of literature.

(*Allegories*, p. 115)

By contrast, Derrida does not suggest that there is an area of culture, ‘literature’, ‘which is exempt from philosophy’s failings and which somehow escapes the urge to univocity. Indeed, he often suggests the opposite, as when he says that ‘the history of the literary arts’ has been ‘tied’ to ‘the history of metaphysics’, even while admitting that, in our own time, ‘the irreducibility of writing and . . . the subversion of logocentrism are announced better than elsewhere today in a certain sector and certain determined form of “literary” practice’ (*Positions*, p. 11).²⁶

De Man’s difference from Derrida on this point emerges when he criticizes, or seems to criticize, Derrida’s reading of Rousseau. He first says that Derrida fails to see that ‘Rousseau escapes from the logocentric fallacy precisely to the extent that his language is *literary*’, and that Derrida ‘remains unwilling or unable to read Rousseau as literature’ (*Blindness*, p. 138). It is true that de Man takes the edge off this criticism by saying that Derrida’s misreading of Rousseau – his ‘deconstructing a pseudo-Rousseau by means of insights that could have been gained from the “real” Rousseau’ – is ‘too interesting not to be deliberate’ (*Blindness*, p. 140). But it is not clear that this suggestion about Derrida’s intentions is more than a courteous gesture.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two men is that Derrida resists both the ‘existentialist’ pathos of early Heidegger and the apocalyptic hopelessness of late Heidegger, whereas de Man exhibits both. As

²⁵ See *Blindness*, p. 24 for de Man’s straightforwardly Husserlian way of distinguishing between ‘natural objects’ and ‘intentional objects’. This is an opposition which Derrida would hardly wish to leave unquestioned. See also *Resistance*, p. 11, where de Man opposes ‘language’ to ‘the phenomenal world’, and *Blindness*, p. 110, where he opposes ‘scientific’ texts to ‘critical’ texts.

²⁶ See also p. 20, where Derrida says that the quest for ‘a concept independent of language’ is not ‘imposed from without by something like “philosophy” but rather by everything that links our language, our culture, our “system of thought” to the history and system of metaphysics’.

Christopher Norris remarks, 'de Man's language is haunted by ideas of sacrifice, loss and renunciation' (*De Man*, p. xix). In tone at least, his work is much closer to Heidegger's than it is to Derrida's. The following passages are typical of de Man, and are echoed over and over again in the writings of his students and followers:

the distinctive character of literature thus becomes manifest as an inability to escape from a condition that is felt to be unbearable.

(*Blindness*, p. 162)

here [in some texts of Rousseau] the consciousness does not result at all from the absence of something, but consists of the presence of a nothingness. Poetic language names this void with ever-renewed understanding and, like Rousseau's longing, it never tires of naming it again. This persistent naming is what we call literature . . . The human mind will go through amazing feats of distortion to avoid facing 'the nothingness of human matters'.

(*Blindness*, p. 18)

Everything in [Proust's] novel signifies something other than what it represents; it is always something else that is intended. It can be shown that the most adequate term to designate this 'something else' is Reading. But one must at the same time 'understand' that this word bars access, once and forever, to a meaning that yet can never cease to call out for its understanding.

(*Allegories*, p. 47)

This tone, with its exaltation of literature as having the courage of its own hopelessness, is only rarely found in Derrida. Much of the time, at least, Derrida seems to be commending, and exemplifying, an attitude of playfulness. Derrida is frequently witty, and even frivolous, in a way that de Man almost never is. So some of Derrida's admirers have attempted to drive a wedge between his work and de Man's appropriation of it, and to emphasize Derrida's relatively relaxed and rueful sense of the inevitable failure of the metaphysicians' project of univocity, as opposed to the intense seriousness with which de Man views this failure.²⁷

This attempt to take the end of metaphysics lightly is rebuked and rejected by those whose primary allegiance is to de Man rather than

²⁷ See Derrida, *Margins*, p. 27. There, after saying that we should avoid Heideggerian nostalgia, he continues 'On the contrary, we must *affirm* this [viz., that 'there will be no unique name, not even the name of Being'], in the sense in which Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance.' (Il faut au contraire l'*affirmer*, au sens ou Nietzsche met l'affirmation en jeu, dans un certain rire and dans un certain pas de la dance.) Compare Derrida, *Writing*, p. 292. Hartman highlights this playful side of Derrida in his *Saving the Text*, and is criticized by Culler for doing so, and for thereby encouraging the idea that deconstruction is a matter of free play (*Deconstruction*, pp. 28, 132n). Culler's criticism is echoed by Norris (*Derrida*, p. 20). See Rorty, 'Logocentrism', and Godzich, 'Domestication', for more on the differences between de Man and Derrida.

to Derrida. This is the situation of Miller, whose discussion of de Man in his *The Ethics of Reading* describes itself as an attempt to show that deconstruction has nothing to do with the critic's freedom to, for example, use the occurrence of a certain metaphor in a text as a basis for recontextualizing that text, playing around with it for the critic's own purposes. To view deconstruction as a matter of 'free play' is, Miller says,

a misreading of the work of the deconstructive critics. Beyond that, it is a basic misunderstanding of the way the ethical moment enters into the act of reading, teaching, or writing criticism. That moment is not a matter of response to a thematic content asserting this or that idea about morality. It is a much more fundamental 'I must' responding the language of literature in itself . . . Deconstruction is nothing more or less than good reading as such.

(*Ethics*, p. 11)²⁸

The good reader, for Miller, is

the careful reader of [i.e. implied by] de Man . . . [who] will know that what is bound to take place in each act of reading is another exemplification of the law of unreadability. The failure to read takes place inexorably within the text itself. The reader must reenact this failure in his or her own reading.

(*Ethics*, p. 53)

Miller represents one extreme of the deconstructionist movement, its extreme de Manian wing. The other extreme is represented by Stanley Fish (see below, chapter 13) His connections with the movement are loose, and he is not usually thought of as a deconstructionist, nor would he so describe himself. But, because he has become identified with the claim that no text can determine its own interpretation, the enemies of the movement have given him honorary membership in it.²⁹ Such an assimilation is plausible, inasmuch as Fish wholeheartedly accepts the view of language common to Derrida, Wittgenstein, and Davidson.

Fish, however, does not find this view startling, nor does he view it either as having important ethical consequences or as dictating critical practice. He and Miller agree that language is a play of differences, that no word is given meaning simply by the presence of a referent, and that objectivity is never more than intersubjectivity. But, unlike Miller and de Man, Fish does not think of 'literature' as an area in which a special

²⁸ Miller, *Ethics*, p. 11. See also p. 58: 'I would even dare to promise that the millennium ["of universal justice and peace among men"] would come if all men and women became good readers in de Man's sense . . .'. Compare Miller in Moynihan, *Recent*, p. 128.

²⁹ For example: Abrams, 'How to do things', criticizes Derrida, Fish and Bloom as instances of 'Newreading'. Among conservative critics of deconstructionism, Fish is usually thought of as equally 'irrationalist', even though less 'French'.

kind of language (with a special feature called 'literariness') is used, nor as an area of culture which has a permanent quarrel with another area called 'philosophy'. Unlike Heidegger and Derrida, he does not see the end of the metaphysics of presence as a world-historical event, but merely as an occasion to remind literary critics that there is no point in talking about 'the interpretation which gets the text right', and every point in putting the text in as many contexts as anyone finds it useful to put it in.

Fish characterizes himself as 'a pragmatist'. His view of the relation between philosophy and literary criticism has much in common with that of John Searle: both men would say that the shipwreck of the philosophers' traditional foundationalist projects and the absence of what Hirsch calls 'determinate meaning'³⁰ (the meaning a text retains when freed of context) has no dramatic consequences for the work of the literary critic. For Searle and Fish, if one has Wittgenstein one does not really need Derrida, although one might still (as Fish does, and Searle does not) welcome his company.³¹ Yet Fish can be seen as writing in one of the veins in which Derrida himself writes, albeit a very different vein from that of either de Man or Miller. When Fish criticizes the attempt at 'determinate meaning' by saying that 'whatever they [commentators on a text] do, it will only be interpretation in another guise because, like it or not, interpretation is the only game in town,' he is restating (in flat, cracker-barrel, American tones) the central thesis of Derrida's 'Structure, sign and play', the thesis that we must give up 'the concept of centered structure', the 'concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play' (*Writing*, p. 279).

This thesis would be accepted by a large number of critics who, like Fish, would not care to be labelled 'deconstructionists' but who would be happy to grant that deconstructionism is playing an important and useful role in literary studies. That role is to help free us from the notion of 'the *correct* interpretation of the text – the one dictated by the text itself', and from the idea that literary criticism needs to be put on the secure path of a science by adopting some such ideal of correctness. As Gerald Graff puts it:

³⁰ See Hirsch, *Aims*, chapter 1. At p. 3, Hirsch says that 'if we could not distinguish a content of consciousness from its contexts, we could not know any object at all in the world'. This is a good formulation of the realist, anti-nominalist, epistemological view which Derrida, Davidson and Wittgenstein reject.

³¹ See Fish's syncretic attempt, in his 'Compliments', to reconcile Derrida with J.L. Austin. Derrida had criticized Austin in a reply to Searle's 'Reiterating' – a reply which he enlarged upon in the 'Afterword' to his *Limited, Inc.* For defences of Derrida against Searle, see Culler, *Deconstruction*, pp. 110–26 and Norris, *Turn*, pp. 13–33.

Current literary theory constitutes a sustained effort to overcome the disabling opposition between texts and their cultural contexts that attended that [New Critical] kind of critique. If there is any point of agreement among deconstructionists, structuralists, reader-response critics, pragmatists, phenomenologists, speech-act theorists, and theoretically minded humanists, it is that texts are not, after all, autonomous and self-contained, that the meaning of any text in itself depends for its comprehension on other texts and textualized frames of reference.

(*Professing*, p. 256)

From Fish's point of view, getting rid of the New Critics' 'disabling opposition' is the cash-value, the pragmatic import, of the deconstructionists' philosophification of criticism, and of the recent emergence of the sub-discipline called 'literary theory'. Fish would argue that, once rid of that opposition, there is no need to accept the de Manian claim that all close reading is a matter of rediscovering the impossibility of reading. From the point of view of the pluralism of interpretive communities which Fish advocates, that claim looks like a simple inversion of the New Critics' celebration of organic unity, just as Nietzsche's celebration of Becoming was (for Heidegger) a simple inversion of Plato's celebration of Being.

The contrast between Miller's souped-up version of de Man and Fish's relaxed and pragmatic contextualism is a contrast between a view which takes philosophy very seriously indeed and one which thinks of the dissolution of the traditional binary oppositions of metaphysics as just one more context into which literary texts may be put, one with no special privilege. As will be apparent in the following section, the same contrast can be found in the practice of deconstructive criticism. The same ambivalence between ethical urgency and relaxed pragmatism, between philosophizing as a necessary task and as an optional context, is found in both domains.

Deconstructionist criticism

The following excerpt from Gayatri Spivak's preface to her translation of Derrida's *On Grammatology* remains one of the best accounts of how deconstructors read texts:

If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being *one* word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability.

(Derrida, *On Grammatology*, p. lxxv)

An article by Miller gives a good example of the kind of reading which Spivak has in mind. In his ‘Ariachne’s broken woof’ he examines a passage from *Troilus and Cressida*, which, he claims,

brilliantly works out the implications of the division of the mind into two when the single narrative line of monologue becomes the doubled line of dialogue. When one *logos* becomes two, the circle an ellipse, all the gatherings or bindings of Western logocentrism are untied or cut.

(‘Ariachne’s broken woof’, p. 44)

Here is the passage:

Troilus: This she? no, this is *Diomids Cressida*:
 If beautie have a soule, this is not she:
 If soules guide vowes, if vowes are sanctimonie;
 If sanctimonie be the gods delight:
 If there be rule in unitie it selfe.
 This is not she: O madnesse of discourse!
 That cause sets up, with, and against thy selfe
 By foule authoritie: where reason can revolt
 Without perdition, and losse assume all reason,
 Without revolt. This is, and is not *Cressid*:
 Within my soule, there doth conduce a fight
 Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate,
 Divides more wider than the skie and earth:
 And yet the spacious bredth of this division,
 Admits no orifex for a point as subtle,
 As *Ariachnes* broken woofe to enter:
 Instance, O instance! strong as *Plutoes* gates:
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven;
 Instance, O instance, strong as heaven it selfe:
 The bonds of heaven are slipt, dissolv’d and loos’d,
 And with another knot five finger tied,
 The fractions of her faith, orts of her love:
 The fragments, scraps, the bits, and greazie reliques,
 Of her ore-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed.

(V, ii, 162–185)

Miller uses the fact that ‘Ariachne’ conflates ‘Arachne’ with ‘Ariadne’ as a clue to the way in which ‘The “whole shebang” of Occidental metaphysics is . . . brought into question in Troilus’s experience and in his speech’ (p. 47). He nicely summarizes Derrida’s criticism of logocentrism when he says ‘The possibility that language may be sourceless, baseless, not modelled on any mind divine or human, but rather coercively modelling them, appears when two different coherent languages struggle for domination within a single mind’ (p. 39).

Miller says that what Troilus has seen has as a consequence ‘the

possibility of two simultaneous contradictory sign systems centered on *Cressida* and that 'either one of these language systems alone is perfectly sane, but both together in a single mind are madness . . . defined as the impossibility of speaking either truly or falsely' (pp. 47–8). His point is that the "whole shebang" of Occidental metaphysics' is built around the 'dream of univocity' in the form of the idea of a language (perhaps only an ideal language, one which we may not yet be speaking but could in principle speak) which permits an unambiguous description of all possible states of affairs. Such a language would make it possible for empirical inquiry to decide between any pair of contradictory propositions, a process of decision which would leave no ground uncovered and no meaningful question unanswered. Miller asks us to see Shakespeare's text as exhibiting how this dream may be brought into question by *Cressida*'s apparent faithlessness, and with it the dream of, in Miller's words, 'the ethical, political and cosmic order all the way up to God' (p. 48).

Cressida's possible faithlessness opens the possibility that madness – the inability to settle, even provisionally, on a candidate for the ideal language – is not simply an aberration within an orderly system, but somehow goes all the way down to the roots of things. Miller views deconstruction as the activity of putting forward this possibility. In the concluding paragraphs of his 'Ariachne' essay he writes:

'Deconstruction' as procedure of interpreting the texts of our tradition is not simply a teasing out of the traces of that dialogical heterogeneity . . . Deconstruction rather attempts to reverse the implicit hierarchy within the terms in which the dialogical has been defined. It attempts to define the monological, the logocentric, as a derived effect of the dialogical rather than as the noble affirmation of which the dialogical is a disturbance, a secondary shadow in the originating light. Deconstruction attempts a crisscross substitution of early and late and a consequent vibratory displacement of the whole system of Western metaphysics.

(pp. 59–60)

Miller's suggestion that the effect of doubting logocentrism is to invert previous hierarchies is common among deconstructionists. But there is an obvious problem with any such suggestion. The claim that order is an epiphenomenon of disorder, sanity an epiphenomenon of madness, rational choice between unambiguous alternatives an epiphenomenon of ambiguity, preserves intact the essence–accident and reality–appearance distinctions characteristic of logocentrism. Invoking the idea of an 'epiphenomenon' (or, in Miller's words, a 'derived effect') is embarrassing to those mindful of Heidegger's warning that inverted Platonism is still Platonism.

Miller, who tends to follow de Man in the belief that close reading

of literary texts always results in a renewed discovery of 'the nothingness of human matters', remains unembarrassed. But many other deconstructionists would say that such reversals of hierarchy are not discoveries of the 'true' relations between opposed notions, but simply experiments – attempts to see what happens when things are shaken up by being turned upside down. Thus J. D. Balkin, a deconstructionist legal theorist, urges that

The point [of inverting hierarchies] is not to establish a new conceptual bedrock, but rather to investigate what happens when the given, 'common sense,' arrangement is reversed . . . Our deconstruction will show that A's privileged status is an illusion for A depends upon B as much as B depends upon A.

(‘Deconstructive practice’, pp. 746–7)

This contrast between those who see the reversal of traditional hierarchies as part of a grand philosophical strategy and those who see it as merely a temporary tactical device roughly parallels the contrast drawn earlier between de Man and Fish. Both contrasts exemplify the difference between adopting a new outlook, based on an inversion of traditional oppositions, and treating both the 'common sense' arrangement and its inversion as live options, as equally good contexts within which to place the text.

The de Manian approach exemplified by Miller's discussion of Troilus' speech is also found in an essay by Cynthia Chase on *Daniel Deronda*, 'The decomposition of the elephants.' Like Miller, Chase takes as a point of departure a line of text in which a familiar philosophical certainty seems to be questioned. Miller's example was the law of non-contradiction; Chase's is the law of causality. She sees this law questioned in a letter to Deronda from Hans Meyrick, his light-minded friend and foil, in a passage in which Meyrick makes an airy, isolated reference to 'the present causes of past effects'. Whereas 'This is, and is not Cressid' is, arguably, an epitome of Shakespeare's play, Meyrick's phrase seems merely peripheral to Eliot's novel. Yet Chase offers a reading of the novel which she says is 'proposed' by the letter of Meyrick to Deronda which contains the line in question. Chase is here being faithful to the examples of both de Man and Derrida, many of whose essays use an apparently isolated and peripheral passage as a lever to 'deconstruct' an entire text.

Meyrick writes to Deronda as follows: In return for your sketch of Italian movements and your view of the world's affairs generally, I may say that here at home the most judicious opinion going as to the effects of present causes is that 'time will show'. As to the present causes of past effects, it is now seen that the late swindling telegrams account for the last year's cattle plague – which

is a refutation of philosophy falsely so called, and justifies the compensation to the farmers.

Chase says that Meyrick's letter 'functions as a deconstruction of the novel,' that it 'proposes an interpretation of the novel that is substantially and radically at odds with the explanations of its narrator', and that it 'functions to exemplify the spirit and the style that the hero [Deronda] transcends.' ('Decomposition', pp. 157–8) Whereas Eliot presents the letter as what Chase calls 'a focus for the devaluation of ironic discourse', an invidious contrast of Meyrick's ironism with Deronda's gravity, Chase reads the letter as both a 'strikingly exact account of discursive structures' (*ibid.*, p. 160) and

a deconstruction of the narrator's story, and by implication, of story in general – both of history, with its system of assumptions about teleological and representational structures, and of discourse, with its intrinsic need to constitute meaning through sequence and reference.

(*ibid.*, p. 159)

Once again, as in Miller, 'the "whole shebang" of Occidental metaphysics' is to be brought into question, this time by bringing a seemingly accidental and optional passage to the centre of critical attention.

But whereas Miller's reading of Troilus' speech leaves the dramatic space of the play unviolated (since it does not switch back and forth between Troilus the baffled lover and Troilus the Shakespearean creation) Chase achieves her effect by seeing Deronda's adventures both as the fabric of a man's life and as Eliot's contrivances. She uses Meyrick's phrase to redescribe the 'distortion of causality which the reader senses' when Deronda's mother reveals to him the secret of his birth: 'What a reader feels . . . is that it is *because* Deronda has developed a strong affinity for Judaism that he turns out to be of Jewish birth.' Chase claims that 'Meyrick's letter . . . names what is vitally at issue: not a violation of genre conventions or of *vraisemblance* but a deconstruction of the concept of cause' (*ibid.*, p. 161). Since, as she says, 'the revelation of Deronda's origins . . . appears as an effect of narrative requirements', we can say that 'his origin is the effect of its effects' (*ibid.*, p. 162).

We can say this only if we are willing to switch back and forth between two causal series – the one described in the novel and the one which produced the novel. Chase reads Meyrick's letter as an invitation to do just that: to focus on 'the contradictory relationship between the claims of the realistic fiction and the narrative strategy actually employed' (*ibid.*, p. 163). This contradictory relationship reminds us of a perplexity which has often been discussed by philosophers of science: what counts as a causal sequence is relative to the scientists' (the narrators of such sequences) choice of terms in which to describe the entities said to belong to the

sequence. Hypotheses about causal relationships, in other words, interact with assumptions about how best to divide the flux into discrete entities. As Chase puts it, ‘attributes carry the authority of identity only insofar as they belong to a system involving causality, in which behavior is causally related to identity’. This large philosophical point – that one can construct as many causal stories as one can find terms in which to describe the heroes of such stories, and conversely – exemplifies the irony conveyed in Meyrick’s letter. Philosophy of science is, so to speak, always on the verge of irony in regard to scientific results, just as literary criticism (shuttling as it does between the viewpoint of a literary character and the viewpoint of its creator, or between both and a third viewpoint attributed to the language which the creator must use) is always on the verge of irony in regard to literary texts. More generally, philosophy, considered as the Socratic ability to question the familiar and to produce comically paradoxical inversions of it, is always on the verge of irony in regard to the products of the rest of culture. The more philosophical literary criticism becomes, the more critics realize how radical and thorough-going are the redescription and inversions offered by recent philosophers (in particular, Nietzsche and Heidegger), the more ironic its tone. Chase’s essay is typical of deconstructive criticism in being shot through with the ironic realization that thought is as malleable as language and that language is infinitely malleable, the realization that no description in language is more than a temporary resting-place, more than something to be getting on with.

Her essay is typical of a specifically de Manian kind of criticism, however, in that it mixes an ironic, Derridean, tone with intimations of human impotence. Chase elsewhere says that ‘Literary texts, as much as philosophical texts, become exemplary of the conflictual character of language, or of an “impossibility of reading” which “should not be taken too lightly”’ (*Decomposing Figures*, p. 4).³² In writing about Eliot’s novel, Chase’s own Meyrick-like wit competes with rather solemn de Manian reminders of ‘the nothingness of human matters’. For example, after she has skilfully shown that the novel ‘banishes the decisive performance [Deronda’s Zionist activity] to a fictive future beyond the story’s end,’ she concludes her paragraph by interpolating another of de Man’s despairing dicta. ‘It is implicitly acknowledged [in the novel],’ she claims, that “‘the possibility for language to perform is just as fictional as the possibility for language to assert”’ (‘Decomposition’, p. 171).³³ Here again we see the tension between the milder claim that traditional philosophical hierarchies

³² Chase is quoting from the last line of an essay by de Man on ‘The profession of faith of a savoyard vicar’ (de Man, *Allegories*, p. 245).

³³ The quotation is from de Man, *Allegories*, p. 129, where de Man is interpreting a passage from Nietzsche.

and arrangements can be twisted, stood on their heads, and put through hoops, and the stronger claim that such malleability is a sign of a terrible predicament in which human beings find themselves. This is the tension, described above in connection with the Fish–de Man opposition, between relaxed pragmatism and ethical urgency. The Meyrick–Deronda, badinage–gravity tension gets recreated within Chase’s own discussion of this tension.

The same tension turns up in a somewhat different form when deconstructionists attempt to reply to the frequent complaint that deconstructionist criticism is mechanical and monotonous.³⁴ According to this complaint, *every* deconstructionist reading of *every* literary text once again brings in King Charles’ head: ‘the “whole shebang” of Occidental metaphysics’. The deconstructionists’ laborious inversions of hierarchical binary oppositions has by now, it is often said, become as tedious as are the Freudians’ coy revelations of covert bisexuality. Deconstructive criticism has turned out, on this view, to be just one more variety of thematic criticism, one which borrows its themes from Heidegger rather than from Freud.

In reply to such complaints, Jonathan Culler has said (in what remains perhaps the most thoughtful account of the consequences of deconstructionist theory for practical criticism), that ‘deconstructive criticism is not the application of philosophical lessons to literary studies, but an exploration of textual logic in texts called literary’ (*On Deconstruction*, p. 212).³⁵ From Culler’s point of view, those who appropriate a Saussurian–Wittgensteinian view of language as Fish does, in a spirit of relaxed pragmatism, are missing the point. It is a mistake to view Derrida’s and Heidegger’s concern with the metaphysics of presence as like Marx’s concern with class struggle and Freud’s with sexuality, merely supplying one more context within which it may prove fruitful to place this or that literary text. For Culler, as for Spivak in the passage cited above, deconstruction is not just an optional context but a way of getting at what is really going on. Deconstruction takes you inside the text, in a way that Marxist or Freudian criticism does not.

This claim opens up the same can of philosophical worms as does the realist–instrumentalist debate among philosophers of science. This debate is about whether the scientist discovers something that was already out there in the world waiting to be discovered, or whether she simply

³⁴ See de Man, *Resistance*, p. 19: ‘Technically correct rhetorical readings may be boring, monotonous, predictable and unpleasant, but they are irrefutable.’ Critics of de Man are troubled by the question of what the ‘refutation’ of a *reading* might be, and thus of how ‘irrefutability’ can be relevant.

³⁵ See also *On Deconstruction*, p. 212, where Culler distinguishes between ‘the study of themes’ and ‘the study of structures or textual logics’.

gives us one more useful way of describing the world, useful for certain particular purposes. Analogously, Culler makes us ask whether what the deconstructionist critic calls 'the logic of the text' is something which was there in the text waiting to be winkled out, or is instead just a good way of describing the text for certain critical purposes. Pragmatists like Fish will wave this issue aside as merely 'metaphysical', as a difference which makes no difference. They will say that the proof of a critical essay is the fulfillment of the critic's purposes. But Culler needs to take the issue seriously. It is important for him to insist that 'Texts thematize, with varying degrees of explicitness, interpretive operations and their consequences and thus represent in advance the dramas that will give life to the tradition of their interpretation', and to distinguish readings of the text from the text itself (*On Deconstruction*, pp. 214–5). To keep this latter distinction intact, Culler needs to claim that the text has 'through the power of its marginal elements' an ability to 'subvert' previous readings. He has to claim that the critic does some finding as well as some making, and that neither the finding–making nor the text–reading distinction can simply be waved aside in the name of pragmatic open-mindedness.

But, as Searle ('World', p. 77) and others enjoy pointing out, deconstructive technique is a universal solvent of essence–accident and substance–relation distinctions, and is no respecter of those used by the deconstructionists themselves. So it is not clear how Culler could argue for the claim that there really is a 'logic' already in the text, waiting for deconstructive critics to detect it. In the last pages of *On Deconstruction*, however, Culler suggests that he would not try – that at a certain point faith must substitute for argument. Glossing a passage from de Man which says of Shelley's poem that '*The Triumph of Life* warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere' Culler says that he

cannot even imagine how a critic would argue for . . . the claim that nothing ever happens in any relation to anything that precedes, follows or exists elsewhere, and one is led to suspect that a certain faith in the text and the truth of its most fundamental and surprising implications is the blindness that makes possible the insights of deconstructive criticism, or the methodological necessity that cannot be justified, but is tolerated for the power of its results.

(*On Deconstruction*, p. 280)

When Culler speaks of 'results', however, he does not refer to the ability of deconstructive criticism to shed light on individual texts *qua* individual. He explicitly repudiates the assumption that such an ability is the test of a critical practice. He acknowledges that

Readers who have assumed, on the American model, that the goal of deconstruction is to illuminate individual works, have found it wanting

in numerous ways. They complain, for example, of a certain monotony: deconstruction makes everything appear the same. Derrida and his cohorts do not, indeed, seem committed to identifying the distinctiveness of each work (or even its distinctive uncanniness) as becomes an interpreter.

(*ibid.*, p. 220)

But, he rejoins, 'one needs to dispute the assumption that opposes science to interpretation . . . and assimilates any critique of science to the interpretive celebration of particularity' (*ibid.*, p. 222).

So the 'results' by reference to whose power Culler asks us to judge deconstructive criticism consist neither in the establishment of quasi-scientific philosophical truths nor in what he calls 'enriching elucidations of individual works' (*ibid.*, p. 221). Rather, these results consist in the critic's experience of continual self-renewal through the continual overcoming of previously adopted frameworks of interpretation – the revelation of the blindness which gave rise to an old insight, followed by a new insight made possible by a new blindness, and so on forever. The 'results' of deconstructive criticism thus do not, on Culler's view, consist in a canon of 'definitive' readings of texts, but in the ability to take part in a practice which continually evades the possibility of definiteness. Such criticism is not a matter of substituting philosophy for literature, nor of applying philosophy to literature, but of engaging in a kind of activity to which the traditional philosophy–literature distinction, like the traditional generality–particularity distinction, can no longer usefully be applied.

Culler's account of deconstructive criticism makes clear how *radical* the claims of such criticism are, and how radical they need to be in order to meet the standard criticisms (of arbitrariness, monotony, and so on) brought against it. The activity which Culler describes is not something which will submit to judgement from outside itself, any more than political revolutionaries will submit to criticism phrased in the terms favoured by the society they hope to transform. This analogy with political movements is reinforced by the fact that many (perhaps most) deconstructive critics think of themselves as pursuing an activity which has a political point. They think of their critical practice as continuous with a political practice. The strength and vitality of the deconstructionist movement cannot be understood without an understanding of its political ambitions.³⁶

³⁶ See Culler, *Framing*, p. xiii on 'the desire to make criticism political', p. 21 on the failure of 'the New Historicism' (a movement often touted as a successor to deconstruction) to 'develop a convincing program for a politically emancipatory criticism', and p. 55 on the 'new pragmatism' (of Fish, Rorty, Knapp, Michaels, and others) as 'a way of protecting a dominant ideology' and as 'altogether appropriate to the Age of Reagan'. For scepticism about Culler's strategy, see Kermode, 'Prologue,' in *Appetite*, pp. 1–46.

Deconstruction and radical politics

At the end of his *The Order of Things* Foucault brings together a sense of the imminence of radical political and social transformation with that of an imminent replacement of man by language. He suggests the possibility that 'man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon' (p. 386). This suggestion, made from the political left, chimes with Heidegger's earlier suggestion, made from the political right, that 'humanism' is the best name for the terminal stage of the metaphysics of presence – the last gasp of a way of understanding Being that has now exhausted its resources, the way which has construed language as a tool in human beings' hands, an instrument subject to their will.³⁷ In a brilliant commentary on Heidegger's 'Letter on humanism' called 'The ends of Man', Derrida joins Heidegger in urging 'the necessity for a "change of terrain"', but goes on to say that Heidegger's way of getting beyond 'man' will not work. What is needed instead, Derrida says, is a 'change of "style"', one which would 'speak several languages and produce several texts at once' (*Margins*, p. 135). All three of these philosophers urge, though from different motives, that *language* is a phenomenon which cannot be subsumed under the concept 'man'. One should not, they argue, think of language, with such writers as Searle, Fish and Davidson, as simply a matter of human beings using marks and noises to achieve purposes.³⁸ All three hint that the realization that language somehow 'exceeds man' will open up new socio-political possibilities.

The present close association between radical politics and deconstructive literary criticism is the principal effect of this attempt by philosophers to put language in the place formerly occupied by man. In Britain and America, the literature departments of the universities, made up of people who take themselves to have special expertise about language, have taken the lead over the social science departments as hotbeds of leftist thinking and as staging areas for radical political initiatives. Those who practise deconstructive criticism typically see themselves as taking part in an activity which has much more to do with political change than with the 'understanding' (much less the 'appreciation') of what has traditionally been called 'literature'.

³⁷ Note Heidegger's claim that 'every humanism remains metaphysical' ('Letter on humanism', p. 202), as well as his remarks on Sartre, Nietzsche and Marx (p. 215). See also p. 197 for his account of the bad, humanistic, pragmatic, conception of language and p. 193 for his opposed conception of language as 'the house of Being'.

³⁸ One consequence of this repudiation of pragmatism is that, as Derrida has recently put it, 'there can be no rigorous analogy between a scientific theory, no matter which, and a theory of language . . .' (*Limited Inc*, p. 118). This is the point at which Davidson would break away from Derrida.

The latter term has traditionally borne a humanistic sense, one which presupposes that 'great' poems and novels are repositories of enduring moral truths which correspond to something essential in human beings as such, regardless of their historical epoch or their linguistic repertoire. By contrast, deconstructionists wish to replace this sense with de Man's description of 'literature' as 'the persistent naming of a void,' the perpetual discovery of the blindness which made previous insight possible, and of the new blindness which made it possible to cure the old. Literature ceases to be a place where the perturbed spirit can find rest and inspiration, where human beings can go to find their own deepest nature manifested, but rather an incitement to a new sort of perpetually self-destabilizing activity. Deconstructionists hope that such activity, carried over into politics, might succeed in overcoming the blindness of the bourgeois democracies to the cruelty and injustice of their institutions.

The claim that 'close reading' is of great political utility is taken for granted by most deconstructionists. So is the claim that the chief function of literature departments is to be politically useful by helping students set aside received ideas, the metaphysical ideas presupposed by 'humanistic' ways of reading the traditional literary canon. Deconstructionists have sometimes been accused by those who (like Frank Lentricchia) prefer Foucault to Derrida of political irrelevance at best and political conservatism at worst.³⁹ In an interview given the year before his death, de Man defended himself against such charges by saying that 'I have always maintained that one could approach the problems of ideology and by extension the problems of politics only on the basis of critical-linguistic analysis' ('Resistance', p. 121). A similar claim is made by many of de Man's admirers⁴⁰, who urge that deconstruction provides (appearances perhaps to the contrary) a way in which teachers of literature can be what Foucault called 'specific intellectuals' – people who are employing their special expertise to do political work.⁴¹

The wide currency of the idea that the study of the workings of language (rather than of, say, the mechanisms of monopoly capitalism and the role

³⁹ For Lentricchia's doubts about the political utility of de Manian criticism, see *After*, chapter 8 and *Criticism*, pp. 1–83.

⁴⁰ Notably Norris. See his *De Man*, especially chapters 5–6, for an exposition of the contrast between the political disillusion displayed in de Man's early and middle periods and the political concern of his last period.

⁴¹ See Lentricchia, *Criticism*, p. 6:

My focus is on the university humanist, because I think that his and her position as a social and political actor has been cynically underrated and ignored by the right, left and center. By 'intellectual' . . . I refer to the *specific intellectual* described by Foucault – one whose radical work of transformation, whose fight against repression is carried on at the specific institutional site where he finds himself and on the terms of his own expertise . . .

of the state as 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie') opens up new possibilities for radical politics can practically be explained by the waning influence of Marxism on the one hand and by the rise of feminism on the other. From Foucault's perspective, Marxism is just one more species of an out-dated humanism. In the later writings of Jean-François Lyotard, an influential French philosopher and social critic, Marxism appears as one of the great 'meta-narratives' about 'humanity' and 'human history'. After Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault, Lyotard thinks, we can no longer bring ourselves to believe such stories (see his *The Post-Modern Condition*). Although some writers – notably Michael Ryan⁴² – have attempted to reconcile Marxism with deconstructionism, most of those who practise deconstructive criticism see themselves as moving into an intellectual world as far from Marx's as from Rousseau's or Condorcet's. Foucault, Derrida and de Man have taken on the roles in the intellectual lives of contemporary English-speaking political radicals which, fifty years ago, were played by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.⁴³

This shift has been accelerated by the realization, by feminists, that the masculinism characteristic of Western moral and political vocabularies is as much a feature of Marxism as of Marxism's Enlightenment precursors. Feminists have been quick to appropriate Derrida's suggestion that the 'logocentrism' of the 'Western metaphysics of presence' can also be

On the following page Lentricchia says that academics who merely organize teach-ins, sit-ins, strikes, etc., instead of bringing their politics into their classrooms and their writing, 'are being crushed by feelings of guilt and occupational alienation'. For Lentricchia's strictures against de Man's notion of 'blindness and insight', as leading to political conservatism, see pp. 49–50, 63–4.

⁴² Ryan's *Marxism and Deconstruction* argues that 'deconstruction can provide the principles necessary for a radical critique of capitalist-patriarchal institutions that is not merely oppositional but undermines from within the legitimating grounds for those institutions' (p. 43). He holds that 'Ideology [defined as "the set of ideas and practices which reproduce class rule"] as the dominant paradigm of the bourgeois social and hard sciences often depends on precisely the sorts of things deconstruction questions' (p. 38). For doubts about such reconciliatory efforts as Ryan's see Louis Mackey's remarks in a symposium on 'Marxism and Deconstruction' in Davis and Schleifer, *Rhetoric and Form*, pp. 75–97. For further reflections on the topic, see articles by Terry Eagleton and others in Mohanty (ed.), *Marx after Derrida*. Some Marxists (especially in Britain) have attempted to use the work of Louis Althusser as a bridge between more traditional Marxism and deconstruction. Derrida himself has not yet written at length on Marx or Marxism; see, however, *Positions*, pp. 56–80 for some passages which touch on Marx, Lenin and Althusser.

⁴³ For a discussion of the ethical-political dimension of Derrida's thought, see Bernstein, 'Serious play'. For a sample of Derrida on politics, see his 'Racism's last word', as well as his surprising claim ('But beyond . . .', p. 168) that 'deconstructive practices are also and first of all political and institutional practices'. In his recent work Derrida has extended the sense of 'deconstructive practice' in such a way that deconstructive reading of written texts is only one species of a genus. But the character of this genus remains obscure. For scepticism about the relevance of deconstruction to politics, see McCarthy, 'Margins'.

thought of as its 'phallocentrism'.⁴⁴ The idea that people with phalluses are more rational, more logical, than those without, and therefore deserve their superior power, is built into the metaphors central to Western metaphysics ('penetrating through the veil of appearances', 'truth even unto its innermost parts', and the like). The metaphors of rationalism and humanism, feminists have shown, are permeated by sexual imagery: imagery in which reason is modelled on the phallus (something thrusting, rigid, rigorous, ideally straight) whereas that which reason masters is modelled on a male image of the female sexual organs (tangled, confused, in need of organization, of being straightened out).⁴⁵ Feminist readings of canonical texts in philosophy and literature have supplied the most persuasive evidence for the claim that deconstructive criticism can bring to light a hidden 'logic' of power and domination, one which must be exposed as a precondition to effective political action.⁴⁶

This brief survey of the relation of deconstructionism to political radicalism perhaps suffices to suggest why Culler is able to set aside the question of how to verify de Man's claims, and can instead appeal to the experience of the *activity* of deconstructive criticism, an activity felt to be inseparable from a political outlook. It may also show why deconstructionists often find politically suspect the relaxed pragmatism of Fish and others who, though equally critical of traditional 'humanist' literary criticism, are not prepared to accept the de Manian notion of 'the logic of the text', nor his claim that reading is an endless process of self-subversion.

To repeat an earlier point: deconstructionism is a movement far broader than literary criticism. The term 'deconstruction', in its largest extension, now serves as a gesture in the direction of a groundswell of suspicion of and impatience with the status quo among the intellectuals. The term 'socialism' served as a gesture toward an earlier groundswell. Just as it would be have been a mistake to characterize this earlier groundswell simply as agreement with those economists who suggested nationalizing the means of production, so it would be a mistake to characterize the present groundswell simply as agreement with those philosophers who urge us to drop the appearance–reality distinction. These philosophers are, as those economists were, simply one rallying point among others for an amorphous movement. Deconstructive literary criticism is only one manifestation of an ongoing, subtle, profound change in the self-image of Western intellectuals.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Derrida, *Margins*, p. xxv. See also the use of sexual imagery in the title essay of *Dissemination*.

⁴⁵ See Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*.

⁴⁶ For critical discussion of the relation between feminism, deconstruction, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, see Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, especially the essays called 'Feminism and critical theory' and 'French feminism in an international frame'.

STRUCTURALIST AND POST- STRUCTURALIST PSYCHOANALYTIC AND MARXIST THEORIES

One of the more evident manifestations of the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism is the process whereby a fairly unified methodology has dispersed into a plurality of theoretical approaches. Within this diversity Marxism and psychoanalysis are, along with deconstructionism, the two most important strands. Both are concerned to challenge the idealist conception of the subject – i.e., the subject as centred in itself, essentially conscious and ‘free’ in the sense that it pre-exists social or other determinations. Structuralism itself of course also rejects such a conception of the subject, and in its insistence on the determining role of language-like structures provides a basis for a materialist theory of subjectivity. But the Saussurean view of the sign in practice reinstates a different form of idealism, as Coward and Ellis argue in their *Language and Materialism*; a genuinely materialist account of the subject has to break out of the confines of a ‘pure’ linguistics-based structuralism, and the Marxist and psychoanalytic perspectives are above all ways of doing this. Conversely, however, structuralism has undoubtedly forced Marxism and psychoanalysis to rethink some of their basic tenets in a rigorous and productive way; as Robert Young puts it in his introduction to *Untying the Text*, poststructuralism would not have been possible without structuralism. Specifically, the theoretical developments that Lacan has introduced into psychoanalysis and Althusser into Marxism are both heavily influenced by, and extremely critical of, structuralism. Lacan and Althusser are the principal figures in question here, and both develop an anti-humanist conception of the subject determined by the unconscious and/or by ideology. These issues go far beyond the practice of literary criticism, but they have opened up a new kind of access to the literary text, and generated a substantial body of critical readings.

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and its relevance to literature

Lacan’s work on psychoanalysis, published as *Écrits* and the many volumes of his ‘Séminaire’, has acquired a reputation for impenetrable obscurity.

Lacan's theoretical constructs do not fit easily into the categories of conventional logic, which require clear unambiguous definitions, consistency of argument, and a commonsensical view of time and space, cause and effect. The fact that Lacan defies these prescriptions makes it almost impossible to summarize his work; and rather than attempt to produce a complete outline of it, I will concentrate here on his main innovation in psychoanalytic theory: namely, the idea that the human psyche is determined by the structures of language.

It is in the first place because of this notion that Lacan can be called a structuralist. The emphasis on the role of language as constitutive of subjectivity, and of subjectivity as a question of structural relations and transformations rather than a substantive entity, remains constant throughout the evolution of his thought. However, Lacan diverges from structuralism in its classical forms, partly because his early work on the function of the *image* in the development of the self provides a continuing counterpoint to the determinations imposed by language, and partly because other intellectual systems such as Hegelian dialectics and phenomenology are also brought to bear on his reconstruction of psychoanalytic theory and practice. Nevertheless, his central concern remains that of the subject's relation to language – which is why his work has aroused such interest among literary critics.

In 1953, at a psychoanalytic conference in Rome, he gave a paper (usually known as the 'Rome speech') outlining his dissident position *vis-à-vis* orthodox psychoanalysis and putting forward for the first time his theses on the centrality of language. Language is to be understood here both in the ordinary sense of verbal communication – particularly, for him, as this occurs between analyst and patient – and in the broader structuralist sense of Lévi-Strauss' 'symbolic function'. In the Rome speech, Lacan uses a very Lévi-Straussian notion of the unconscious; later, as we shall see, this evolves rather differently. He also follows Lévi-Strauss in appropriating the concepts of structural linguistics for use in another field – in his case, that of psychoanalysis. Here too, however, the original ideas undergo considerable re-working. The three linguists he draws on are Saussure, Jakobson and Benveniste (on structuralist theories, see chs. 2–4). From Saussure's theory of the sign (see above, pp. 58–66) he takes the idea that the signified, as its name suggests, is simply that which is signified, and has no existence independently of its signifier; language does not attach labels to a series of predefined discrete entities, but carves up an undifferentiated field of perception, experience, etc., by means of the articulations introduced by signs. Secondly, Jakobson provides two further basic methodological tools from structural linguistics – the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes. He has theorized these two major and opposing dimensions of language structure in rhetorical terms: the figure of metonymy, which associates elements on

the basis of contiguity, is essentially syntagmatic, because the two items are co-present, whereas metaphor is a substitution of one thing for another and therefore paradigmatic (Jakobson, *Two Aspects*).

Thirdly, the work of Benveniste on the place of the subject in language,¹ which has had considerable influence on the structuralist literary theory of Todorov, for instance, is also of relevance to Lacan. Benveniste argues that language is not a *self-contained* structure external to the subject which the subject merely uses. He demonstrates this by showing that certain features of language cannot be defined except by reference to the speech act in which they occur. For example, 'I' and 'you' have no fixed dictionary meaning, but 'mean' whoever is speaking and listening in any given instance. Thus Benveniste is led to argue that language and subjectivity are fully interdependent and inseparable: the very structure of language depends on the implication of the subject in it, and conversely there is no subjectivity without the ability to *say* 'I'. However, when I say 'I', there are obviously two instances of the *I* in question, and this gives rise to another pair of theoretical terms: the speaking 'I' is the 'subject of the enunciation' and the spoken 'I' (the linguistic sign, actually present in the utterance) is the 'subject of the statement' (*énoncé*).

Lacan's description of the subject's position in language weaves together these three insights and in so doing transforms them into something significantly different. For instance, whereas Saussure's main point was the *union* of signifier and signified in the sign – he compared them to the two sides of a sheet of paper – Lacan stresses their *separation*. His formula for the sign is: S/s with the 'bar' symbolizing the way in which the dominant signifier is cut off from the signified underneath it. That is, the signifier does not connect directly with its signified: meaning is not a simple matching of one vocal, graphic, etc., form with one concept; and this disconnection leads to an asymmetrical relation between the two – the *primacy* of signifier over signified. In other words the signifier, which alone has any material existence, dominates the far more shadowy and elusive signified: Saussure's interdependence has become a one-way dependence, because while for Lacan it is still – in fact even more – impossible to conceive of a signified on its own, he argues that we are constantly confronting signifiers on their own; either in the sense that we do not know *what* they signify, as with the child acquiring a first language, or because we may not even recognize that they *are* signifiers, as in the case of psychosomatic symptoms, for instance.

Cut off from the signified, the signifier is however necessarily connected

¹ See his articles 'Les relations de temps dans le verbe français', 'La nature des pronoms', and 'De la subjectivité dans le langage', which form chapters 19, 20 and 21 of *Problèmes de linguistique générale*.

to and interdependent with other signifiers. Here Lacan takes up Saussure's notion and recasts it as what he calls the 'signifying chain': one signifier inevitably leads to another. Lacan is not primarily referring here to the way words combine syntactically to make up a sentence; the relations in question are those of semantic association, and of interpretation (in the sense that the meaning of one word is just another word, as in a dictionary definition). A good example would be the way in which images in a dream or a poem may be juxtaposed, or replace each other, on the basis of some kind of similarity. More precisely, the relations between signifiers in the chain are all either *metonymic* or *metaphorical*, in the enlarged sense that Jakobson has given these terms. That is, the chain either moves syntagmatically *from* one signifier *to* another related one (metonymy), or it operates paradigmatically, putting one signifier *in the place of* another (metaphor). These quasi-rhetorical trajectories bring into play language's permanent tendency to mean *something else*: 'What this structure of the signifying chain discloses', Lacan says, 'is the possibility I have . . . to use it in order to signify *something quite other* than what it says' (*Ecrits*, p. 155, italics in original).² He defines metonymy and metaphor as the two 'slopes' of language, down which the signified 'slides', under the signifying chain – an 'incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (p. 154) which can only be pinned down very provisionally and approximately. The signifying chain thus focuses on the 'endlessness' of meaning, which results from the chain as a whole rather than any particular unit within it: as Lacan says, 'it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning "insists" but . . . none of its elements "consists" in the signification of which it is at the moment capable' (p. 153).³ Meaning is best thought of as this kind of 'insistence', as pressure and trajectory, rather than a finite link between two terms.

Jakobson himself had already compared the two axes of metaphor and metonymy with the psychoanalytic concepts of *displacement* and *condensation* which Freud saw as the two major unconscious mechanisms at work in the production of dream images (*Two Aspects*, p. 72); and it will be clear from the above description that Lacan's signifying chain refers above all to the production of meaning in the *unconscious*: 'language', for him, is first and foremost the language-like processes of the unconscious. Thus, for instance, the 'bar' under which the signified 'slides' symbolizes the

² Quotations and page references from Lacan are taken from Alan Sheridan's English translation of *Ecrits* (*Ecrits: A Selection*) unless otherwise stated. Where the original wording is important, I have given the French text in a note, with page reference to the original edition of *Ecrits*.

³ 'l'on peut dire que c'est dans la chaîne signifiante que le sens *insiste*, mais qu'aucun des éléments de la chaîne ne *consiste* dans la signification dont il est capable au moment même' (p. 502, italics in original).

repression of thoughts and desires that are refused access to consciousness; and in this perspective its constant slippage, its ungraspable quality, becomes more comprehensible. Although Lacan is not talking about the same sort of language as is structural linguistics, the very importance accorded to the unconscious means that its effects cannot be confined to particular areas of human behaviour; it pervades everything we do, *including* the elaboration of theories about language. Thus one crucial difference between Lacan and theoretical linguists is that he challenges the notion of a scientific metalanguage – of a discourse founded on the claim that it can adequately *explain* another, less ‘intelligent’ discourse. Structural linguistics is precisely a metalanguage which takes natural languages as its object; and psychoanalysis might be thought to be a metalanguage studying the language of the unconscious. But for Lacan, all varieties of language are equal because all are equally determined by the unconscious; no one discourse has mastery over any other. (It follows, of course, that the metalanguage of literary critics is also unable to ‘master’ the language of literature.)

Thus the central issue of the subject’s relation to language returns us to the question of the unconscious. One of Lacan’s most famous pronouncements is that *the unconscious is structured like a language*; we are perhaps now in a position to see more clearly what this means. All the fragments of repressed material – desires, memories, etc. – while they may be completely non-verbal, are nevertheless *signifiers*, linked together, metonymically or metaphorically, in a signifying chain which sends fragmentary and distorted messages to the conscious mind. As that part of ourselves to which we have no access, and which thus remains essentially *other* to us, the unconscious (or, in Lacan’s terminology, the Other) speaks to us through symptoms (which he compares to metaphors), through the breaks and flaws in our conscious speech and behaviour. It is the subject’s discourse, but he receives it as though it came from somewhere else. Evidence of this can be found in the feeling that our dreams are ‘trying to tell us something’, or in the fact that our own jokes can make us laugh with the same sense of surprise as other people’s jokes do. All of this is a further indication that we are not masters of our own discourse, because: ‘The unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse’ (p. 49).

The stress here on the ‘transindividual’ dimension of the unconscious again recalls Lévi-Strauss’ conception of it. But Lacan sees both the subject and the unconscious as more dynamic constructs, and is far more concerned than Lévi-Strauss with the *process of their production*. This emphasis also adds a quasi-literary dimension to his theory; his account of the construction of the subject in language has itself, in its archetypal

version, a certain ‘narrative’ form: it is the *story* of the causation of the subject, and Lacan does not miss an opportunity to point out its fictional and dramatic dimensions. The story has two moments of climax and/or crisis (although it must be stressed that in the life of any individual, these are not once-and-for-all events, but constantly recur in one form or another): the ‘mirror stage’ and the ‘entry into the Symbolic order’.

The theory of the mirror stage, put forward in an important early paper in 1949, is rooted in Freud’s observation that the ego develops out of narcissism. Prior to this, the infant experiences himself as a fluid amalgam of drives, of good and bad feelings, lacking both unity and separateness, undifferentiated from the world around him and in particular from the mother’s body. The moment at which he realizes that his image in the mirror is in fact ‘himself’ literally transforms him: for the first time, he sees himself as it were from the outside, as a *totality*, a distinct, stable entity – and he reacts, Lacan says, with ‘jubilation’. This narcissistic identification with the image is what constitutes the ego, and it underlines the importance of vision in the child’s development. But in identifying with the mirror image, which is not only gratifyingly separate from the world around it but inevitably also separate from him as subject, he is basing his identity on a fantasy – or, as Lacan also says, situating it ‘in a *fictional* direction’ (p. 2, my italics);⁴ and the ego is thus constitutionally alienated from the subject. Also, the perfect couple formed by subject and image provides a misleading model for other dual relationships and especially the child’s relation to his mother. The mirror stage inaugurates the Imaginary Order – that continuing dimension of the subject’s existence which is bound up with the ego, the mother, alienating identifications of all kinds, and a preponderantly *visual* mode of experience.

The second crucial point in the story of the subject has far more the character of a crisis. Whereas the mirror stage was pre-linguistic and pre-Oedipal, the entry into the Symbolic order occurs at the point of coincidence of the child’s learning to speak and the father’s intervention in the couple formed by child and mother. The term ‘Symbolic order’ is first used in the Rome speech (e.g. p. 64) to define, in Lévi-Straussian fashion, the pre-existing transindividual matrix of signification on which man is fundamentally dependent. (It is to be distinguished not only from the Imaginary but also the third order of the ‘Real’, i.e., that which for the subject always remains out of reach, which resists Imaginary capture and Symbolic articulation.) The Symbolic order governs all forms of social organization – hence Lacan also refers to it as the ‘primordial Law’ (p. 66) – and intervenes, as a mediating third term, in all relations between individuals. It centres on the incest taboo, and is necessarily identical

⁴ ‘dans une ligne de fiction’ (p. 94).

with the order of the signifier, since without the possibility of *naming* relationships, a kinship system would also be impossible: language system and kinship system are interdependent and interchangeable. This allows Lacan to argue further that the Oedipus complex is not a purely personal affair: it marks the extent of the subject's experience of a social structuring, a social 'law'. The prohibition, in other words, is merely *represented* in the individual figure of the child's actual father; it is essentially a Symbolic relation and as such works through the father as 'name', as metaphor for the Law itself. (This reformulation enables Lacan to avoid the criticism often levelled at Freud's Oedipus complex as being too narrowly defined in terms of European patriarchal family structures; the 'paternal metaphor' can for instance be assumed by the tribal ancestors instead.)

The Symbolic order is thus the matrix of social meaning that every human being is born into, but without at first realizing it. Lacan calls it 'the Other', thus posing somewhat provocatively the question of its relation to the individual unconscious, which is also 'the Other'; but this problem requires us first of all to look in more detail at the notion of 'entry into' it. It pre-exists the child, who, even before birth, already has a particular position in the family, probably a name, and so on. The child has to *assume* this position, in speech (for example, children refer to themselves by their name, i.e. from the point of view of other people in the family, before they start using first-person pronouns) and behaviour (for example, giving way to the father's prior claims on the mother). In other words, the child as subject is produced in and by the domain of the signifier: the signifier is cause, and the subject is effect: the subject is 'subject to' the signifier. It is therefore a *materialist* account of the subject, who, far from being an autonomous self-generating spirit, is produced by the material agency of the signifier – constituted *by* his insertion *into* the Symbolic order.

This process of insertion/constitution, coinciding and in some sense identical with the Oedipal stage, is also a process of *division*. The subject now appears in the signifying chain as a signifier but *not* as a 'being': just as the ego was formed by alienation in an image, so now the subject is formed through its alienation as a signifier. This 'originating division of the subject'⁵ is modelled on the split between subject of the statement and subject of the enunciation, as formulated by Benveniste. The former is the

⁵ Lacan defines it as: 'Le signifiant se produisant au lieu de l'Autre non encore repéré, y fait surgir le sujet de l'être qui n'a pas encore la parole, mais c'est au prix de le figer' (*Écrits*, p. 840). This is from 'Position de l'inconscient', the key text for this difficult concept, but not included in Sheridan's translation. Stephen Heath, in *Questions of Cinema*, translates it as: 'The signifier occurring in the place of the Other not yet grasped has the subject emerge there from the being as yet without speech, but at the price of fixing it' (p. 81).

subject as signifier, occurring in the signifying chain, hence the subject as 'spoken' (by himself and others); but what is always left over and left out from the chain is the subject as 'speaking', as subject of enunciation. The two exist on different planes and are, as Lacan puts it 'radically ex-centric' to each other: 'What *there was* there ready to speak . . . disappears from being now only a signifier'.⁶ Since he, unlike Benveniste, ties this in with the Oedipal stage and hence the fear of castration, the insertion/division is seen as a mutilation and the creation of a lack: so the subject's position in language is *confictual* in a way that it is not for Benveniste.⁷

Before the split caused by the entry into the Symbolic there is no unconscious: 'The unconscious is a concept forged on the trace of what operates to constitute the subject.'⁸ Lacan takes up Freud's concept of primary repression – i.e. that the unconscious is created with the original Oedipal repression of the desire for the mother – and translates it into the terms of Symbolic order, and hence of a subject split between meaning and being, between statement and enunciation. Having recognized that the unconscious is structured like a language, he asks: what sort of subject can be conceived for it? – and answers that it is the subject of the enunciation, which is not present in the statement, but which the statement 'points to' insofar as it contains certain traces of its 'instance' – variously translated as either 'insistence' or 'agency'. In other words, the process of insertion into the signifying chain causes the split into the *conscious* subject of the statement, 'signified' in it, and the subject of the enunciation which 'falls beneath' it and is thus *unconscious*.

The dominant terms for the existence of the subject-in-division are not, however, as static as this simplified model might suggest – they are those of a pulsation, an eclipse or 'fading', a 'vacillation' between signifying and being: 'an enunciation whose being trembles with the vacillation that comes back to it from its own statement' (p. 300); 'in between this extinguishing that still gleams and this birth that falters, "I" can come to be in disappearing from what I say' (*ibid.*).⁹ The subject is not an object which splits into two parts: it is a process structured by the constant alternation of two incompatible positions. Thus what is meant by 'division' is *not* (to caricature the version given by some commentators) that half the subject

⁶ Heath's translation, *ibid.*

⁷ Anika Lemaire gives a usefully concise formulation of this: 'L'insertion du sujet, à travers l'Oedipe, dans l'ordre symbolique qui sous-tend l'organisation sociale, est simultanée à une division entre le je d'existence et le je de sens' (p. 157). ('The subject's insertion, through the Oedipal phase, into the Symbolic order which underpins social organization, is simultaneous with the division into the I of existence and the I of meaning', my translation.)

⁸ Heath's translation, p. 77; *Écrits*, p. 830.

⁹ My translation. The original is: 'entre cette extinction qui luit encore et cette éclosion qui achoppe, Je peut venir à l'être de disparaître de mon dit' (p. 801).

goes underground to get away from the signifier.¹⁰ The Symbolic and the unconscious are not opposed – the unconscious, too, is a structure of signifiers, and this is perhaps why they are both called the Other. More precisely, the unconscious is further defined as ‘the discourse of the Other’: if we take the Other here to be the Symbolic, we can understand this as the unconscious being the place from (or in, or through) which the Symbolic order – i.e. the social order, based on repression of desire – ‘talks’ to the subject.

Equally, though, Symbolic order and unconscious are not the same, as some over-structuralist interpretations imply.¹¹ The *entry into* the Symbolic, which pre-exists the subject, *produces* the unconscious, which does not; the subject’s relation with language is thus a ‘drama’ – ‘the drama of the subject in language’ (*Écrits*, p. 655). (It is in fact Lacan’s recurring emphasis on the notions of splitting, separation and conflict that mark his difference from the structuralist thinkers whose concepts he takes over – Saussure and Benveniste, as we have seen, but also Lévi-Strauss.) The unconscious is ultimately conceivable only as the reality of the division: in ‘Position de l’inconscient’ Lacan refers to it as an ‘edge’ and a ‘break’. There are the two domains of subject and Other, and ‘The unconscious is the act of the break between them’.¹² The subject of the unconscious – ‘being’ rather than signifier – flickers into life in those moments when the edge breaks open, but only to be eclipsed – to fade – as it closes again and the chain of signifiers re-forms over the gap.

The subject of the unconscious is above all the *desiring* subject: desire, in a process parallel to the constitution of the subject, is split off both from physical need and from linguistically formulated demands. It is the ‘unconscious residue’ of the demand, and thus inextricably – but conflictually – linked with signification: the signifier imposes its structure on desire, but desire is equally a force emerging in the ‘intervals’ of the signifying chain and propelling it onwards. The irremediable loss of the original object – the mother’s breast or, even further back, the placenta – generates a metonymic movement from one substitute object to another: always going further ahead but also always attempting to *return* to the original memory of satisfaction. Lacan’s Hegelianism comes across strongly in his account of desire as desire for recognition by another

¹⁰ Lacan translates Freud’s ‘Spaltung’ (split) as ‘alienation’, which has been interpreted over-humanistically by critics such as Fredric Jameson, leading him to talk about the ‘real subject’ being ‘driven underground’ (‘Imaginary and Symbolic’, p. 361), and so on.

¹¹ Muller and Richardson, for instance, give this impression when they say ‘This Other, of course, we take to be the unconscious, inasmuch as it “is structured in the most radical way like a language” (*Écrits: A Selection* p. 234) – a structure synonymous with the symbolic order that “pre-exists the infantile subject”’ (*Lacan and Language*, p. 269).

¹² ‘L’inconscient est entre eux leur coupure en acte’ (p. 839).

subject; one consequence of this is that the *gaze* of the other person – which always escapes the subject – is an important object of desire.¹³

The role of literature in Lacan's work is both important and diverse. In the first place, his insistence on the play of the signifier governs his relationship to the founding texts of psychoanalysis: he reads Freud with the kind of attention to textual detail that one would expect from a literary critic – and this is an essential part of his project of rescuing Freud from the distortions imposed by later analysts (see for instance the opening sections of the Rome speech and 'The Freudian thing'). The most obvious example is his almost obsessively painstaking reinterpretation of the dictum 'Wo Es war soll Ich werden' ('Where id was there shall ego be') in order to prove that this is not, as French and American analysts have taken it to be, a slogan exhorting the triumph of the ego *over* the dark forces of the unconscious, but rather a realization that subjectivity in any true sense must recognize its roots *in* the unconscious.¹⁴ His own style is self-consciously 'literary' in its use of rhetorical figures, puns, and so on; and it is also full of literary references. Malcolm Bowie (*Freud, Proust and Lacan*, pp. 136–63) explores in depth the pervasive, seductive but ultimately ambivalent place of literature throughout Lacanian theory; the characteristic alternation of arrogance and humility that he identifies is especially evident in three articles which are wholly devoted to analyses of literary texts.¹⁵

The best-known of these is the 'Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*', which opens the *Ecrits*. Poe's short story hinges on a compromising letter (presumably from a lover, but we are never told its contents) sent to the queen; in the presence of both king and queen the letter is stolen (presumably for purposes of blackmail) by the minister; he sees that the queen has seen him take it, but knows that she cannot accuse him without drawing the king's attention to it. She later asks the chief of police to find it, and his men search the minister's room, but cannot find it, paradoxically because it is not *hidden* but left quite visible. The chief then turns to Dupin, the master sleuth, who does find it, takes it, and returns it to the queen, leaving in its place another letter which makes clear to the minister that he has been outwitted. For Lacan the letter is a metaphor for the agency of the 'letter' in the unconscious; the fact that we do not know what it says makes it a symbol of the repression of the signified, a pure signifier whose 'agency'

¹³ See Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, pp. 116–9, for a discussion of the gaze as object of desire.

¹⁴ See for instance *Ecrits* pp. 417–8, 524, 864; and Malcolm Bowie's commentary in *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, pp. 122–3.

¹⁵ But see also 'Jeunesse de Gide', *Ecrits*, pp. 739–64, on Jean Delay's 'psycho-biography', *La Jeunesse d'André Gide*.

derives solely from its structural displacements. It thus exemplifies the determining power of the unconscious signifier, because it is the letter which *orders* the events of the plot. Specifically, it is like the ‘insistence’ of a repressed element which generates a repetition compulsion: the narrative consists of an original scene which is repeated with a different set of participants. The first scene involves: (a) the king, who does not see the letter; (b) the queen, who sees that the king does not see the letter; (c) the minister, who sees what the queen sees, and takes the letter. In the second scene the same three subject positions are occupied by, respectively, the police, the minister, and Dupin. What is repeated, then, is the *structure* of the scene, illustrating the Symbolic displacement of the signifier (the letter) through the insistence of the chain. For Lacan this proves the supremacy of the signifier over the subject; although the queen and the minister both, at different points, suffer from the Imaginary delusion that they *possess* the letter, it is in fact the letter – the Symbolic – that ‘possesses’ them, insofar as their actions are ruled by its movements and it always escapes them – as is shown by the minister being displaced from subject position (c) to (b), from the powerful all-seeing position in the first scene to defeat in the second. Dupin, in contrast, is in the position of the analyst: that is, in the position of the Other, the figure through whom the unconscious message is returned to its subject: he restores the letter to the queen.

The above is an extremely schematic and incomplete summary of Lacan’s reading of the story. It has been the object of numerous commentaries, to which reference may be made for a more detailed analysis of it.¹⁶ Much of this discussion is far from uncritical: in particular, Lacan is accused of betraying his own characterization of the unconscious by assuming that the story has one fixed ‘true’ meaning (see in particular Derrida’s article, and Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, p. 142); and also of a cavalier assumption that literature can simply be annexed as raw material for psychoanalytic demonstration.

The same objection could be made to his ‘Desire and the interpretation of desire in *Hamlet*’; this is one of a series of seminars on desire, so it is perhaps not surprising that Lacan uses Shakespeare’s play to illuminate his theory rather than vice versa: ‘The drama of Hamlet makes it possible for us to arrive at an exemplary articulation of this function, and that is why we have such a persistent interest in the structure of Shakespeare’s play’ (p. 28). Nevertheless, he produces enough new insights into the play to interest literary critics as well as students of psychoanalysis; and since

¹⁶ Shoshana Felman’s ‘On Reading Poetry’, and Elizabeth Wright’s account in *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, pp. 113–17, are particularly clear and comprehensive. See also Catherine Clément, *Jacques Lacan*, pp. 219–22; Jacques Derrida, ‘The purveyor of truth’; Barbara Johnson, ‘The frame of reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida’, in *The Critical Difference*, pp. 110–46; David Carroll, *The Subject in Question*, pp. 21–45.

also it has received far less attention than the ‘Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*’, I shall deal with it at greater length.¹⁷

Freud’s own interpretation of *Hamlet* centred on the ‘discovery’¹⁸ of Hamlet’s Oedipal desire for his mother and the consequent guilt preventing him from murdering the man who has done what he unconsciously wanted to do. Lacan’s reading is not unrelated to this, but recasts it in terms of the position of the *phallus* in the signifying economy of the unconscious. This allows him to link the central issue of Hamlet’s delayed action with other elements in the play: mourning, fantasy, narcissism and psychosis. The phallus figures in all of these, in a bewildering variety of roles (‘And the phallus is everywhere present in the disorder in which we find Hamlet each time he approaches one of the crucial moments of his action’, p. 49) which do not always seem compatible with each other; but this in itself perhaps illustrates the nature of meanings as they proliferate in the unconscious. The phallus, according to Lacan, is the signifier of unconscious desire – the desire of the Other.¹⁹ It comes to assume that role through the workings of the Oedipus complex. The child’s first desire is to be the object of the mother’s desire – i.e., to be the *phallus* that the mother lacks. The intervention of the Name-of-the-Father forces the child to give up this desire: to accept Symbolic castration, to repress the phallus, which thus becomes the unconscious signifier of this original desire. As such, it comes to stand for all subsequent desires as well, and to reproduce itself in chains of signifiers which metaphorically substitute for it.

Lacan establishes the Oedipal nature of the play via a connection with the theme of mourning which runs through it. In the ‘decline’ (the final phase) of the Oedipus complex the subject ‘mourns the phallus’ as lost object of desire. Therefore all later occasions of mourning recall the loss of the phallus – and this accounts for the omnipresence of the phallus in the play. But mourning is also relevant to other features both of *Hamlet* and of Lacanian theory, because it is a restructuring process which involves all three ‘orders’: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. The death of a loved one makes a ‘hole in the real’ (p. 37) which provokes a disturbance on the level of the Symbolic, evoking the ‘missing signifier’ which is the ‘veiled phallus’ – the phallus as absence. The work of mourning is ‘performed to satisfy the disorder that is produced by the inadequacy of signifying elements to cope with the hole that has been created in existence’ (p. 38) – that is, a response carried out on

¹⁷ John Muller’s article ‘Psychosis and Mourning in Lacan’s *Hamlet*’ is, however, a helpful introduction to the text.

¹⁸ As he triumphantly put it, ‘After all, the conflict in *Hamlet* is so effectively concealed that it was left to me to unearth it’ (VII, pp. 309–10, quoted in Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, p. 34).

¹⁹ See ‘The signification of the Phallus’, in *Écrits: A Selection*, pp. 281–91.

the Imaginary level: 'swarms of images, from which the phenomena of mourning arise, assume the place of the phallus' (p. 38). Lacan compares this with the 'foreclosure' that produces psychosis,²⁰ which he defines as a 'hole in the *Symbolic*' that becomes filled with images that are perceived as *real*: the inverse equivalent, in other words, of mourning. This symmetry explains why in the case of mourning the images may also appear real, like psychotic hallucinations: the ghost of the dead father. Moreover, the function of ritual is to bring the hole in the real into correspondence with the 'lack' in the Symbolic, thus inscribing it as an unconscious signifier. If this process is short-circuited, the disturbance becomes pathological: thus the concepts of Symbolic, Imaginary and Real are used to account for the traditional belief that ghosts appear when the rites of mourning have not been properly performed. There are several instances of this in *Hamlet*: the over-hasty remarriage of Hamlet's father's widow, Ophelia's suicide denying her a proper burial service, Polonius buried secretly for political reasons, etc.

The central question posed by the play is of course: why is Hamlet unable to kill Claudius until he is dying himself? Lacan's answer is in the first instance that 'man's desire is the desire of the other', and that Hamlet's desire is suspended from, subject to, his mother's desire for Claudius. He is forced in a sense to desire her desire, which is Claudius. But Lacan elaborates this further through two major aspects of the Imaginary order: *fantasy* and *narcissism*. Fantasy refers to the subject's relation to an object of desire which is an Imaginary substitute for the Symbolic phallus – it is thus in some sense a 'lure' or a deflection; and in Hamlet's case it is also what deflects him, lures him away from, his mission to avenge his father. The main fantasy object, or 'bait' (p. 11), is Ophelia, and Lacan analyses this at length, pointing to her phallic associations in the text (p. 23); but the duel with Laertes – which Claudius arranges in order to 'deflect', in fact to get rid of, Hamlet – constitutes another trap set on the level of the Imaginary. Hamlet's extraordinarily docile acceptance of the wager can only be explained, Lacan argues, by the logic of the mirror stage in which narcissism is inextricably bound up with rivalry. That is, Hamlet identifies with Laertes as an ideal image of himself, and *therefore* (as already evident in their fight over Ophelia's grave) sees him as a rival: 'The ego ideal is . . . the one you have to kill' (p. 31).

The deepest and most hidden reason for Hamlet's inaction is, however, a different kind of narcissism, and one that again concerns the phallus. As Lacan has said, the decline of the Oedipus complex consists in mourning the phallus; and, as in all mourning, its loss is compensated for in the Imaginary register: by the creation of an *image* of the phallus which is

²⁰ See Muller's paper for a detailed explanation of this.

narcissistically invested by the subject (pp. 48–9). And – this is Lacan’s final revelation – *Claudius represents the phallus*. So to kill Claudius would be to commit suicide. But why is Claudius the phallus? Because he is the object of the mother’s desire – but also because he has escaped unpunished from killing the father. In other words, the difference between *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* is that whereas Oedipus’ crime of killing his father and marrying his mother was punished by castration, Claudius’ acting out of the Oedipal drama has left him uncastrated: the phallus is ‘*still there . . . and it is precisely Claudius who is called upon to embody it*’ (p. 50, my italics). Lacan substantiates this connection further through the phallic connotations of kingship, and claims that Hamlet’s enigmatic statement ‘The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body’ makes profound sense if ‘phallus’ is substituted for ‘king’: ‘the body is bound up in this matter of the phallus – and how – but the phallus, on the contrary, is bound to nothing: it always slips through your fingers’ (p. 52). The fact that Hamlet says *he* is the foil (‘I’ll be your foil, Laertes’) which, as it turns out, kills both himself and Claudius serves to underscore the final truth: it is only at the moment of his own death, when the knowledge that he is dying releases him from all narcissistic attachments, that Hamlet is free to kill the king/phallus.

The third text I wish to consider is a short article²¹ on Marguerite Duras’s novel *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. Lol goes to a ball with her fiancé and sees him taken away from her by another woman – with everyone at the ball watching. Her enigmatic reaction to this experience determines the rest of the narrative: she has some sort of nervous breakdown, then apparently recovers but, returning ten years later to her home town, becomes involved with her childhood friend Tatiana and Tatiana’s lover Jacques, who falls in love with Lol. A second triangle is thus formed; Lol’s desire is not to usurp Tatiana but to recreate her original ‘ravisement’: to watch Jacques and Tatiana making love (she hides in the field outside the hotel where they have their regular assignations). Jacques’ attempt to make love to Lol drives her to the brink of madness – and the novel ends with her once again in the field watching the window of the room where Jacques is with Tatiana.

Unlike his work on Poe and Hamlet, Lacan’s act of ‘homage’ to Duras is extremely careful not to give the impression of appropriating her novel for his own ends; all he will do, he says, is to ‘punctuate’ the thread of her discourse, the unravelling of the ‘knot’ of desire, with concepts from his

²¹ ‘Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras’, in *Marguerite Duras*, 1979. It has not as far as I know been translated into English. Lacan’s treatment is discussed by Catherine Clément (pp. 224–7). The novel has been given a rather different ‘Lacanian’ interpretation by Michèle Montrelay, ‘Sur le ravissement de Lol Y. Stein’ in *L’Ombre et le nom*.

theoretical work on the gaze as field of unconscious desire.²² Lol's story is thus seen as an interplay of 'gazes'. Lol's 'ravishing' is both a dispossession and a kind of ecstasy; and it is ambiguously active and/or passive: is she its agent or its object? Lacan's development of Freud's work on the 'vicissitudes' of instincts stresses their capacity for 'reversibility' around the active-passive axis: in particular, voyeurism/exhibitionism. Insofar as the act of seeing has more to do with desire than with vision it is marked by a constant slippage between subject and object positions – seeing and being seen – but all contingent upon the underlying gaze which comes from the place of the Other. Lol is 'ravished' by being looked at by everyone at the ball; and she 'ravishes' the couple formed by Jacques and Tatiana, in that she breaks up the narcissistic dualism of their seeing each other: Jacques is put in the position of making love to Tatiana *for* Lol; and she 'shows' Tatiana to Jacques as something *other* than what he sees – that is, she comes to occupy the place of the Other: it is not *her* gaze, Lacan says, but 'the' gaze which, passing through her and 'realizing her', simultaneously exposes the couple to 'the relation of structure which, by being of the Other, desire sustains with the object that causes it' (p. 136).

Despite the importance of literature, one way or another, in Lacan's own work, his greatest contribution to literary criticism has come about indirectly, through the impact of his ideas on literary analyses by other people. In France, many figures who are important theorists in their own right have been deeply, if sometimes not very explicitly, influenced by his work. This is notably the case with Roland Barthes (see ch. 6) in his later writing (the notion of *jouissance* in *Le Plaisir du texte*, or, in *S/Z*, those of the 'symbolic code' structuring sexuality and the 'circularity' of metalanguages, are all extremely Lacanian),²³ but also with Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Philippe Sollers. In all of these cases, Lacanian concepts are recontextualized within a rather different overall theoretical framework.

There has also been a lot of Lacanian literary analysis produced in Britain and the United States.²⁴ These range from detailed readings of individual texts to general discussions of the possibilities and difficulties offered by psychoanalysis to literary theory, but most of them can be

²² See 'Of the gaze as *Objet petit a*', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 67–119.

²³ Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, discusses Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* as an example of Lacanian literary criticism.

²⁴ I will not deal here with the equally substantial body of Lacanian-inspired work in *film* studies: Christian Metz in France, and the journal *Screen* in England throughout the 1970s, for instance. Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe, whose literary analyses are mentioned below, have in fact produced more work on film than on literary texts.

situated within certain key areas of Lacanian thought: the configuration subject–signifier–lack–desire; the Symbolic and Imaginary orders; language and sexuality; the effect of the unconscious on the text; the impossibility of mastering the signifier; the status of theoretical metalanguage.

The basic idea that the subject is constructed in language provides a radically new way of looking at fictional characterization and narrative point of view, and has regenerated this whole area of literary criticism. An early example is Stephen Heath's *The Nouveau Roman*, especially the chapter on Claude Simon, which centres on the text's awareness that 'to know oneself is to lose oneself in language, to decentre oneself in the system (formal play of differences) in which one finds oneself' (p. 160). Simon is a typically 'modern' writer, and the Lacanian conception of the subject is perhaps more immediately relevant to modernist than to classical texts; Régis Durand's article in *Modern Language Notes* encapsulates it in the term 'aphanisis' (one of Lacan's names for the 'fading' of the subject's being under the signifier), and argues that it offers a way out of the unsatisfactory situation in which narratology (see ch. 5) is busy refining its taxonomies to account for a subject which has all but disappeared from modernist fiction. 'Aphanisis', then, enables us to theorize the evanescent subject that we encounter in the texts of Beckett, Duras, or Pynchon.

There is also, of course (although Durand does not mention him), Joyce, whose texts enact in exemplary fashion the production of subjectivity as an itinerary through language. Thus for Maud Ellmann the subject of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' exists only as *scar* and/or *punctuation*, as a 'gap or wound that rips the fabric of the text at irregular intervals' ('Dedalus', p. 192). Colin MacCabe's book on Joyce sets out to show in depth how 'Joyce's texts concern themselves with the position of the subject in language' (p. 4), how this involves using language against classical realism,²⁵ and how, consequently, both hero and reader are destabilized: Joyce's texts are a plurality of unhierarchized conflicting discourses, such that the reader is denied any secure position of dominance. The subject constructed in language is determined by lack, and hence by *desire*; and Joyce's fragmentation of the illusory plenitude offered by classical realism opens up the language of the texts to 'the possibility of desire "speaking" through this fragmentation' (p. 104), and thus generating new meanings by its successive displacements: 'Desire is the passage along the metonymy of signifiers' (p. 127). Since literature in general is to a large extent 'about' desire, Lacan's formulation of desire

²⁵ *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are concerned not with representing experience through language but with experiencing language through a destruction of representation' (p. 4).

inextricably interweaving with signification has obvious potential for criticism; John Brenkman's analysis ('The Other and the One') of Lacan's 'materialist rewriting' of the Platonic discourse on desire is a case in point.

The subject – this dynamic of lack-of-being, signifying chain and desire – is counterposed to the Imaginary plenitude of the ego: in other words, it belongs to the Symbolic as against the Imaginary. This major articulation of Lacan's thought has been appropriated in various ways by literary criticism. Jameson, for instance, explores its relevance on a metatheoretical level, as a means of situating existing theories ('Imaginary and Symbolic', p. 375); thus phenomenology, rooted in lived experience and sensory plenitude, is almost purely Imaginary, whereas Brecht's epic theatre 'can best be understood as an attempt to block Imaginary investment and thereby to dramatize the problematical relationship between the observing subject and the Symbolic order or history' (p. 379). On a similarly general level, narrative *per se* has been seen as a cardinal manifestation of the Symbolic order – as imposing the 'Law' of socially constructed signifying structure on individual experience.²⁶ The two concepts have also been applied directly to particular texts. My study of Simon (Britton, *Claude Simon*), for instance, analyses the novels' oscillation between a subject represented as image and a subject constructed in language in terms of the interplay of Imaginary and Symbolic. Elsewhere they have been employed as a way of articulating the symbolic role of paternity in fiction: thus Jeffrey Mehlman's *A Structural Study of Autobiography* analyses the 'failure' of the father in Proust and Sartre, and the ensuing dual mother–son relationship as a recurrent and determining pattern throughout *A la recherche du temps perdu* and *Les Mots*. Tony Tanner's study of adultery in the novel emphasizes the father as agent of separation from the original object of desire (*Adultery*, p. 129), and as source of conjoined nomination and prohibition ('le nom/non du père')(p. 141).

Although the Name-of-the-Father seems to provide a good starting point for a critique of patriarchy in fiction, the development of a specifically *feminist* Lacanian literary theory is inhibited by the fact that Lacan only tackled the issue of sexual difference late in his career, and by the more serious problem that his own position on feminism is notoriously ambivalent.²⁷ 'Lacanian feminism', therefore, has not had the option of passively applying concepts

²⁶ Both MacCabe (p. 63) and Juliet Flower MacCannell ('Oedipus Wrecks', p. 911) quote Barthes' famous (although actually rather off-hand) correlation of narrative structure and the Oedipal stage: 'it may be significant that it is at the same moment (around the age of three) that the little human "invents" at once sentence, narrative and the Oedipus' (Barthes, 'Analyse structurale', p.28, quoted in MacCabe).

²⁷ For further discussion of this issue, see Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, Heath, 'Difference', and Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*.

straight from Lacan to literature; rather, it has emerged out of a struggle with the 'master' which is not without its own Oedipal overtones. (Jane Gallop, for instance, dramatizes the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism as 'the Father and the Daughter' (*Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, chapter 5).) In order to see how this has worked out, we need to return to the fundamentals of Lacan's theory of the subject.

To say that the subject is constructed in language is also to say that language is the matrix for the construction of *sexuality*. Indeed, what distinguishes psychoanalysis from other theories of language is its insistence on the crucial and difficult link between words and bodies: 'psychoanalysis analyses language caught up in a sexed and mortal body.'²⁸ On the one hand, sexuality is never purely and simply physical, but always experienced as a kind of *meaning*;²⁹ conversely, language is not abstract but, grounded in the Other, always has its 'fleshly', sensuous, material side as well.³⁰ This second emphasis (language as sexuality) is evident in Ellmann's treatment of Joyce, as she plots the double trajectories of 'word' and 'flesh' in *A Portrait* through what she calls 'Sexual/Textual Economics' of the subject in language – the subject, in other words, who can be known only as the words that flow through him, which are simultaneously the desires that flow through him and appear in the text as a circulating currency of 'Semen, blood, urine, breath, money, saliva, speech and excrement' (p. 193).

MacCabe's discussion of these 'fleshly' aspects of language in Joyce situates them specifically, and cogently, in relation to *women* in the text; women function as the disruption and the *excess* of male meanings (pp. 147–52). This idea is more fully developed in the work of feminist Lacanian analysts such as Michèle Montrelay, who claims that women are not affected by Symbolic castration in the same way as men, and that their relationship to language is therefore not the same: there is a particular 'feminine speech' that is in immediate contact with the body, closer to the sexual drives and less fully enmeshed in the Symbolic order – and in *L'Ombre et le nom* Montrelay illustrates this from the novels of Duras. But, as Toril Moi points out in her useful presentation of the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva (*Sexual/Textual Politics*, pp. 103–73), 'there is very little feminist *literary criticism* in France With a few exceptions

²⁸ John Forrester, 'Psychoanalysis or literature?' p. 172.

²⁹ Shoshana Felman argues that repression contradicts sexuality but is also what *constitutes* it, and so sexuality is emblematic of divided meaning – 'a problematization of literality as such' ('Screw', p. 110–11).

³⁰ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan sees literature as a privileged activation of this aspect of language, '[inferring] . . . a Real power to words and a concrete materiality to language which vibrate all the way back to a representational memory bank, starting with sensory impressions of the mother's body and a haunting sensation of disembodied gazes and voices' ('Lacanian poetics', p. 404).

. . . French feminist critics have preferred to work on problems of textual, linguistic, semiotic or psychoanalytic theory' (p. 97).

In terms of the underlying notion of the subject constructed in language, the topics cited so far have perhaps centred on the subject more than on language. But the interconnectedness of language and unconscious can also be taken in a more *textual* direction: what sort of access does it give us to the structures of the literary text? In the first place, the refusal to reduce language to the mere transparent expression of conscious ideas results in an attention to the *materiality* of the signifier: the unconscious 'speaks' through the play of sounds, the slippage of meaning from one signifier to another. This emphasis is prominent in MacCabe's discussion of Joyce's echoing transformations of words (e.g., p.80), and Heath's detailed analysis of the multiple metaphorical and metonymic shifts in a passage from *La Route des Flandres* (*Nouveau Roman*, pp. 175–7); Tanner's treatment of *Madame Bovary*, also, is partially structured by the various meanings and transformations of 'tour' (a 'turn' of speech, a lathe, Emma's dizzy 'turns' and lack of direction – not knowing where to 'turn', and so on).

One might of course argue that literary criticism has always done this, and does not need Lacan's help in focusing on the fine textures of word-play. But where Lacan is necessary is in relating word-play to the unconscious: that is, interpreting the text not as the result of an author's conscious intention but as the end product of a process of *repression*. The text, in this view, is to be read 'symptomatically', in the same way as the analyst listens to his patient's speech, or as Freud analysed dreams.³¹ Robert Con Davis, in his 'Lacan and narration', makes a very cogent case for this way of approaching narrative texts – for locating 'narration's manifest content' as 'a product of the unconscious discourse that is both the precondition of narration and the site of its appearance. This says essentially that the subject of narration, what gives it form and meaning, will always be other than what is signified in narration . . . the unconscious discourse of language and its processes are revealed in the "gaps" or "lapses" (inconsistencies, failures of speech and signification, etc.) that appear in a narrative's manifest text' (p. 854); he then, in another piece in the same volume, demonstrates it in an analysis of the repressed metaphors in a short story by Poe (pp. 983–1005).

One of the best known and most widely acclaimed examples of this kind of symptomatic reading is Shoshana Felman's article on Henry James' *The*

³¹ For instance, metaphor is recast as symptom – as in Lacan's own interpretation of a line from Hugo's poem 'Booz endormi', 'His sheaf was neither miserly or spiteful'. See 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious' in Sheridan's translation of the *Ecrits*, pp. 156–7. For interpretations of this interpretation, see Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 223–5, and Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, pp. 111–12.

Turn of the Screw. She points to parallels on various levels between the text of the novel and the Lacanian version of the unconscious: the peculiar topology of its framing devices works to ‘disoriginate’ it, and to subvert any simple distinction between what is outside it and what is inside it. It is ‘this non-presence of the story to itself, this self-exteriority, this ec-centricity’ (p.123) that is also the defining feature of the unconscious. In other words, the literary text can be presented as ‘behaving like’ the psychic unconscious. The status of this essentially allegorical move from psychoanalysis to literature has been questioned in several quarters,³² and its *limits* – in what ways is the text *not* like the unconscious? – are not defined. Nevertheless, the sheer productivity of the hypothesis would suggest that there are certainly some ways in which text and unconscious can profitably be superimposed.

Felman’s discussion of James’ story problematizes the boundaries of the text and hence, also, the separation between it and critical responses to it. In so doing, she follows the logic inherent in the ‘allegorical’ position – a logic which derives from the general proposition that all language use is held in the force field of the Other. That is, meaning is always subverted by the unconscious, and there is no reason to suppose that critical-theoretical discourse should be in any way immune from this general condition. Being a metalanguage is no guarantee of rationality or privileged access to knowledge; a discourse that takes another discourse as its object (for example, critical theory/literary text) is always itself open to be ‘spoken’ (theorized, deconstructed, re-interpreted) by yet another discourse – all of them equally subject to the operations of the unconscious signifier.

This insight is the basis of another important trend in Lacanian literary theory, and one that has in recent years increasingly taken over from the earlier more interpretive criticism. The latter, however scrupulous and tentative it may be in practice, nevertheless carries with it the implication that the

³² John Forrester’s review article expresses misgivings about the fact that ‘Such allegorical arguments – that all texts are allegories of the psychoanalytic process, so that the psychoanalytic theory of that process can supply the theory of all texts – abound in these studies’ (p. 175), and argues that the *difference* between speech (of the patient) and writing (of the text) has been underestimated (p. 178). The journal *Poetics* – exponent of a more cautiously rigorous semiotics not normally sympathetic to psychoanalytic criticism of any kind – devoted a double issue (4–5, 1984) to an investigation of the possibility of integrating psychoanalysis as part of semiotics, and provides an interesting spectacle of two very different theories trying to come to terms with one another. Mieke Bal in her introduction specifically rejects the ‘analogical’ (or allegorical) importation of psychoanalysis into the field of literary semiotics, while Ellie Ragland-Sullivan’s contribution takes as its explicit starting point the hypothesis that ‘literature operates a magnetic pull on the reader because it is an allegory of the psyche’s fundamental structure’ (p. 381) – an allegory which her article has the merit of substantiating in detail and on the basis of a very closely argued reading of Lacan’s texts.

theorist's discourse is somehow protected from the very operations that it is practising on the author's discourse – operations which consist in interpreting the unconscious manoeuvres that, unknown to the author, constitute the meaning of the literary text. In moving away from excessive deference to the author's intention and the reductive view of textuality ('author knows best') which that entails, psychoanalytical criticism has fallen into the opposite but equally reductionist trap of acting as though the critic knows best: critics can so to speak tell authors what their texts 'really' mean.

There are two ways out of this trap. Critics may stop trying to give definitive, substantive interpretations of the *author's* text; or they may start trying to interpret the unconscious determinations of their own (or, usually, someone else's) *theoretical* text. Felman's article on James is an excellent example of the first solution; rather than decide *what* the text means, she attends to *how* it means: 'How does the meaning of the story, whatever it may be, rhetorically take place . . .' (p. 119). Moreover, this turns out to be above all a question of how it *refuses* a consistent meaning: ' . . . rhetorically take place through permanent displacement, textually take shape and take effect: *take flight*' (*ibid*, Felman's italics). She outlines the strategies by which the text manages to be always one jump ahead of its own critical interpretation. However the reader responds, that response has always been placed and undermined within the text – these are the 'turns' of the screw: 'whichever way the reader turns, he can but be turned by the text, he can but *perform by repeating it*' (p. 101, Felman's italics). Reading is not an act of mastery, but one of surrender. Con Davis expresses a similar relation in terms of the gaze: while *we* appear to *see* the text, in reality 'we are focused upon and held by a Gaze that comes through the agency of the object text . . . Thus held in the act of reading . . . we are not masterful subjects; we – as readers – then become the object of the Gaze' (p. 988).

This recognition of the impossibility of mastering the signifier sets Lacanian literary theory apart from earlier Freudian criticism. Felman in particular devotes a lot of time to a critique of such work – Wilson's interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw*, and, in her article 'On reading poetry', J. W. Krutch's and Marie Bonaparte's analysis of stories by Edgar Allan Poe.³³ Rather than unearthing 'evidence' of neurosis (or in Poe's case psychosis) in particular texts, the focus of psychoanalytic criticism shifts onto the larger plane of theories of production of meaning. It can be seen as a move from the signified to the signifier and, in its more extreme forms, an abandoning of the signified and hence of interpretation. Geoffrey Hartman, for instance, sees no point in producing 'yet another exercise in casuistry', and takes it for granted that all 'Interpretations

³³ J.W. Krutch, *Edgar Allan Poe*, and Marie Bonaparte, *Life and Works*.

that focus exclusively on a literary text and perform a certain number of analytic moves . . . seem to be as dated as certain kinds of Gothic shudder' (*Psychoanalysis*, p. vii).

Given Lacan's claim that the main characteristic of the unconscious is its capacity to generate unstoppable chains of signifiers so that meaning is never fixed, it is perfectly plausible to argue, as Jane Gallop does, that readings which '[lose] the literarity of the text (its dialectic) in favour of a fascination with its hidden significations would not be Lacanian' ('Lacan and literature', p. 307). And if Lacan is right about the unconscious, then one is also quite justified in viewing interpretation of the kind practised by earlier Freudian critics as crudely reductive. But a further, rather different, claim is sometimes made: that interpretation is actually a form of *repression* – and this seems to me more dubious. When Felman, for instance, argues that by making explicit the supposed unconscious meaning of a text, 'the [Wilson's] psychoanalytic reading, ironically enough, turns out to be a reading which represses the unconscious, which represses, paradoxically, the unconscious which it purports to be 'explaining' ('Screw', p. 193), it is not clear what sense can be made of 'repressing the unconscious' (which is by definition the repressed). How does this 'repression' relate to the repression which constitutes the unconscious in the first place? It is one thing to argue, as Lacan frequently does, that Freud's *discovery* of the unconscious has itself been repressed within the subsequent history of psychoanalysis; but why is the act of making something conscious necessarily one of repression, i.e., making it unconscious? In James' text a link is provided by the fact that in trying to extract the truth from the boy Miles, the governess accidentally kills him, so to equate 'forcing the text to surrender an explicit meaning' (p. 193) with 'killing' seems fair enough: but to appropriate the metaphor further and turn it into 'repression' seems to me to lack any motivation either in the text or in Lacan's theory.³⁴

The second way out of the above-mentioned 'trap' is sometimes accomplished via the concept of *transference*. The patient's relationship with the analyst is structured by unconscious desires that are transferred from the patient's past history onto the figure of the analyst; transference thus marks out the territory within which the psychoanalytic process takes place. When 'transferred' to the domain of literature, transference becomes a means of conceptualizing the unconscious dimension of the reader's relation to the text; and thus of making the point that as readers we are caught in a relation of lack and dependence *vis-à-vis* the text, rather

³⁴ Jeffrey Mehlman takes a position similar to Felman's in discussing Freud's analysis of one of his dreams. In seizing on the latent meaning of the dream as its 'truth', Freud is repressing the unconscious dream-work: 'Thus the content of the wish – the wish as content – presented by Freud in his analysis is less a manifestation of the "repressed" than of that which represses' ('Trimethylamin', p. 180).

than controlling it or our responses to it. Felman and Wright both make use of this idea, as does Gayatri Spivak ('The letter'), but it is most fully developed in Jane Gallop's 'Lacan and literature: a case for transference'. She takes up the distinction made by Felman in her introduction to *Yale French Studies*, no. 55–6, between a 'relation of interpretation' and a 'relation of transference'; says that most early Lacanian criticism, including Lacan's own, is based on the former; and argues that this presupposes and perpetuates the unjustifiable 'authority' of psychoanalytic theory over literature. This interpretive relation is also like one kind of transference – but the wrong one. That is, the critic interpreting the text is like the analyst interpreting the patient's discourse; and the analyst's authority is, according to Lacan, less due to his actual competence than it is an effect of the patient's transference onto him. The patient sees the analyst as 'the subject presumed to know',³⁵ as an infallible repository of truth; and unless this effect is itself analysed it confirms the analyst in his fantasies of omniscience. Gallop argues that the critic assuming the position of analyst, wielding his interpretive power on the hapless text, is in danger of acquiring the same fantasies. (Although, as Spivak points out ('The letter', p. 244) it is hard to see how the text performs the patient's role, which would entail actively setting the critic up as 'subject presumed to know'.) In order to avoid falling prey to the illusion of mastery, therefore, the critic too needs to become aware of the mechanisms of transference.

Such an awareness, moreover, should also alert the critic to the similarities between his or her position and that of the *patient* in transference – lacking authority, and struggling to grasp a meaning which the text is 'presumed to know', but withholds. From this perspective the critic's relationship to the text is redefined as one of perpetual inadequation; and we are brought back again to the impossibility of mastering the signifier.³⁶

To stress the transferential nature of the critic's relationship to the text is

³⁵ See *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 230–43.

³⁶ With however – it seems to me – some oversimplification. Transference of any kind is a misrecognition. This emphasis is prominent in Gallop's description of the 'transference' which constitutes the *critic* as subject-presumed-to-know. But although she does present the inverse 'transference' (of the critic onto the *text* as subject-presumed-to-know) as equally an effect to be analysed ('I am attempting to do a psychoanalytic reading that includes analysis of transference as it is enacted in the process of reading: that is, readings of the symptomatic effects produced by the presumption that the text is the very place "where meaning and knowledge of meaning reside"', p. 307), its relevance to her overall argument is above all that of a valuable experience of vulnerability: resisting it is equated with a 'refusal' to confront literature' (p. 307). It is of course true that the patient's transference onto the analyst is both a misrecognition and a salutary experience, but, however salutary, it remains within the Imaginary order. The trouble with substituting 'text' (signifiers) for 'analyst' is that the experience starts to look very much like the Symbolic structuring of the subject's subjection to the signifier. Therefore there is a strong temptation to assimilate the two, although they belong to different orders of psychic causality.

one way of focusing on the unconscious elements that structure the *critic's discourse*; another way is to demonstrate that this too can usefully be read 'symptomatically'. Thus for instance Felman's critique of existing criticism of Poe aims to show not simply where it goes wrong, but where and how it is shaped by unconscious determinations. 'What', she asks, 'is the unconscious of literary history?' ('On reading poetry', p. 147). The approach can be extended to theoretical writings of any kind, and has produced some interesting work on psychoanalytic theory itself. Thus Bowie (*Freud, Proust and Lacan*) explores the interplay of theory and unconscious desire in the work of Freud and Lacan – what is the incidence of the theorist's desire on his theory of desire? – and sees Lacan's appropriation of Actaeon, the mythical Greek hunter torn apart by his own hounds, as a crucial figure for the psychoanalyst's self-destructive and desperately self-renewing desire for knowledge of the unconscious. On a smaller scale but along similar lines, Mehlman's detailed symptomatic reading of Freud's interpretation of a dream is based on the claim that there is 'a fantasmatics of the metapsychology, and that the latter can be properly understood only through an adequate analysis of the former' ('Trimethylamin', p. 179).

In this way the distance between theoretical and literary discourses shrinks to almost nothing. Theory is text; the only difference is between theories that are aware of this fact and those that are not. Jean-Michel Rey finds in Freud a 'writing subject' split from the idealist 'knowing' subject, and cites Freud's recognition of the split as 'the only instance in the history of theoretical systems of such an involvement of the subject and his writing process in an imbrication which is never resolved once and for all' ('Freud's writing', p. 307). But, clearly, Lacanian literary theory must also recognize itself as text. And this in turn means that it must rethink the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and literary text. Felman's introduction to *Yale French Studies* no. 55–6 is devoted to precisely this question; the traditional 'master–slave' relationship in which a body of psychoanalytic *knowledge* is applied to a body of literary *language* has to give way to an equal relation of reciprocal implication: both psychoanalysis and literature are bodies of both language and knowledge, and so literature can provide insights into psychoanalysis as well as the other way round. Specifically, she suggests 'that, in the same way that psychoanalysis points to the unconscious of literature, *literature, in its turn, is the unconscious of psychoanalysis*; that the unthought-out shadow in psychoanalytic *theory* is precisely its own involvement with literature' (p. 10, Felman's italics). This amounts to saying that literature and psychoanalysis work to *deconstruct* each other; and indeed, especially in the work of the 'Yale school' – Felman, Hartman, Johnson and others – Lacanian and deconstructionist literary theory often seem to merge. But a complete absorption of psychoanalysis into deconstruction is prevented by Derridean unease at the former's

persisting commitment to some form of ‘truth’, and by the determining role it accords to sexuality and desire in meaning.

Althusserian Marxist criticism

Louis Althusser occupies the same sort of pivotal position in relation to Marxist theory as Lacan does to psychoanalysis. In the course of the 1960s he elaborated a structuralist version of Marxism which – again like Lacan – remains both very controversial on its own ground and very influential in the neighbouring field of cultural analysis. He locates an ‘epistemological break’ in Marx’s work in 1845, with *The German Ideology*, and claims that only after this is a properly Marxist theory of dialectical materialism constructed. But Marxism in Western Europe developed on the basis of the early writings of Marx – in Althusser’s terms, ‘pre-Marxist’ Marx – and is therefore trapped in the humanist ideology from which the ‘Marxist’ Marx made a break. Althusser argues that while humanist Marxism is a satisfactory *ideology* it is inadequate as a *theory*, precisely because it is an ideology; in other words, it is unable to produce a scientific explanation of social history. His project, therefore, is to institute a complete break with humanist Marxism in order to found a ‘scientific’ Marxism.³⁷ This involves reading Marx’s own texts ‘symptomatically’ – i.e. seeing in them the omissions and inconsistencies that, even more than what is explicitly stated, reveal an underlying problematic.

Althusser is structuralist both in his rejection of humanism and also because, although in *Reading Capital* he has distinguished carefully between his work and that of structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss, his actual definition of society is based on the concept of structure. Both humanist Marxism and Stalinism see economic reality as the ‘base’ of society which determines everything else: the state, politics, and ideology are ‘superstructural’ *reflections* of the economy. For Althusser, this ‘reflectionist’ model of society, which claims that contradictions within the economic level alone are sufficient to cause social revolution, is unable to explain the historical failures of, for instance, 1848 and the Paris Commune (*For Marx*, p. 104). The only adequate way to theorize society is to see it as the combination of different levels of activity, each containing its own specific contradictions, but equally each interacting to either reinforce or counter the others. This conception – first developed in the article ‘Contradiction and overdetermination’ in *For Marx* – produces a recognizably structuralist conception of society as, precisely, a *structure*

³⁷ See Benton, *Structural Marxism*, especially pp. 35–67, for a lucid discussion of this. Benton’s book as a whole is an invaluable exposition and critique of Althusserian Marxism.

of distinct but necessarily interrelated elements, and as *over-determined*: change is not the result of a single cause – a contradiction on one level – but always of an ‘accumulation of contradictions’ (p. 97). It is impossible to define some contradictions as solely causes and others as solely effects, because each one is ‘determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various *levels* and *instances* of the social formation it animates; it might be called *overdetermined in its principle*’ (p. 101).³⁸ The economic level remains the *ultimate* determination of everything else, but it is not – and he cites Marx and Engels in support of this (pp. 110–11) – immediately and mechanically determining in each specific case, since other elements of the social formation are ‘relatively autonomous’.

Each of these other elements or levels – politics, ideology, and science – generates a particular *practice*; and the totality of ‘social practice’ is thus made up of a number of distinct but interacting practices. Economic practice is the *process of production*; and the other practices also take this form: that is, they transform a given material into a given product by means of a specific type of labour (*For Marx*, pp. 166–7). Thus scientific intellectual work is redefined as ‘theoretical practice’, working either on pre-existing ideological concepts or on an earlier stage of theoretical concepts, using specific procedures developed by the discipline in question, and *producing* new theoretical knowledge. *Ideology* is also a practice; i.e., rather than just an abstract, purely subjective set of beliefs, it works on human consciousness (*For Marx*, p. 167) in order to produce human beings as ‘ideological subjects’.

Althusser is in fact seen (at least in Britain) as above all a theorist of ideology. The theory is set out firstly in ‘Marxism and humanism’ and ‘Contradiction and overdetermination’, both in *For Marx*, and then in a revised and more fully developed form in ‘Ideology and ideological state apparatuses’, an article which, first published in *La Pensée* in 1970, has become extremely influential – both in the original French and in its English translation – in the field of cultural studies: film studies, the sociology of literature, and so on. Written in the aftermath of the events of May–June 1968, which had begun (and to a considerable extent remained) within the pre-eminently ideological level of the French education system, it takes as its starting point the ‘relative autonomy’ of the ideological. The fact that ideology can have its own contradictions had just been dramatically demonstrated. It also clarifies and emphasizes the

³⁸ ‘déterminante mais aussi déterminée dans un seul et même mouvement, et déterminé par les divers *niveaux* et les diverses *instances* de la formation sociale qu’elle anime: nous pourrions la dire *surdéterminée dans son principe*’ (*Pour Marx*, pp. 99–100, Althusser’s italics).

point made in *For Marx* that, as a practice, ideology has a *material existence*: that is, it exists as *apparatuses*. Following a functionalist view of ideology, Althusser argues that one of the functions of the capitalist state is to ensure the reproduction of the labour force, and this means not just individuals physically capable of work but individuals who are both technically trained and ideologically conditioned to carry out their allotted tasks in the process of economic production. Therefore, as well as its repressive apparatuses (army, police, etc.) the state is also equipped with *ideological apparatuses* – institutions such as schools, the family, church, and the media – which preserve the rule of the dominant class by persuasion rather than by force: by, for instance, transforming social imperatives into abstract moral ones (e.g., respect for the rule of law) and creating the impression that social roles are freely chosen. Ideological practices such as teaching or praying are inscribed in these apparatuses; and *beliefs*, according to Althusser, are a function of the actions which make up the practice (*Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 157).

This means that ideology cannot be defined as illusion. Whereas humanist Marxism sees ideology as a ‘deformed’ (incorrect, illusory) representation of the real social relations of production, Althusser argues that ideology does not represent relations of production at all, but rather the individual’s ‘lived’ relation *to* the relations of production (*ibid.*, pp. 152–5). However, this relationship is *Imaginary* – not in the sense of illusory, but in the strictly Lacanian sense of the term, in which all conscious self-awareness is experienced in the Imaginary order. Althusser imports this psychoanalytic concept into his theory of ideology in order to explain the necessary transition from social institutions to individual consciousness. He uses it as the basis of his notion of *interpellation* (or ‘hailing’) – the mechanism whereby ideology makes individuals feel that they are being personally addressed by it, thus inducing them to ‘recognize’ themselves in its categories.

This entails grafting onto Lacan’s theory of the construction of the subject an ideological component whereby the individual is simultaneously constituted as an *ideological subject*. It is not very explicit – he seems for instance to be conflating Lacan’s Imaginary and Symbolic orders – but the project of articulating the individual psyche and ideology is none the less a valuable one. He first outlines the way in which the individual is, even before birth, determined by his or her pre-assigned place in the ideological structure of the family, described in terms reminiscent of Lacan’s Symbolic order (*ibid.*, p. 164). He does not, however, refer to the Oedipal moment of ‘entry into the Symbolic’ (see above), but bases his account of the construction of the subject entirely on the mirror stage. The ‘subject’ for Althusser, then, seems to be solely a subject in the Imaginary; arguably, this is a valid conception of the *ideological* subject, but it is of

necessity cut off from the unconscious. Interpellation, in other words, is a form of specularity: the subject is produced in and through its specular relation to an 'Absolute Subject' of ideology. He illustrates this in the case of Christian ideology, according to which man is created in the (mirror-) *image* of God; so the subject's sense of identity is dependent on the relation to God, while God is reciprocally constituted by the subjects who believe in him. As in the original Lacanian version, the recognition of oneself in one's mirror-image is a *misrecognition*, and in that sense imaginary; but it is real in that it really constitutes the subject in the Imaginary order. To sum up, interpellation produces the individual as ideological subject, that is, produces the subject in and through its specular relation to the absolute subject of ideology; and this 'subjection' is experienced as freely assumed: 'The individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection . . . there are no subjects except by and for their subjection*' (*ibid.*, p. 169, italics in original).³⁹

All of this happens in order to guarantee the reproduction of the social relations of production, which is the *raison d'être* of ideological practice. The weakness of this functionalist view of ideology is that it offers no basis for the theorization of *oppositional* ideologies. On the one hand the relative autonomy of ideology means that it is a site of real conflict and struggle (*ibid.*, p. 140); on the other hand the idea that ideological subjects are produced 'for' economic production (the economy is determining 'in the last instance') leaves no room, and no reason, for the production of ideological subjects 'against' the prevailing relations of economic production. The existence of oppositional ideologies is recognized in principle but the theory simultaneously deprives them of any reason for functioning. This contradiction causes problems particularly for the analysis of culture, as will be seen later; but first we must examine Althusser's stated position on art and literature.⁴⁰

His comments in this area are in fact somewhat impressionistic and sketchy. They are contained in three pieces of writing: 'The "piccolo teatro": Bertolazzi and Brecht: notes on a materialist theatre' in *For*

³⁹ 'l'individu est interpellé en sujet (libre) pour qu'il se soumette librement aux ordres du Sujet, donc pour qu'il accepte (librement) son assujettissement . . . Il n'est de sujets que par et pour leur assujettissement' (*Positions*, p. 121, Althusser's italics).

⁴⁰ Althusser's theories of ideology and culture have been the object of attacks too numerous to be discussed here. One particularly incisive critique, however, is Terry Lovell's 'The social relations of cultural production', in which she sets out three general criteria that a Marxist theory of cultural production must satisfy: it must locate its object in the social formation as a whole; its concern for the specificity of its object must not lead it to incorporate other theoretical elements which are actually incompatible with Marxism; and it must provide the basis for a political practice. She then argues that Althusser's conception of ideology fails on all three counts.

Marx (pp. 129–52), and two pieces which appeared in different journals in 1966: ‘Cremonini, painter of the abstract’ (*Démocratie nouvelle*), and the ‘Letter on art’ (*Nouvelle Critique*). English translations of the last two are included in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (which has given them greater influence in Britain than they have in France).⁴¹ The ‘Letter on art’ states clearly what is in fact his main point in all three articles: ‘I do not rank real art among the ideologies, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with ideology’ (*Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 203). This relationship is illustrated in Bertolazzi’s and Brecht’s theatre, and Cremonini’s paintings, which are all characterized by their decentred structure, their disruption of the imaginary plenitude of ideological representation. Art, therefore, has the ability to ‘make visible’ the ideology that it emerges from, by a kind of ‘internal distancing’ from it. The novels of Balzac and Solzhenitsyn, for instance, ‘make us “perceive” . . . in some sense from the inside, by an internal distance, the very ideology in which they are held’ (p. 204). Art thus also has a specific relationship to knowledge: while it does not *theorize* ideology and thus enable us to truly *know* it, it does in some more immediate but related sense allow us to ‘perceive’ it. It gives us, in another formulation, an ideological perception *of* ideology: its critique of its ideology in turn produces an ideological effect: ‘as the specific function of the work of art is to make visible, by establishing a distance from it, the reality of the existing ideology (in any one of its forms), the work of art cannot fail to exercise a directly ideological effect’ (p. 219).

This conception of art has been developed further by a number of Marxist literary and cultural critics, and to good effect. It does, however, pose two serious problems in its original formulation. Firstly, the above remarks apply only to ‘real art’, but in the absence of any theoretical basis for defining this, Althusser is left with a completely ‘unscientific’ distinction (‘I mean authentic art, not works of an average or mediocre level’ (*ibid.*, p. 204)) that reduces his account to tautology: what real art does is to make ideology visible, because that is what makes it real art. Secondly, in the four years that elapse between these articles and ‘Ideology and ideological state apparatuses’, he abandons his original views on art, which is now simply listed – without comment – as one of the ideological state apparatuses: ‘The cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.)’ (*ibid.*, p. 137).

Before considering the critical work on literature that has been influenced by Althusser’s ideas, it will perhaps be useful to summarize briefly the

⁴¹ Francis Barker’s ‘Althusser and art’ gives a useful exposition and discussion of the ideas contained in these three papers.

aspects of them that are particularly relevant to literary theory, and that have in fact been used most widely. In the first place the concept of *theoretical practice* implies that literary criticism should aim to be scientific rather than impressionistic or judgemental; and that it should produce a specific body of knowledge of the literary object. Secondly, the notion of *practice* is clearly applicable to literature itself; and subsequent theorists have added 'signifying practice' and 'literary practice' to Althusser's lists of components of social practice. This perspective has the advantage of situating literature not as a collection of end-products but as, precisely, a practice: a work of *production* of meaning (or of ideological effects).

Thirdly, there is the question of *art's relationship to ideology*, which is in fact the central issue. As the above presentation of his work suggests, Althusser provides a possible basis for several different positions on this question. Oversimplifying slightly, we can state these as follows: (1) according to the 'Letter on art', art is not simply ideological, but 'makes ideology visible'; (2) according to 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses', art is an ideological state apparatus which interpellates subjects into ideology; (3) according to a rather undeveloped implication of the article on Bertolazzi and Brecht, some art is ideological and some is not: Althusser contrasts classical theatre, whose themes are 'precisely ideological themes . . . without their ideological nature ever being questioned' (*For Marx*, p. 144), to Brecht's materialist theatre which distances and makes visible the ideological nature of the individual consciousness (*ibid.*). Moreover, the sense in which Brecht's art is to be distinguished from ideology is rather different from the case of Balzac, whom he cites in the 'Letter on art'; it is surely important to distinguish between art which consciously opposes the dominant ideology and art which, as it were despite itself, is carried by its own structural logic to 'make visible' *its* ideology. Since Althusser's theory of the relative autonomy of ideology grants a real validity to ideological struggle, thus allowing a less reductive approach to literature than reflectionist Marxism does, it would seem to make sense to see Brecht as an example of such ideological struggle. But does that mean that his plays are not 'merely' ideological? In other words, is the dominant ideology being contested by a subordinate oppositional ideology, or by something which is not ideology at all? This confusion relates directly to Althusser's failure to theorize *oppositional ideologies*, as discussed above – a failure which makes it both easier and more urgent to find ways of classifying at least some literature – militant or subversive texts – as in some sense non-ideological.

These issues are picked up and developed further, in rather diverse ways, by various Marxist literary critics. Of these, the one who remains closest to Althusser is Pierre Macherey, who institutes a break with humanist

Marxist literary criticism (Lukács and Lucien Goldmann) which parallels Althusser's break with humanist Marxism in general. His main work on literature – *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*⁴² – came out in 1966, the same year as Althusser's articles on art (Althusser acknowledges his influence in the 'Letter on art'). The book is divided into three parts: an exposition of the 'elementary concepts' of his theory, two chapters on existing literary criticism (Lenin on Tolstoy, and the structuralism of Barthes and Genette), and analyses of literary works (by Jules Verne, Borges and Balzac). Although somewhat wordy and occasionally unclear, it is very rich in ideas, and the summary I shall give will be necessarily selective.

He starts by outlining the conditions on which critical theory can be a *science* in the Althusserian sense: it must produce 'a new knowledge which adds something different to the reality of which it speaks' (p. 14). Specifically, it must produce an explanation of *the process whereby the literary work is produced*. This means that it must avoid the three 'illusions' of idealist literary criticism: the empiricist illusion, which sees the work as immediately accessible to the critical gaze, and as a self-sufficient entity which need not be related to anything else; the normative illusion, which judges the work in relation to an external aesthetic standard or model; and the interpretive illusion, which extracts from the work a single hidden meaning, thus reducing the work itself to the inessential receptacle which both contains and masks its 'true' meaning. He attacks structuralist literary criticism for being a combination of the second two: the structure of the work is both its model (different texts merely reproduce the same invariant narrative logic) and its ultimate 'meaning' (the principle underlying the work which the critic makes manifest). This critique is developed further in the chapter entitled 'L'analyse littéraire, tombeau des structures' (pp. 159–80).

The literary work can be the object of a scientific study only because it is *determined*; it is produced in accordance with certain *laws* (p. 21), and is the result of the *conditions of possibility* regulating its production. One of the most distinctive features of Macherey's conceptualization of literature is this emphasis on *constraints*, which runs counter to both the humanist ideology of free creativity and the poststructuralist stress on the aleatory and open-ended character of at least modern literature. These constraints, however, do not function in a straightforward mechanical manner; and there is no one single overriding factor which determines the work (certainly not the intention of the author, for instance). Rather, the work – like Althusser's social formation – is produced at the intersection of a number of distinct levels of determination.

⁴² Page references are to the French text, and translations are mine.

Moreover, these determinations inevitably contradict each other, so that the work is characterized above all by its internal complexity: 'the accent is on the *diversity of the letter*: the text says not one thing, but necessarily several things at once' (p. 33). He never really explains why this is *necessarily* so; but the analyses he gives (the study of Balzac is, typically, subtitled: 'a disparate text') argue cogently for the 'diversity' of at least these particular texts. However, far from being a source of polysemic richness, the diversity results in a series of absences. Rather than 'plural', the text is *fractured*. That is, the conflicting determinations open up fault-lines in it and expose its limits: what it says is significant only in relation to what it *cannot* say – the determinate absences which are the trace of the pressures weighing on its production. The 'silences' of the work are 'what gives a meaning to the meaning'; they 'show what precisely are the conditions under which a discourse can appear, and hence what its limits are' (p. 106). The work, in other words, has to be subjected to a symptomatic reading.⁴³

Therefore the traditional opposition between an immanent (empiricist) criticism and one which explains the work with reference to external factors (as reflectionist Marxist criticism does) is a false one; the critic is neither completely 'inside' nor 'outside' the work. Instead, he or she takes up position in the area of this 'unsaid' which surrounds the work as its 'margins', from where its production can become visible (p. 113). This idea is expanded in the study of Verne, where he says that rather than the critic 'going out of' the work, 'one has to talk about the work in a way that *takes it out of itself*, that instals it in the knowledge of its own limits' (p. 186, my italics).⁴⁴ Macherey compares this margin or 'underside' of the work with a kind of unconscious (p. 105) – which is, in fact, *history*. History is the ultimate determinant of the literary work, not as that which the work 'reflects', but as what, in a formula reminiscent of the Lacanian unconscious, causes it to 'say what it does because of what it cannot say'. Moreover, it is the complexity of the work's relation to history that accounts for its multiple determinations: from Lenin's analysis of Tolstoy, Macherey (p. 137) concludes that the work must be analyzed in relation to its *objective position in history*, but also to the *ideological representation* of that history; to the history of social formations, but also the history of *literary forms*.

43 Catherine Belsey's explicitly Machereyan analysis of the Sherlock Holmes stories (*Critical Practice*, pp. 109–17) is a good example of the way in which the absences in the work can be made to reveal the limits of its ideological project. In this case the 'silence' of female sexuality, always repressed by the narrative or presented as a mystery (e.g., typically, the contents of a compromising letter which can never be revealed), forms a *limit* to the positivist project of explaining everything scientifically.

44 'il faut parler de l'oeuvre *en la sortant d'elle-même*, en l'installant dans la connaissance de ses limites'.

In other words, the writer wants to 'say' something in response to his situation – to answer a question posed by his experience of his position in history. But since this conscious question is an ideological one, it raises another question: why that particular ideological question? The answer to this second question lies, outside the writer's consciousness, in the determining effect of the historical situation on the ideology. The way in which the literary work 'answers' the ideological question – the particular contradictions and lacunae in the text – is thus determined by this relation between the ideological representation of history and objective historical conditions (p. 113). But the author's ideological project *also* comes up against history in a more specifically literary area. What he or she wants to say has to be given substance as a literary work, using *forms* which to a large extent preexist the production of this particular work. (They correspond to the 'determinate means of production' of literary practice.) These are not neutral, purely technical instruments. They have evolved 'over a long history, the history of work on ideological themes' (p. 112); and so they have acquired their own specific 'weight' or 'force', which is carried over to the new contexts in which they are used (pp. 53–4), with the effect of *pulling against* the originality of the author's intention. (They may of course also conflict with each other.)

Macherey illustrates this double historical determination in the novels of Jules Verne.⁴⁵ Verne's ideological project is to express the conquest of nature by science and industry moving forward into the future, and this is figured in (among other images) the recurrent motif of the voyage as a 'straight line' which, like science, 'corrects' the irregularities of nature. But the straight line mutates irresistibly into the more familiar adventure story motif of the *trace* which has been laid down by a previous exploration and which the hero *rediscovers* (in *Treasure Island*, for example) (p. 212). This means that far from progressing freely into the future, Verne's heroes turn out to be tied to the past, merely repeating a discovery which has already been made. The *ideological* project has been deflected by the counter force of the *literary* motif it has set in motion. But this thematic reversal is *also* symptomatic of the historical contradictions in the situation of the bourgeoisie of the Third Republic: scientific innovation on the one hand, economic and political stagnation on the other, with the result that their ideology is unable to produce a coherent representation of the future (p. 263).

Thus Macherey characterizes the literary work as above all marked by contradictions, which are, as we have seen, the result of its ideological determinants. But he also argues that it is not reducible to ideological

⁴⁵ Tony Bennett summarizes this analysis in his *Formalism and Marxism*, (pp. 123–5).

discourse; and here he enlarges upon Althusser's idea of art 'making visible' its ideology. This produces a slightly different overall impression of the work – the emphasis is less on its determined and hence incomplete nature, and more on a particular kind of autonomy and, almost, self-sufficiency. He says that while literature does not have its own specific language, it does 'wrench' the everyday language of ideology away from its usual functioning and put it to a different use (p. 66), in something analogous to the epistemological break between ideology and science. It is thus a question of the similarities and differences between three discourses: ideological, scientific, and literary. Scientific discourse is *rigorous* (it institutes *necessary* relations between theoretical *concepts*), whereas 'everyday' (ideological) discourse lacks any rigour and works not with concepts but with the *imaginary* 'realities' of ideology. Literary discourse is mid-way between these two: like ideological discourse, its material is imaginary; but like scientific discourse, it has a certain rigour or necessity.

But whereas scientific rigour is based on reason, that of literary discourse is based on *illusion* (p. 71). 'Illusion' is of course also a feature of ideological language, but Macherey claims that literary illusion is different. He starts by saying that one of the main characteristics of literary language is this ability to create an illusion, which, unlike that of ideology, is sustained without reference to an external reality; it carries its own 'truth' (p. 56). Therefore the language itself must appear 'necessary'. It achieves this by a kind of compulsive repetitiveness which *imposes* its 'fascinating images' (p. 71), weaving them together into a 'world' of such density that it produces an illusion of reality. The study of Balzac (pp. 287–327) gives more substance to this view: he shows how the novel produces a network of relations, articulating differently angled viewpoints, so that the reality effect works at the level of the complex as a whole rather than any of its elements. It is this rigour peculiar to literary discourse which differentiates fiction from the shapeless, empty 'illusion' of ideology. Moreover, its rigour enables it to give a determinate circumscribed form to the ideological discourse which is its raw material; it works on ideology, institutes a specific *position* in relation to it, and thus *reveals* it for what it is (p. 80). (Again, this is illustrated at greater length in a subsequent section – the discussion of Lenin on Tolstoy.) Therefore fiction is a second order of illusion, and without explicitly criticizing the basic ideological illusion, it produces it in a form which allows the reader to 'see' it as, precisely, ideological.

While the general idea of literature producing ideology in a determinate visible form is vigorously argued, Macherey never decides exactly what it is about literary discourse that enables the process to take place. In the passages quoted above he attributes it to the specifically literary 'necessity' of illusionist fictional discourse – that is, the point at which it

is most autonomous and most distinct from ideology. Elsewhere, however, he locates it in the text's *determinate absences*, speaking for instance of 'that internal hiatus, or that break, by means of which [the work] *corresponds* to a reality that is itself incomplete, which it makes visible without reflecting it' (p. 97, Macherey's italics).⁴⁶ This is the position in his analysis of Verne's novels, in particular *L'Île mystérieuse*. Here – to summarize a convoluted argument – the initial ideological project (depicting a new form of industrial community based on the progressive virtues of scientific research) fails because the form of the narrative is trapped within the eighteenth-century pre-industrial motif of the solitary adventurer – pre-eminently, Robinson Crusoe. The latter is initially presented by the text as an image from which the group of explorers explicitly distance themselves, but reappears triumphantly at the end in the form of Nemo, who had been there all the time secretly manipulating them. And it is exactly this failure to go beyond a reactionary form of hero that exposes the limits of the ideology in question: Verne's use of earlier forms works to 'expose them as being in reality obstacles and hindrances, in a way that shows their retrograde significance . . . far from being illusory, Jules Verne's work, by its constitution of a mythology, gives the exact position of a historically attested mythology' (p. 253, Macherey's italics).

After 1968, Macherey rejected the conception of the text–ideology relation given in *Pour une théorie*, and evolved a new theory of literature on the basis of Althusser's 1970 article on ideology and ideological state apparatuses. This is formulated in 'Sur la littérature comme forme idéologique' (an article which he wrote jointly with Etienne Balibar in 1974),⁴⁷ the paper 'Problems of reflection', given at Essex University in 1977, and an interview given at the same conference and published in *Red Letters*. Literature is no longer seen as a separate entity, but as part of ideology – albeit a specific part requiring its own study. Whereas before literature *per se* produced a *critical* perspective on ideology, it is now seen as contributing to the dominant ideology, where it is particularly efficacious because it does not appear to be imposing anything: it offers itself as an object to be *freely* consumed, open to different subjective interpretations ('On Literature', p. 96). The 'potentially critical' role of literature is now strictly dependent on its being theorized from a materialist standpoint ('Interview', p. 5).

Macherey's 1966 work was inadequate, he says, because in it literature was defined as a *formal* transformation of an ideological 'content'. The

⁴⁶ 'Ce décalage interne, ou cette césure, par le moyen duquel [l'oeuvre] *correspond* à une réalité, incomplète elle aussi, qu'elle donne à voir sans la refléter'.

⁴⁷ Translated into English in *Untying the Text*, ed. R. Young, pp. 79–99. Page references are to this translation.

problem now is to avoid this formalism without falling back into the orthodox reflectionist position (for which art can only be either an ideological, hence *illusory*, reflection of a real historical situation, or a *true* representation of it). The solution is to construct a genuinely materialist, as opposed to humanist-idealist, concept of reflection – a task which has been made possible by Althusser's 1970 theorizing of ideology. That is, seen as a practice rather than an illusion, the literary reflection of reality *is* a reality in its own right, quite independently of the degree of accuracy with which it represents historical reality. It reflects the social conditions which produce and determine it in complex ways which are not reducible to the notion of representation; its 'insertion into reality is not dependent upon a formal cause (similarity) but upon a real cause – its material determination, inside a series of concrete conditions which constitute the social reality of a historical period' ('Problems of reflection', p. 50).

Although literary practice is specific in its 'fiction-effect' (which determines a particular variant of interpellation via identification with fictional characters: 'On Literature', pp. 89–93), it has to be analysed in its articulation with other ideological practices and apparatuses – primarily the *educational*, characterized by Althusser as the dominant ideological apparatus in republican France. The idea that literature is constituted through the routine grind of the education system ('On literature', p. 97) is new and provocative, and Macherey is well aware of how radically he is attacking the humanist view of literature as the inspired creation of a free individual genius. However, he argues that far from 'diminishing' literature, he is actually 'enlarg[ing] its significance' ('Interview', p. 5).

In fact, literature exists as part of a *triple* interdetermination, along with educational, but also with *linguistic practice*. The impact of Althusserian Marxism on linguistics is perhaps best exemplified by Michel Pêcheux's *Les vérités de la Palice*, which constructs a critique of formal linguistics from a materialist viewpoint and situates language as a social practice within an Althusserian conception of ideology. But Macherey draws instead on the work of Renée Balibar, whose *Le Français national* argues that the prime ideological necessity of post-revolutionary France was to impose *national unity* on *social division*, and shows how this was achieved through the construction, in the school system, of a national language. The two apparatuses of language and school work together. Both are 'contradictory unities': they arise out of social contradictions which they inevitably reproduce even in the process of suppressing them. Therefore the division between proletariat and bourgeoisie is reflected in the division between primary and secondary education, and between 'basic French' (i.e. what is taught in primary school) and 'literary French' (taught, in conjunction with Latin, in the *lycées*, to almost exclusively bourgeois pupils). It follows that while literary language appears unified, its very existence is rooted in

ideological contradiction: it is a 'language of compromise'; and Macherey's previous conception of the literary work as complex, diverse, etc., is now re-cast within this framework ('On literature', p. 88). From this basis he develops the new idea that the literary work exists *in order to* provide an imaginary solution to conflicts which the ideology is otherwise unable to handle, and that it does this by *displacing* them all onto the linguistic conflict. Literature is 'the imaginary solution of ideological contradictions in so much as they are formulated in a special language which is both different from the common language and within it (the common language itself being the product of an internal conflict), and which realises and masks in a series of compromises the conflict which constitutes it' (*ibid.*, p. 89).

This rather schematic presentation should be read in conjunction with Balibar's *Les Français fictifs*,⁴⁸ which gives a detailed analysis of two texts – Flaubert's *Un Coeur simple* and Camus' *L'Étranger* – as examples of how the school produces literature as 'sacred', a process theorized in partly Freudian terms as the defence mechanism of an ideology which represses conflicts by displacing them into fiction. She argues that fiction can represent all ideological conflicts *except* those concerning language and education – that is, those that actually constitute it. These it represses, by the construction of realism as the dominant literary style of the nineteenth century, *because realism effects a particular compromise between 'basic' and 'literary' French* (p. 60). In its artful simplicity it appears to be rejecting literary ornament in favour of a 'natural', purely functional usage – but this is misleading on two counts. Firstly, its naturalness is in reality not functional, but an artificial imitation of an ideologically constructed model: primary school French. Secondly, realist discourse manages at the same time to discreetly display its expertise in the latinized French of pre-revolutionary literature and of the lycée. This would appear an almost impossible feat, but Balibar's analysis of the first sentence of *Un Coeur simple* – 'For half a century, the bourgeois housewives of Pont-l'Évêque envied Madame Aubain her maid Felicity'⁴⁹ – is an ingenious demonstration of how it is achieved. As a one-sentence paragraph it has the unmistakable resonance of the decontextualized 'grammatical example'; and it condenses within its structure typical features of elementary French grammar (single clause, a prepositional phrase, direct and indirect objects, etc.) *and* typical problems encountered in Latin translation, plus the four-part balanced construction favoured by the Latinate 'period'. The result is a 'game of hide-and-seek'

⁴⁸ This has not been translated. Two conference papers which Balibar gave, in English, at Essex University have been published: 'Georges Sand' and 'National language'. The former of these is discussed in Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, pp. 162–5.

⁴⁹ 'Pendant un demi-siècle, les bourgeoises de Pont-l'Évêque envierent à Madame Aubain sa servante Félicité'.

in which ‘the dominance of the French model over the Latin model is simulated one minute, and the opposite the next, thus symbolizing one minute the democratization of French, and the next, the permanence of elitist humanism’ (pp. 110–11).⁵⁰

Macherey’s later work with Etienne Balibar, as we have seen, eliminates the problem of ‘literature’s relation to ideology’ by dissolving literature into ideology. This second problematic has generated some work on literary texts by English critics.⁵¹ But the most prominent of these, Terry Eagleton, in his *Criticism and ideology*, works closely within the framework provided by *Pour une théorie*, although he does not always make this explicit. Unlike the 1966 text, however, he draws his conception of ideology from Althusser’s 1970 article on ideological state apparatuses. Partly because of this, he is able to develop and revise Macherey’s original theory, although his version in turn runs into certain problems. He theorizes the text’s ‘multiple determinations’ more concretely and precisely than Macherey’s rather ambiguous formulation, seeing the text as produced by the mutual articulation of five elements: the general mode of economic production of the social formation (GMP); the literary mode of production (LMP) – i.e., how literature is materially produced and distributed: manuscript, magazine serialization, state publishing house, etc.; the general dominant ideology (GI); the authorial ideology (AuI), i.e., how the author as an individual is inserted into GI; and the aesthetic ideology (AI), a distinct region of GI determining the literary forms produced and the significance attached to literature in general. These interact in different ways according to the particular historical situation, producing different configurations of congruence or contradiction. Macherey’s *general* formula – that the text is the result of a contradiction between its ideological project and its literary forms – is recast as just one possible contradiction: between AuI and AI (p. 62). Eagleton’s scheme is therefore broader, notably in not being restricted to the ideological level but including material modes of production, and in being more flexible. It is in fact so flexible – he constantly stresses the *variety* of possible relations between these factors – that more work needs to be done on the ultimately determining force of the historical conjuncture on the relations in question in order to counteract the impression that virtually anything is possible.

He then analyses the relation between the text (as product of the five factors) and ideology (GI). This, however, turns out to be solely the relation between AI and GI – the other determinations do not play

⁵⁰ ‘le jeu de cache-cache auquel donnaient lieu les allusions grammaticales travesties-refoulées pouvait simuler tantôt la domination du modèle français sur le modèle latin, tantôt l’inverse, symbolisant ainsi tantôt la démocratisation du français, tantôt la permanence de l’humanisme des élites’.

⁵¹ See, for instance, T. Davies, ‘Education, ideology and literature’.

any part in it. While this can be seen as a legitimate separation of two questions (what determines the text as a whole is not necessarily the same as what determines its relation to ideology) it means, as Tony Bennett has pointed out (*Formalism and Marxism*, pp. 149–50) that he does not actually use his initial framework at all. One might also have hoped that a materialist analysis would assign a more central role to the LMP. In fact, however, there is an implicit overlap between LMP and AI. This occurs because, firstly, Eagleton's formulation of 'the text's relation to ideology' is, as he says, 'less a question of two externally related phenomena than of a "relationship of difference" established by the text *within* ideology' (pp. 97–8, author's italics). In other words, Macherey's 'literary forms' are now placed firmly within the aesthetic *ideology*, so that nothing in the text is outside ideology altogether. And, in line with the view of ideology as practice (process of production), the aesthetic ideology determines certain 'aesthetic modes of production' (the 'literary forms') which interact with the GI. These are theoretically distinct from the *literary* mode of production; in practice, however, there is sometimes no way of telling them apart. Since Eagleton argues that the LMP is also not purely external to the text but determines its genre and form (p. 48, p. 61), a feature like, for instance, a 'cliff-hanger' ending can just as well be located in an LMP of serial publication as in an AI determining narrative structure.

It is in any case literary devices like cliff-hangers, or the larger-scale conventions of the pastoral, or psychological realism, and so on, that, defined for these purposes as aesthetic modes of production, act on ideology as it preexists the text in order to produce an equally ideological but distinct product which Eagleton calls 'ideology to the second power' (p. 70). That is, the text is a production of a production. Its raw materials are not, as idealist criticism claims, objective reality in its pure state, but significations which have already been produced by ideological categories. The text takes these ideological products and produces them in such a way as to reveal, at least partially, their *relation to* objective reality: 'the literary text's relation to ideology so constitutes that ideology as to reveal something of its relations to history' (p. 69). Eagleton's version of this process differs from Macherey's also in that he sees it as *mutually* determined by the GI and the aesthetic modes of production: the 'revealing' will depend on the particular features of the ideology as well as on the 'distancing' effect of the literary forms, and to ignore this is to lapse into formalism (pp. 84–5). He also points out, against Macherey, that there is no reason to suppose that the text and ideology will necessarily be in conflict – a whole range of differential relations between them are possible (pp. 92–4). Equally, the ideology may be in conflict with *another ideology*: indeed this seems to be 'the moment of genesis of much major literature' (p. 96).

In his next chapter, Eagleton studies the relations between text and ideology ‘as they manifest themselves in a particular sector of English literary history’ (p. 102). The ideas originating in Matthew Arnold’s ‘Culture and society’ are traced through their repercussions in other nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers: a detailed analysis of George Eliot, and briefer discussions of Dickens, Conrad, James, T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Joyce and Lawrence. Here the concept of authorial ideology reappears:⁵² the social positions of the writers in question affects their individual ‘production’ of a dominant ideology which is characterized as a contradictory unity of Utilitarian rationalist corporatism and Romantic individualism (pp. 102–3). But what all their work has in common is an attempt to resolve this contradiction, in particular via the aesthetic notion of ‘organic form’ (as a ‘living’ – emotionally fulfilling – form of corporatism). However, the very construction of this imaginary organic unity entails a series of structural dislocations in the work, which thus ends up betraying the contradictions it was designed to reconcile. This occurs to varying degrees: while ‘a potentially tragic collision between ‘corporate’ and “individualist” ideologies is consistently defused and repressed by the forms of [George] Eliot’s fiction’ (p. 112), Dickens’ novels are marked by ‘the clarity with which those conflicts inscribe themselves in the fissures and hiatuses of the texts, in their mixed structures and disjunct meanings’ (p. 129). But in all cases, a perception of the underlying contradictions can be retrieved by a critical analysis of the *formal* contradictions of the literary work. For example, George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* is ultimately forced to abandon its realist mode in favour of a mystical epistemology (p. 123).

As these examples suggest, Eagleton is above all concerned with the text’s relation to ideological *contradictions*. Bennett claims that this constitutes a ‘quite different formulation’ (*Formalism and Marxism*, p. 149) from the original theoretical framework: although Eagleton seems to adopt Althusser’s view of art as mid-way between science and ideology, his ‘detailed considerations . . . in fact suggest a different approach to literature as a form of signifying practice which operates at the *points of contradiction between competing ideologies*’ (p. 149, author’s italics). But the difference is not really so clear-cut, if only because the original Althusser/Macherey theory tends to use ‘limits’ and ‘contradictions’ interchangeably: it states that the text makes visible the *limits* of its *ideology*, which result from the *historical contradictions* that the ideology exists to conceal. But since it never conceals them completely, these historical

⁵² In fact, Francis Mulhern’s critique of an earlier version of this chapter, published as an article in *New Left Review*, argues that in attaching too much importance to the author’s ideology, it effectively reinstates an ‘expressive’ conception of the text (‘Ideology and literary form’, pp. 80–7).

contradictions are also reproduced in it. Therefore the term ‘ideological contradictions’ can plausibly designate the form the historical contradictions take *within* the ideology. This is clearly not the same as contradictions *between* ideologies; but in practice ‘ideological contradictions’ is used to refer to both phenomena. This slippage of meaning is evident in Eagleton’s use of the terms – as between, for instance, ‘Eliot’s work attempts to resolve a structural conflict between two forms of mid-Victorian ideology’ (p. 110) and ‘Eliot’s fiction recasts *historical* contradictions into *ideologically* resolvable form’ (p. 114, my italics). These overlaps in terminology simply mean that Eagleton is not as sharply different from Macherey as Bennett claims (the stress on ideological contradiction actually brings him closer to Macherey’s revised theory); they do not affect the validity of his analyses.

But to the extent that Eagleton focuses predominantly on ‘ideological contradiction’ – in its varying senses – he tends to imply that this is a condition for the text’s ‘knowledge effect’. In other words, literature produced from within placidly self-consistent ideologies may not be able to gain the necessary purchase on them to ‘distance’ and ‘reveal’ them. And this implication is strengthened by his use of the criterion of contradiction as the basis for a materialist theory of literary *value*. This is both the most original and the most dubious part of his theory. In his discussion of Dickens he asserts that ‘the finest achievements of nineteenth-century realism’ were produced by the petty bourgeoisie *because* of this class’ peculiarly complex relation to the dominant ideology (pp. 125–6). This idea is generalized in his final chapter, where he argues that the aesthetic value of a literary work depends on its ability to reveal the contradictions of its ideology, which in turn depends on its being produced in a situation of ideological contradiction. The ‘major authors’ he has been considering were all ‘contradictorily inserted into an hegemonic bourgeois ideology which had passed its progressive prime’ (p. 180), and their texts are valuable because in them ‘the hegemonic formation is produced from a particular dissentient conflictual position within it, and . . . the resulting problematic throws the “fault-lines” of that formation into partial relief’ (p. 181). As Francis Mulhern comments (while acknowledging the major importance of Eagleton’s work), it seems remarkably convenient that this new Marxist criterion of aesthetic value should happen to coincide with the bourgeois ‘Great Tradition’ in literature (which has itself of course always valued ‘complexity’). He criticises Eagleton also for reinstating an invariant, a-historical concept of value under the guise of a historically determined one (‘Marxism in literary criticism’, pp. 85–7). This latter view is shared by Bennett, who argues further that Eagleton has defined a particular kind of text (one which distances ideological forms) which needs to be theorized not as an object of value but as a historically determined

form of writing, in terms of 'the particular constellation of linguistic, ideological and economic determinants which bear upon such a form of writing so as to produce it for that space, installed between ideologies, which defines it' (*Formalism and Marxism*, p. 155).

Eagleton is unable to do this, Bennett argues, because he clings to the ideological category of 'Literature' which is what makes the concept of literary value necessary in the first place, but which also prevents him from looking at the concrete differences between different practices of writing. Why should, for instance, a medieval ballad, Montaigne's Essays, and Restoration comedy all be treated as manifestations of the 'essence' of Literature? In his later book *Literary Theory*, Eagleton has in fact decisively rejected 'Literature' as a coherent object of study in favour of a wider notion of signifying or cultural practice.

Bennett's book is concerned to integrate the progressive elements of Russian Formalism and post-Formalism (Bakhtin) into Marxist literary theory. Whereas this was blocked by the reflectionist theory of Lukács, he sees Althusserian Marxism as making it more possible. In fact he argues that many of Althusser's insights were anticipated by the Formalists.⁵³ But the work of Althusser, Macherey and Eagleton still, he claims, suffers from idealist preconceptions, insofar as they define science, art and ideology as *general*, eternal forms of cognition: "Art" *as such* hovers between "science" *as such* and "ideology" *as such*' (p. 121, Bennett's italics). Consequently they cannot break away from the 'legacy of aesthetics' which posits literature in general as an object of analysis. They are therefore obliged to generalize the relation between ideology and whatever particular texts they study as an invariant 'literary effect', which prevents them from simply saying that 'some forms of writing do indeed display a tendency to rupture the categories of certain ideological forms from within' (p. 132), and others do not. Therefore also they locate the object of literary theory in the text as an artefact with an intrinsic meaning, forever fixed in the structures of its production. A materialist criticism should look rather at the ways in which its meanings are subject to its consumption, which is necessarily a process of continuous *re*-production under different historical circumstances (p. 135, p. 148). He quotes Mulhern making a similar point in 'Marxism in literary criticism'; and this conception is also central to Macherey's later work: 'Literary works are not only produced, they are constantly *reproduced* under different conditions – and so they themselves become very different . . . it is essential to study the material history of texts and . . . this history contains not only the works themselves but all the interpretations which have been attached to them and which are finally incorporated *into* them' (Macherey, 'Interview', pp. 6–7).

⁵³ Raman Selden's *Criticism and Objectivity* also develops this connection.

Bennett fully endorses the 1974 positions of Macherey and Balibar, seeing in them the most productive way forward for Marxist literary theory. He differs from them, however, in the explicitness with which he rejects the idea that literary criticism is a form of theoretical (scientific) practice. Arguing that the Althusserian notion of science on which this idea depends has in any case collapsed (pp. 137–8), he proposes instead that literary criticism should be seen as a *political* practice. Rather than theorizing the process of the text's reproduction in different historical situations, as Macherey and Renée Balibar set out to do, the literary critic should *intervene* in it: literature 'is not something to be studied; it is an area to be occupied. The question is not what literature's political effects *are* but what they might be *made to be* – not in a forever and once-and-for-all sense but in a dynamic and changing way – by the operations of Marxist criticism' (p. 137, Bennett's italics). If the text has no fixed meaning, it can have no fixed contradictions either. A reading such as Eagleton and Macherey propose does not in reality 'discover' contradictions in a text; it actively reads them into it, in order to produce a political, and not an aesthetic, effect.

Catherine Belsey concurs in this emphasis on 'critical practice' as an intervention in the reproduction of literary works, but retains the concept of a *scientific* criticism which 'in producing knowledge of the text . . . actively transforms what is given' (*Critical Practice*, p. 138). It deconstructs the text's positioning of the reader as an ideological subject in communication with the author, so that 'liberated from the fixity of the communication model, the text is available for production in the process of reading' (p. 140). As this implies, Belsey's central theoretical concept is *interpellation*, combined with a Lacanian (and Benvenistean) account of the construction of the subject in language. The dominant genre under capitalism is classic realism, which performs the work of ideology by 'offering the reader as the position from which the text is most "obviously" intelligible, the position of the *subject in (and of) ideology*' (p. 57, Belsey's italics). She analyses the mechanisms of this interpellation (pp. 67–84), in particular the 'hierarchy of discourses': omniscient narration both *dominates* the character's speech and *neutralizes* itself as discourse; in identifying with the point of view of this subject of enunciation, the reader is interpellated as an 'autonomous and knowing subject' (p. 69), apparently transcending the discourse which in fact produces the position.

But alongside classic realism, there are other 'interrogative' texts which in contrast operate to *unfix* ideological subject positions: they do not privilege a single containing discourse, and refuse the reader a unified position of knowledge. They tend to occur at moments of ideological crisis, for example in the work of Shakespeare, Donne, Defoe, Swift and Brecht. While arguing that critical practice (Macherey, and also

Barthes in *S/Z*) can open up classic realist works to less ideologically limited readings, Belsey still makes a fundamental distinction between texts which perform the work of the dominant ideology and those that do not. This is another way of theorizing the difference between reactionary and progressive literature that, in various forms, is a concern of Althusser, Eagleton and Bennett (and is given even greater prominence in the work of *Tel Quel* – see below). Raman Selden has a similar conception: innovative literature acts like a revolutionary ideology insofar as it disarticulates the unity of interpellations in the dominant ideology, but, *unlike* the latter, does not complete the process by constructing a new unity (p. 81). For Selden, however, ‘innovative’ texts are in some sense emblematic of literature in general (since interpellation functions straightforwardly only in ‘literature’ that ‘veers towards propaganda or dogma’, *ibid.*). He claims that ‘literature tends to *interfere* in the process of interpellation’ (*ibid.*, Selden’s italics) – a variation, in other words, on Althusser’s relative autonomy of ‘real art’. Other critics have used interpellation in various ways, and the published collections of papers from the Sociology of Literature conferences at Essex University contain interesting examples of this.⁵⁴

A rather different use of Althusserian and Machereyan theory is to be found in Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*.⁵⁵ The theoretical range and originality of this important book take it beyond the scope of the present discussion; I shall deal here solely with its engagement with Althusser and semiotics. As the title suggests, it proposes a view similar to Macherey’s conceptualization of history as the ‘unconscious’ of the text: *all* cultural artefacts are structured by their repression of political-historical contradictions. The task of a Marxist criticism is to analyse the dynamics of this repression, manifested not only in literature but also in other critical approaches to literature, and to do so in a properly *dialectical* fashion, by subsuming these other accounts (such as psychoanalysis and semiotics) as moments within itself. Rather than rejecting them outright, it places them as having a certain ‘local’ validity, but as needing to be reevaluated within a *historicizing* perspective. This applies first of all to the concept of *interpretation*, which Althusser has attacked as depending on a Lukacsian notion of ‘expressive totality’. In other words, interpretation rewrites the text as the simple expression of historical reality, and the specificity of the various instances is lost. But Jameson argues, citing Macherey’s work as

⁵⁴ *Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature*; 1848: The Sociology of Literature; Literature, Politics, and Theory; all edited by Francis Barker *et al.* Individual papers of particular relevance are listed in the bibliography, but especial mention may be made here of Colin Mercer’s ‘Baudelaire and the city’, showing how Baudelaire’s poetry inscribes the transitional stresses of the movement towards new interpellations in post-1848 capitalism.

⁵⁵ References are to the 1983 paperback edition.

an example, that interpretation can be relocated within an Althusserian theory of structural causality. Althusser's conception of a structural totality of *relatively* autonomous elements presupposes that the elements are indeed related in determinate and determining ways. However, the relations need to be theorized in terms of difference rather than identity: not a static homology between a textual artefact and extrinsic social conditions, but the textual/narrative 'production, projection, compensation, repression, displacement' (p. 44) of social contradictions.

In order to articulate the different levels without simply collapsing one into the other, Jameson proposes that the text should be interpreted within three successively wider 'horizons': with reference to political history, as a 'symbolic act'; as a fragment of ideological dialogue between social classes; and as the contradictory coexistence of forms or semiotic systems belonging to different modes of production (p. 75). The first of these is worth examining in more detail because it draws on the structuralist theory of Lévi-Strauss and Greimas. Lévi-Strauss' concept of art as 'symbolic act' – for example, the face painting of the Caduveo tribe inscribes in visual patterns a fantasy of equilibrium lacking in their social institutions – provides an alternative theorization of the work of art as the 'imaginary resolution of social contradictions'. Within this 'horizon', then, the political unconscious takes the form of relatively 'topical', and 'political' in the narrow sense, issues. Jameson distinguishes further between the level of the social contradictions themselves, seen in Althusserian terms as radically external to consciousness, and the level of their ideological formulation as 'antimonies' – paradoxes, blockages which cannot be thought through rationally and therefore generate imaginary *narrative* 'solutions'. It is on this second level that Greimas' 'semiotic rectangle' comes into play, as an instrument for formalizing the poles of the antinomy and the tensions between them. In Balzac's *La Vieille Fille*, for instance, Jameson analyzes 'a binary opposition between aristocratic elegance and Napoleonic energy, which the political imagination seeks desperately to transcend, generating the contradictories of each of these terms, mechanically generating all the syntheses logically available to it, while remaining locked into the terms of the original double bind' (p. 48). The ideological limitations of this method are inseparable from its usefulness: it is precisely the static logical *closure* it imposes on its data that 'allows us to map out the inner limits of a given ideological formation' (p. 48). But its results must then be interpreted dialectically, to ensure the transition whereby the antinomy is read as a symptomatic projection of the underlying social contradiction (p. 83).

The critical work discussed so far in this section has situated itself, in varying ways, in relation to Macherey. This is not the case with the

other main current of Althusserian literary theory represented by the journal *Tel Quel*, which had by the mid-1960s moved away from its original involvement with Russian Formalism to a position in which the major strands of poststructuralism converge: Foucault, Barthes, Derrida and Lacan intertwine with an Althusserian conception of literature as a form of *practice*. The volume *Théorie d'ensemble*⁵⁶ brings together the most important work previously published by the journal on this theme; and although the approaches of the critics concerned (principally Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and Jean-Louis Baudry) differ, the basic collective argument is clear. The practice of writing is a process of production, but bourgeois ideology presents it instead as a representation of reality (i.e., Belsey's 'classic realism'). It is only by refusing this mystification, and openly assuming its productive nature, that the literary text can cease to serve the interests of bourgeois ideology and become revolutionary. *Tel Quel's* militant stance is based on the radical opposition of bourgeois *representational* 'literature' and Marxist *productive* 'writing': the preface to *Théorie d'ensemble* proclaims in large capital letters that 'WRITING IN ITS PRODUCTIVE FUNCTIONING IS NOT REPRESENTATION' (p. 9). As much as a theory, it is a programme for revolutionary writing, which, as production, is *anti-representational*: the text is a 'space' in which language does not refer to anything *outside* itself, but works *on* itself in order to transform the relations of meaning which underpin ideology. Kristeva defines the text as a 'trans-linguistic apparatus, which re-distributes the order of language' (p. 300). The *Tel Quel* critics stress the political significance of this work on the linguistic forms of ideology: textual production attacks the nerve centres of the social unconscious (Sollers, p. 68). Their evident disregard for the material conditions of literary production and, crucially, consumption has been much criticized as the spurious politicization of 'difficult' elitist *avant-garde* texts; and, in always referring at least by implication to bourgeois or dominant ideology, they leave undefined the status of productive writing in relation to ideology in general: is it the product of an opposing revolutionary ideology, or outside ideology altogether?

They do, however, construct an interesting critique of the bourgeois ideology of literature by developing the idea of practice as production into a more complex analogy with the economic process.⁵⁷ Thus 'production' invokes as its opposites a series of concepts also taken from economics – exchange, circulation, property – each of which is

⁵⁶ This has not been translated. Page references are therefore to the French edition, and translations are my own.

⁵⁷ A more detailed presentation of this analogy and its implications can be found in my 'The Nouveau Roman and *Tel Quel* Marxism'; what follows here is essentially a summary of this.

identified as a characteristic of reactionary literature. The notion of *property* is assimilated to the view of the text as *creation* of its author. Baudry expresses the complicity of the two terms in his definition of the ideology of literary creation as based on the 'theological model Creator/created': 'It confers on a certain number of individuals, by virtue of particular gifts inherent in their nature, the status of "creator". They are also the possessors, the owners and in some sense the capitalists of meaning' (p. 353). Another aspect of the opposition between creation and production is at the root of Kristeva's influential notion of *intertextuality*: whereas creation is supposedly *ex nihilo*, the process of production assumes a pre-existing raw material which in this case is constituted by other texts; each new text is thus a reworking of the existing body of literature.

The circulation of money in the economy is paralleled by the communicational circuits of meanings in society (Sollers, p. 68), and both are antagonistic to productive *work*. In Jean-Joseph Goux's formulation, in order to 'circulate', the work of the signifier is forced into a code of preconstituted signs (p. 203). In other words, the process of circulation is based on the exchange values of the products, which are arrived at by both exploitation and occultation of the process of production. In fact the most irreducible antagonism is between production and *exchange* (e.g., Baudry, p. 352). By introducing this opposition, *Tel Quel* reshapes the Althusserian definition of practice (neither Althusser nor Macherey uses the concept of exchange in relation to literature) as a formal analogy between textual and economic production. Exchange is equated with representation, via an analysis of the ideological function of the *sign*. Baudry argues that the bourgeois ideology of literary creation rests on a double view of the literary work: as sign and as commodity. As sign, it *represents* a preexisting 'reality' – its author's message – and as commodity it has a certain aesthetic *exchange* value (p. 353). That this 'contradictory character' can be contained by bourgeois ideology is due to the ideology's (specifically, Saussure's) construction of the linguistic sign in terms of *value* (see chapter 3). Baudry demonstrates firstly that Saussure sees language as expression and representation, and secondly that he explicitly links linguistics with political economics on the basis of their common concern with the notion of value. Just as it is only by the mechanism of exchange that inherently incommensurable economic commodities can be brought into one system of equivalence, so it is only the mechanism of the sign – its separation of signifier and signified – that allows us to compare (i.e. assign values to) different signifieds on the basis of the homogeneity of the signifiers, as all part of the language system. The signifier is thereby reduced to the simple agent of that comparison: just as a 50p coin 'represents' the value of a ride on the underground, so the signifier merely *represents* the

'value' of its signified or 'concept'. This definition of language as exchange value serves to repress its real functioning as production; conversely the concept of productive writing renders Saussure's analogy null and void. The opposite analogy, however, between writing and Marx's theory of production, remains (Baudry has some reservations about it (p. 364), but it is wholeheartedly developed by Jean-Joseph Goux, pp. 188–211).

Tel Quel's critique of Saussurean linguistics places them clearly as poststructuralists, opposed to the residual idealism of structuralism. However, the attempt to found a materialist theory of literary production in a metaphorical appropriation of the economic process has oddly reflectionist implications. The real value of their approach lies in the detailed critical analysis of realist discourse and more especially of language that transgresses or subverts the constraints of representation and takes off into generative, productive word-play. Jean Ricardou's criticism is a typical example. The authors he writes on are all in varying ways anti-realist: Poe, Ollier, Robbe-Grillet, Simon, Sollers, and so on. His *Le Nouveau Roman* sets out to classify a set of strategies for subverting representation: the text reflecting back on itself, presenting contradictory versions of the 'same' scene, confusing different levels of representation (for example a real scene suddenly becomes a photograph), and so on – all illustrated from the novels of the *nouveaux romanciers*. He has devoted particular attention to Claude Simon, whose novels, he says, demonstrate the way in which modern texts 'metamorphose traditional expressive devices into means of production' (*Pour une théorie du nouveau roman*, p. 119). He analyses the production of Simon's *La Bataille de Pharsale* on the basis of textual 'generators': images, words, simple letters which recur and proliferate in endless different combinations through the text. Ricardou's often remarkable insights are marred, however, by a dogmatic formalism which prevents him from seeing anything in the texts that will not fit into his categories. While his influence on literary criticism has been considerable, the reaction against him which began in the 1980s has also been detrimental to other, sometimes more subtle, proponents of 'textual production'.

Althusser and Lacan: literary theory based on a Marxist psychoanalysis

There have been various attempts, notably by the Frankfurt School of Marxism and by Sartre, to combine the theoretical insights of Marx and Freud in order to produce either a theory of culture or of the individual subject under capitalism. What is, however, specific to the poststructuralist version of this project is the centrality it accords to 'signifying practice' – or a variously theorized combination of language, ideology and art – as the point of intersection between individual and

social. The link with Lacan is already in place in Althusser's own work; it was in fact Althusser who introduced Lacan to a non-specialist audience with his early article (before the publication of *Ecrits*) in *La Nouvelle Critique*, 'Freud and Lacan'. Then, as we have seen above, Althusser uses Lacan's idea of the mirror stage in his own theory of *interpellation*. The problem with this, however, is that the Althusserian subject appears to differ from the Lacanian one in the way that it is situated in relation to the signifier. Although in 'Freud and Lacan' the stress is overwhelmingly on the Oedipal moment and the entry into the Symbolic, the 1970 article on ideological state apparatuses, as I have argued above, presents interpellation as a *specular* structure – the ideological subject constructed in the Imaginary, rather than in language. Colin MacCabe concludes from this that Althusser's subject is not subject 'to' the signifier and therefore has no unconscious ('On discourse', pp. 212–13).

The problem is potentially a serious one for a theory of literature, in which the issue of language is unavoidable. In practice, critics who have worked on the basis of a conjunction of Althusser and Lacan have tended to ignore the specifically specular features of interpellation. The closeness of the two theories on a more global level has meant that a great many Althusserian critics have incorporated some Lacanian ideas into their work, and vice versa, and this is true of many that have been discussed above. This final section will, however, be limited to attempts to work out an articulation of the two on an explicitly theoretical level, rather than a simple *ad hoc* use of both of them. In Britain this project has been carried on above all in the pages of *Screen*, in the mid- to late seventies, while its impact on literary studies has been rather less.

But this was never the case in France, where its best-known exponent is undoubtedly Julia Kristeva.⁵⁸ In an early *Tel Quel* article entitled 'Semiotics: a critical science and/or a critique of science'; she confronts semiotics (see chapter 4) with a choice: it can either continue to be what it has been so far, a theory of representation, or it can – and should, in her view – become a 'semiotics of production', 'production' in the sense elaborated by *Tel Quel* and discussed above. To do this it must base itself firstly on the Marxist theory of economic production, which can itself be seen as a kind of semiotics in that it analyses the elements of the social relations of production as a '*combinatoire* with its own specific logic. We might say that the possible combinations are the different kinds of semiotic *systems*' (p. 81, Kristeva's italics). But Marxism does

⁵⁸ *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, contains translations from most of Kristeva's important texts. I have quoted from this unless otherwise stated, but given the original dates of publication in French. Moi's introduction is very useful. See also her discussion of Kristeva in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, and Philip Lewis, 'Revolutionary semiotics'.

not go far enough, because it studies production only in terms of the *value* of its products, that is, in terms alien to the process of production itself. Thus for an adequate conception of production we must turn also to Freud, 'who was the first to think of the work involved in the process of signification as anterior to the meaning produced' (p. 83), and whose notion of *dream-work*, with its mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and so on, transforming an original latent content into the manifest dream, is precisely a conceptualization of the *process* of production of meaning. In fact however, this idea was never followed up, and in her later work (principally *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), but also 'The system and the speaking subject' (1973), and 'Signifying practice and mode of production' (1975) Kristeva adopts a specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis and a more or less Althusserian Marxism, and organizes her theory explicitly around the concept of the subject. Here too it is a question of psychoanalysis remedying a deficiency in Marxism: in this case, Marxism has no theory of the subject ('The system', pp. 31–2). The project, therefore, is to enlarge semiotics in order to include a conception of meaning as process/production, to articulate this with the Lacanian construction of the subject in language via the mirror stage and the entry into the Symbolic, to situate all that within the structural totality of the social formation, and finally to define the place of art in the whole.

Kristeva's boldest and most original move in this project is to divide signifying practice, or what she calls 'signifiante', into two qualitatively different areas or stages: the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*. The semiotic originates in the pre-verbal drives, the primary processes which condense and displace energy through the infant's body; it is the 'psychosomatic modality of the signifying process' (*Revolution*, p. 96), but it is already structured through its relation to the mother's body, and hence, indirectly, the Symbolic order as this determines the family relations. It is structured into an arrangement Kristeva calls the '*chora*', but not in a fixed or permanent way; the *chora* is not a signifying *position*, but it is the necessary basis out of which, but also against which, one will be constructed. The symbolic, on the other hand, is meaning as constituted in the Lacanian Symbolic order: meaning as subject position, as structure, and as ideological closure, based on a stable separation of signifier and signified producing 'finished' meanings. The transition from semiotic to symbolic occurs through the '*thetic phase*', roughly equivalent to Lacan's entry into the Symbolic – beginning with the mirror stage in which the subject for the first time grasps itself as separate from its image and from its objects (a separation on which, Kristeva argues, the logical-syntactic operation of predication depends) and finishing with the resolution of the Oedipal phase and the positing of the phallus as the supreme signifier (see above p. 208). The subject is now positioned in the Symbolic, using language in

an adult, socialized and ideological fashion: ‘the symbolic – and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories – is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures’ (pp. 96–7). But the semiotic does not disappear; as in Lacan’s account of the persistence of pre-Oedipal elements in the Symbolic, it remains an active force constantly ‘exceeding’ and threatening (sometimes with relative success) the boundaries established by the symbolic. However, it now manifests itself *in* language, as traces of the archaic psychosomatic basis of language (the materiality of sound and rhythm) and of the fissile energy of the drives infiltrating plurality and displacement into the stasis of meaning.

Thus the duality of language originally theorized as production versus representation reappears as the dialectical opposition of semiotic process and symbolic structure – dialectical, because Kristeva emphasizes that the mode of persistence of the semiotic is not, except in neurotic or psychotic discourse, a simple regression. Not only is the semiotic the necessary precondition for the thetic, but also it is only once the thetic phase has occurred that the semiotic can *manifest itself* in signifying practice. Kristeva refers in Hegelian fashion to the ‘*Aufhebung* [sublation: simultaneous preservation and supersession] of the semiotic in the symbolic’ (*Revolution*, p. 104). The subject as ‘being’ (cf. Lacan) is absent from the symbolic; the irruption of the semiotic signals the re-emergence of the subject, which in turn necessitates the establishment of a new thetic phase, i.e. a different distribution of the boundaries of the symbolic.

The semiotic, in other words, is both the precondition and a constant disruption of the symbolic. Its disruptive force is greatest in *poetic language*. ‘Though absolutely necessary, the thetic is not exclusive: the semiotic, which also precedes it, constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice that are called “creation” . . . This is particularly evident in poetic language . . .’ (*ibid.*, p. 113). It is in poetic language that the phonic material of language is most prominent (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration) and also that – at least in modern poetry, which Kristeva sees as the most significant – meaning becomes elusively plural. Thus poetic language both ‘maintains and transgresses thetic unicity . . . by introducing into the thetic position the stream of semiotic drives and making it signify. This telescoping of the semiotic and the symbolic pluralizes signification’ (*ibid.*, p. 112). Her analyses of Mallarmé and Lautréamont, whom she situates historically at a moment of crisis in the position of the subject under capitalism, shows how in their texts the semiotic causes a number of mutations on the different levels of language structure (phonetic, syntactic, and in the structure of the subject of enunciation), and how they ‘[work] on the

signified of these mutant effects, consciously orchestrating their polysemic possibilities and even throwing into question the structures of state, family and religion' ('Signifying practice', p. 69).

As the end of the above quotation suggests, poetic signifying practice has a socio-political dimension. Here, in other words, we rejoin the Marxist problematic, which poses two distinct questions. In what sense is poetic language *revolutionary*? And how is signifying practice related to the social formation as a whole? The answer to the first of these lies in Kristeva's insistence in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that the irruption of the semiotic in poetic, as distinct from neurotic, language is not a regression to infantile language but, because the thetic position is resynthesized rather than merely abandoned,⁵⁹ is a true *practice* which by destabilizing signification transcends the 'unicity' (or ideological closure) of the symbolic – 'And thus, its complexity unfolded by its practices, the signifying process joins social revolution' (*ibid.*, p. 112).

This position is easily caricatured, and the plausibility of seeing the delicately ambiguous textures of Mallarmé's poems as agents of social revolution is indeed somewhat tenuous. To some extent its credibility depends on the second question posed above concerning the role of signifying practice in general as a component of social practice. This is raised in 'The system and the speaking subject', where Kristeva argues that the present mutations of capitalism have brought about a crisis in the symbolic system which can only be theorized by locating signifying practices, via their subject, 'in the historically determined relations of production' (p. 32). It is already clear, however, that this will not be a simple process of matching them up, since 'signifying temporality is not coextensive with that of the modes of production' (*ibid.*).

The problem is addressed at greater length in 'Signifying practice and mode of production'. There are two moments of signifying practice, corresponding to the dominance of the symbolic or the semiotic: the establishment of a particular sign system (or in Althusserian terms, ideological formation), and its 'traversing' or transgression. The latter coincides with moments of *social* rupture. Therefore, 'signifying practice is that through which the mode of production signifies its stabilisation *and* its (self)expenditure – the condition of its renewal'. So far, this is consonant with Althusser's ideological practice, only with more emphasis on the break-up of one formation and the transition to another. She then posits 'the *intrinsic belonging* of a mode of sign-production to the mode of

⁵⁹ 'In other words, the subject must be firmly positioned by castration so that the drive attacks against the thetic will not give way to fantasy or to psychosis but will instead lead to a "second-degree thetic", i.e., a resumption of the functioning characteristic of the semiotic *chora* within the signifying device of language. This is precisely what artistic practices, and notably poetic language, demonstrate' (*Revolution*, p. 103).

production of the socio-economic ensemble' (p. 64, my italics).⁶⁰ It is precisely this that needs to be explained.⁶¹ It is, she says, a relation played out on the terrain of the speaking subject; and her explanation rests on the articulation, in the subject, of two levels of contradiction between 'unity' and 'process'. On the one hand the state imposes a unity on the process of contradiction between the forces and relations of production, and the family structure imposes its unity on the process of drives and 'jouissance'. On the other hand, signifying practice is constituted by the contradiction between the unity of the symbolic and the process of the semiotic. But this remains only a formal parallel. She then suggests that it is the transgressive, unsocializable aspects of signifying practice (the semiotic) that make the subject 'an element of potential mutation' which threatens the social formation. This amounts to claiming that signifying practice has a determining effect on the socio-economic mode of production: 'It is these signifying practices that can reveal the economic and social formation that shelters them as a provisional articulation, constantly exceeded and threatened by the permanent contradiction proper to the process of signifiante' (p. 68).

It turns out, however, that an essential mediating structure here is the mode of reproduction – the family. The semiotic is unconscious, in other words it has been repressed by entry into the symbolic, and this process is determined by the family structure. In this way the semiotic can be defined as what 'derives from the unsocializable elements in the relations of reproduction (experience of sexual difference, incest, death drive, pleasure process)' (p. 68). It is therefore crucial that the relation between mode of reproduction and mode of production should be specified, but Kristeva remains vague and contradictory on this point, initially treating them as indistinguishable ('modes of production should also be considered as modes of reproduction (specific regulation of kinship relations)' (p. 68) while in her final conclusion arguing that signifying practice cannot be related directly to a mode of production, but that 'the mutation should be re-thought in terms of the relations of reproduction' (p. 74), since it is these which regulate the socialization of the drives. Moreover, since one mode of reproduction – for example, the patriarchal family – can span a number of different historical modes of production, we can expect to find the same signifying practices occurring in different modes of production. Far from determining modes of production, in other words, signifying practices are now not even correlated with them. They are correlated

⁶⁰ 'l'appartenance intrinsèque d'un mode de production de signes au mode de production de l'ensemble socio-économique' ('Pratique signifiante', p. 11).

⁶¹ Burniston and Weedon's discussion of this concludes that her attempt to construct a Marxist theory of subjectivity ultimately fails because she is unable to theorize this 'intrinsic belonging' ('Ideology, subjectivity and the artistic text', pp. 224–5).

with modes of reproduction, but do not determine them either: rather they are determined by them. The ultimate determining factor, of both the socio-economic formation and of signifying practice, is the family. In the light of this it is not surprising that by the late 1970s Kristeva had abandoned both semiotics and Marxism for psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, the attempt in *Revolution in Poetic Language* to base the subversive, transgressive force of (some) poetic writing in the primary processes of the unconscious remains her most original and influential contribution to theory, and, although very speculative, it accounts in an intuitively satisfying way for many important features of poetic language.

The work of Catherine Belsey has several important points in common with the Kristeva of the mid-seventies, but is less elaborate. While she makes great use of interpellation, she treats it as the construction of an ideological subject position in *language* and emphasizes the primacy of language over subjectivity (*Critical Practice*, pp. 59–61): the Lacanian Symbolic Order, like Kristeva's 'symbolic', brings together language and ideology. But since Lacan also sees the subject as *process*, constantly unmade and remade in discourse, Belsey also concurs with Kristeva in siting the revolutionary potential of literature in the polysemic excess of its meanings (Kristeva's semiotic) which disrupts subject positions (*ibid.*, pp. 66–7). But she combines this with a concept of the textual unconscious which is closer to Althusser and Macherey's, regarding it not as the traces of primary processes in the semiotic chora, but as 'what the text cannot say' because of the conflict between ideological project and literary form. In fact she remodels Macherey's textual unconscious in more explicitly Lacanian terms: 'The unconscious of the work is constructed in the moment of its entry into literary form, in the gap between the project and the formulation. The process is precisely parallel to the process by which the child enters the Symbolic order' (*ibid.*, p. 135).

Belsey's emphasis on the *historical* nature of subjectivity is the most important aspect of her work, and is extremely illuminating. In *Critical Practice* she argues that the construction of a unified subject is in the interests of a stabilized class society, and in turn depends on a certain ideological stability. 'But at times of crisis in the social formation, when the mode of production is radically threatened, for instance, or in transition, confidence in the ideology of subjectivity is eroded' (p. 86). At moments such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism the underlying truth of the *division* of the subject breaks through to the surface and can be glimpsed in literary texts of the period. She cites Donne and Shakespeare as examples, and, in her article 'The Romantic construction of the unconscious', the English Romantic poets. The idea is developed further in this paper, which argues that the unconscious itself is a historical phenomenon arising only with the emergence of the

unified subject of bourgeois ideology. The medieval subject is structured quite differently, as a permanent *overt* contradiction between the desire of the soul and that of the body, so that ‘it makes no sense to talk of a medieval unconscious’ (p. 75). Her book *The Subject of Tragedy* pursues this theme in looking at the emergences of a liberal humanist subject in the plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Seen in this perspective, psychoanalysis can become a Marxist theory: no longer ‘the discovery of a timeless truth of human nature, but a theory of subjectivity that radically undermines specifically the sovereignty of the subject of bourgeois ideology’ (‘Romantic unconscious’, p. 75).

It is this need for psychoanalysis to come to terms with *history* that forms the starting point for Fredric Jameson’s engagement with it. He sees Lacan as having shifted the problematic of psychoanalysis away from Freud’s emphasis on sexuality and wish-fulfilment towards the more fundamental issue of the construction of the subject, and argues that this shift opens up a way out of the purely individual towards the social and historical dimension. He focuses especially on the three Lacanian ‘registers’: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. In his article in *Yale French Studies*, he equates the Real with history (pp. 384–7), and suggests that the Imaginary and the Symbolic can be used as conceptual parameters against which different critical approaches can be measured (see above, p. 213). In *The Political Unconscious*, however, he applies the concepts directly to literature – with, in my view, more interesting results. Rather than a metatheoretical tool, Lacanian psychoanalysis is now seen as one of the interpretive frameworks that can be subsumed within dialectical materialism (see above, p. 240). This means primarily that the construction of the subject has to be theorized historically rather than in the genetic terms of the individual biological subject (pp. 152–3).

Like Belsey, then, Jameson rewrites Lacan’s subject as the historically specific subject of bourgeois ideology, bringing to bear Althusser’s attack on humanism as ‘one powerful way of historicizing the Lacanian critique of the “centred subject”’ (p. 153). Unlike Belsey, though, he situates its emergence not in the sixteenth century but after the industrial revolution, because, for him, it is a result of the process of *reification* specific to advanced capitalism (although reification itself is not an Althusserian concept: indeed, Althusser sees it as part of the ideology of humanist Marxism). Thus, whereas most Marxist commentators have used Balzac as a prime example of fully-fledged bourgeois ideology, Jameson concentrates on those aspects of his work which pre-date the constitution of the ‘centred subject’. He shows for instance how in *La Vieille Fille* desire is produced as strangely anonymous and all-pervasive, and is not attributed to a particular positioned subject. He also gives a detailed analysis of *La Rabouilleuse* in terms of Imaginary and Symbolic orders, arguing that the

absence of a centred subject shows up in the prevalence of the Imaginary and the 'truncated and mutilated experience of the Symbolic' (p. 175) – the latter figured in the 'absent father' who is shown to take social-historical as well as familial forms.

Finally, this is generalized (pp. 179–84) into a theory of how the Imaginary and Symbolic are integrated into ideology via the mediation of the family. Social contradictions are reproduced as structural contradictions in the family which, in the form of an unconscious 'master narrative' in the subject, generate a series of imaginary resolutions (wish-fulfilling fantasies) that in turn need to be supported and validated by ideological beliefs, and also be realistically plausible. In this way the interplay of wish-fulfilment and reality principle is reformulated as that of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in their transindividual dimension.

Jameson's approach to the question of a Marxist psychoanalysis includes most of the key concepts of the debate: construction of the subject, Imaginary and Symbolic, family structure, ideology, capitalist mode of production, history. But he accords much less prominence to the one concept that crucially differentiates the poststructuralist version of the debate from earlier ones: signifying practice. The project of bringing together Lacanian and Althusserian theory in fact poses in a particularly acute form the problem central to poststructuralism as a whole: that is, the exact definition, status and role of signifying practice in relation to the individual subject and society.

READER-ORIENTED THEORIES OF
INTERPRETATION

HERMENEUTICS

Introduction

The Greek God Hermes, credited with the invention of both language and writing, lies somewhere at the origin of the word 'hermeneutics'. As messenger of the gods, it was his task to communicate the divine word to mortals, thus mediating between Olympus and the sphere of human activity. The Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which means 'to say', 'to explain', or 'to translate', and the noun *hermeneia*, 'explanation' or 'interpretation', already map out the field of meaning hermeneutics would later assume. Of central importance for the Greek and for the modern sense of the term is the bringing to understanding of something obscure or foreign, the translation of the unfamiliar into a comprehensible form. In its most basic form hermeneutics has to do with mediation of understanding, and for this reason the 'art of interpretation' has been most often discussed and developed when meanings have been or become unclear. Although it has traditionally involved the method for dealing with textual artefacts of the past, in the twentieth century hermeneutics has been associated with more general philosophical considerations, especially in the realm of ontology. Rather than developing rules for the exegesis of written material, hermeneutically oriented theories for the past century have emphasized understanding as a basic orientation for our being-in-the-world.

Prior to the romantic era the tasks of hermeneutics were rather well defined and confined to three central areas. Perhaps the longest continuous hermeneutic tradition involves Biblical exegesis. It can be traced back to Old Testament times, when rules were developed for the correct interpretation of the Torah. The allegorical method associated with the early scholarship of the Catholic Church (Origenes, Augustine), in which a literal meaning (*sensus litteralis*) points to a higher moral, allegorical, or mystical sense (*sensus spiritualis*), and the subsequent challenge to this tradition by the Protestant Reformation, which insisted on interpreting scripture on its own (*scriptus sui ipsius interpres*), are the most important stages of Biblical hermeneutics. In secular life legal hermeneutics became

important during the Renaissance with the revival of interest in Roman Law. The attempt to lend a consistent interpretation to the Code of Justinian (AD 533) led scholars of jurisprudence to seek methods of correct interpretation. Indeed, on a practical level the need for hermeneutics is evident: in order to carry out justice from general laws, judges have to interpret their meanings as they apply to specific instances. A final area of interpretive endeavour, philological hermeneutics, has its origins in the Alexandrian School with its concentration on the interpretation of Homer and the rhetorical tradition. This branch of hermeneutics also experienced a reawakening during the Renaissance, when humanist scholars sought to reconstruct authentic versions of texts. Associated closely with the preservation and understanding of the classical heritage, philological hermeneutics was closely allied with translation and with more general pedagogical concerns.

Enlightenment hermeneutics

Enlightenment hermeneutic theory provides the most direct link with the history of literary criticism. Although writers such as Johann Martin Chladenius (1710–1759) and Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777) were not primarily concerned with interpreting literary texts, their focus on general rules for understanding written documents makes them relevant for this branch of hermeneutics. Despite considerable differences between Chladenius' affective or psychological approach and the semiotic direction propounded by Meier, enlightenment theorists are united in several respects. Unlike most later writers, they conceive of a single correct interpretation that can be established by eliminating error or obscurity. In this sense, their approach resembles that type of criticism which conceives interpretation as the refinement of a single version of a text's meaning. To proceed towards correct interpretation one must only exercise reason and have recourse to sound philological practices such as comparison. The correct and reasonable composition of the text itself allows the application of appropriate hermeneutic principles, and ultimately it is the intention of the author, embodied in the text, that the reader must grasp for a comprehensive understanding. However, the author's intention is important not because it represents a psychological state, but because it too seeks to represent a thing or object. The author and the reader do not converge in a psychological harmony as in some versions of nineteenth-century hermeneutics, but in agreement about the subject matter of the text. According to these enlightenment postulates the desired harmony between poetics (the making of the written text) and hermeneutics (the understanding and interpretation of the text) is mediated by a common object.

The emphasis on reason, correctness, authorial intent, and correspondence with an idea or object was not entirely unproblematic for eighteenth-century hermeneutics, and it is perhaps most interesting precisely when one of these precepts is implicitly called into question. This happens, for example, in the examination of figures, metaphor, or polysemous language. Although the threat to univocal interpretation is usually countered by one or another methodological suggestion (comparison, parallelism), occasionally even enlightenment writers seem willing to admit that 'obscurity' cannot be completely eliminated from interpretive activity. A similar problem is raised by Chladenius in his discussion of point-of-view (*Sehe-Punct*), a topic he treats in connection with historiography. Chladenius concedes that accounts are necessarily perspectival because of a variety of factors, from the physical position of one's body when witnessing an event to the previous knowledge one possesses prior to the event. True to his enlightenment principles, however, Chladenius regarded this inevitably perspectival account as an obstacle to be overcome, not as a fundamental part of hermeneutic understanding. Ultimately he affirms both the objectivity of the event itself and our ability to arrive at a correct understanding of it through reason and authorial intent.

Romantic hermeneutics

The change from enlightenment to romantic hermeneutics is best illustrated in the theory of Friedrich Ast (1778–1841). Unlike Chladenius and Meier, Ast was a classical philologist; thus his *Grundlinien der Grammatik, Hermeneutik und Kritik* (1808) is principally designed to instruct its readers on the proper treatment of Greek and Roman literature. What separates his philological hermeneutics from those of his enlightenment predecessors is his reliance on the unity of spirit informing a work. While Chladenius and Meier focused their efforts on eliminating obscurity and error in order to understand an object or event mediated by an authorial intent, Ast's goal is the higher unity that underlies the writings of the ancients. Without the assumption of such a unity meaning and significance would be impossible; each work and each part of individual works would be an atomistic fragment with no cohesiveness. The shift in romantic hermeneutics is thus from the thing (*Sache*) to the spirit (*Geist*). Authorial intent remains central to its concerns, but now psychological identification becomes the end of understanding. Rather than understanding an event or object equally distant from, and equally comprehensible to, both author and reader, in Ast's view the reader is called upon to assume the perspective of the author, partaking in the spirit of the foreign or past age.

The introduction of the concept of a unified spirit has far-reaching

consequences for the correct method of understanding. While Ast still relies heavily upon traditional grammatical and philological approaches to understanding – he calls a first level of understanding the ‘hermeneutics of the letter’ – he is also compelled to introduce a notion of the hermeneutic circle. For him the foundation of all understanding is to find the spirit of the whole in the individual occurrence and to comprehend the individual through the whole. The former is the analytical, the latter the synthetic aspect of understanding. In its simplest form this circle presents us with an epistemological contradiction, since we cannot gain knowledge of either the individual part or the whole without recourse to its counterpart. But this contradiction is resolved by Ast’s assumption of a prior harmony or correspondence of individual and whole. In keeping with the philosophy of identity propounded by his teacher Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1775–1854), the specific and the general, the analytic and the synthetic, implicate each other. The spirit of the age can be found in every individual poet and writer, and each author contributes to the unity of spirit identified with a given epoch. The second and third level of understanding he postulates, the ‘hermeneutics of meaning’ (*Hermeneutik des Sinnes*) and the ‘hermeneutics of the spirit’ (*Hermeneutik des Geistes*), thus appear to be part of his collapsed circle, both being informed by the idea: the higher, living unity out of which all life develops.

Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics

Friedrich Schleiermacher, perhaps better known for his theological writings and concern for New Testament hermeneutics, is usually viewed as the founder of the modern hermeneutic tradition. In contrast to Ast’s focus on the interpretation of classical texts, Schleiermacher conceives of hermeneutics as a general activity. His theory of interpretation is tantamount to an epistemology of objects from historical and intellectual life. Schleiermacher’s attempt to illuminate the conditions for the possibility of understanding itself is analogous to Kant’s in his critical philosophy. The importance of his contribution was not always recognized, however. Until 1959, when Heinz Kimmerle published the early lecture notes and notebooks, he was considered chiefly an advocate of a psychological hermeneutics. This erroneous notion was chiefly attributable to Wilhelm Dilthey, Schleiermacher’s biographer and a seminal contributor to hermeneutic theory himself. According to him, Schleiermacher insisted that the reader should be able to empathize or identify with the author who wrote a given text. The task of the interpreter would then be to recreate as accurately as possible an authorial state of mind, and the most accurate interpretation would be accomplished by scholars who could put themselves in place of the author to the greatest degree.

Indeed, this view is not without foundation in Schleiermacher's writings; the celebrated dictum that the highest perfection of interpretation would be to understand an author better than he could give an account of himself suggests the very conclusion that Dilthey drew. But this is only a partial view of Schleiermacher's thought, and more recent appraisals (Szondi, Frank) have correctly supplied a more rounded account.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutic theory actually consists of two levels. The first is grammatical and has to do with understanding the text as part of a linguistic universe. The second he called psychological or technical and entails the individual contribution of the author as subject. In Schleiermacher's theory the linguistic understanding of the text does not stand opposed to the psychology of its author; rather both are part of an ongoing process of interpretation. Perfect understanding – which Schleiermacher considered impossible – could only be achieved when either way of approaching the text would yield the same result, that is, where the individual and the general coincide. What Schleiermacher affirmed, therefore, was a dual approach to understanding. On the one hand, texts and utterances are dependent on a supra-individual structured system of signs. To achieve grammatical understanding the interpreter must consider both the linguistic community of the original public and the particular combination of words. With the terms *Sprache* (language) and *Rede* (speech) Schleiermacher anticipates Saussure's distinctions between *langue* and *parole* as well as those between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships. On the other hand, the psychological or technical aspect of hermeneutics does not consist solely of a state of mind, but also of the style or individuality of the text. One might conceive of his hermeneutics as combining a structural and a phenomenological aspect. The individual utterance must be understood and interpreted synthetically, as the result of both an impersonal language and an act of consciousness.

Since Schleiermacher did not conceive of understanding as the elimination of error or as the grasping of a harmonious spirit, interpretation is neither a finite nor a totally logical enterprise. Unlike his predecessors he introduces the notion of the divinatory into his theory as a necessary moment of hermeneutic activity. Despite appearances divination does not introduce an irrational element into hermeneutic theory. The divinatory may not be something we are able to account for in conceptual language, but it is neither arbitrary, nor pure guesswork, nor anti-rational. Rather, it should be seen as the way in which we perforce encounter the other as something foreign to ourselves. There is always a first moment of guessing or divination in understanding, but this initial encounter is then subject to revision based on rational procedures. Schleiermacher's use of the divinatory can be understood more accurately as a fundamental openness to foreign experience, a willingness to confront otherness on

unfamiliar terms. Unlike Ast's hermeneutic circle, Schleiermacher's is not a preconceived harmony of synthetic and analytic halves. It designates instead a movement initiated by a spiritual act of divination and traces a trajectory that is never completed.

Dilthey and the foundation of the human sciences

The hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) represents both an extension and a rejection of Schleiermacher's theory. Dilthey disregards the important linguistic aspect adhered to by both Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). The distinction they drew between a supra-individual structure of language and the individual articulation of utterances resurfaces in the twentieth century in other contexts (structuralism, Russian Formalism). The fundamental linguisticity of interpretation postulated by German idealism, however, reappears only in the present century with the late work of Martin Heidegger and the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer. What Dilthey inherits and develops is the psychological dimension of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Dilthey retains a noticeable romantic tendency in his thought, affirming the fundamentally creative spirit of the critic in his encounters with texts. For him the highest form of understanding occurs when the reader reaches a state of total empathy with an author. The aim of hermeneutics is thus duplication of experience. Employing our imagination and creative efforts, we are called upon to re-live or re-experience the circumstances as well as the feelings and emotions expressed in written documents. We accomplish this by working in the reverse direction from the person who had the actual experience. Our ability to transpose ourselves mentally into a situation demands that we work back through the expression to arrive at the original experience.

Dilthey's work is thus particularly suggestive for literary criticism, and it is certainly not coincidental that he himself wrote extensively on literary subjects, and that he served as an inspiration for an entire school of literary scholars in Germany during the first third of the twentieth century. He considered literary works to be the highest form of expression of lived experience. A first class of life-expressions (*Lebensäußerungen*) consists of concepts, judgements, and ideas; these are defined merely in terms of content and are understood independent of the living subject that produced them. A second class contains actions. These are more difficult to interpret because one needs to reconstruct a context in which they make sense; hence they do not permit immediate access to inner spiritual life. Expressions of lived experience (*Erlebnisausdrücke*), by contrast, establish a special connection between life, from which they emanate, and understanding, which they produce. Unlike mere ideas, these expressions are

not true or false, but authentic or non-authentic, providing direct access to the spirit. For Dilthey, great works of literature are the best examples of such expressions of lived experience and thus foundational for human studies. Because they exceed the personal experience of an individual author, they exist in a world beyond deception and transience, in a realm inaccessible to reflection and theory. Such expressions give us access to the profundity of the human mind outside of the spheres of science and action.

Dilthey's major contributions to hermeneutic theory, however, involve his injection of a historical dimension into the question of understanding and his celebrated distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Following in the footsteps of Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder, Dilthey posited a separation between the way in which we have cognition of the natural world and the way in which we confront the historical world. The former demands an epistemology based on a subject–object distinction; the task of the scientist is to provide explanations for phenomena in nature and to develop laws that describe the regularity of natural process. The human sciences must operate with fundamentally different notions. Since they deal with human experience, with an inner reality accessible to us only through objectified expressions, the researcher must employ understanding and interpretation. Hermeneutics is thus situated at the foundation of an entire branch of scholarly investigation and contrasted with the methodology of the natural sciences. Dilthey's goal was to ground this distinction philosophically by composing a *Critique of Historical Reason*, a work he never completed. This critique would have complemented Kant's epistemology for the natural sciences in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by supplying categories for understanding in the human sciences.

Ontological hermeneutics

In the twentieth century the central innovation in hermeneutics is associated with the work of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–). The general shift they advocated can be summarized in three areas. (1) In contrast to the tradition since at least the enlightenment hermeneutics no longer concerns itself exclusively with the understanding and interpretation of written documents or speech. (2) Unlike romantic hermeneutic theory from Schleiermacher to Dilthey, the aim of understanding is not focused on the communication with, or the psychology of, another person. (3) The hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer explores a realm that is prior to or more fundamental than Dilthey's separation of the natural sciences from the human sciences. Twentieth-century hermeneutics takes leave of the epistemological arena

in which previous theories of understanding had operated and moves into the area of 'fundamental ontology', to use Heidegger's phrase. This means that understanding is not to be conceived transitively; we are not concerned with understanding something. Rather understanding is grasped as our way of being-in-the-world, as the fundamental way we exist prior to any cognition or intellectual activity. Ontological hermeneutics thus replaces the question of understanding as knowledge about the world with the question of being-in-the-world.

Heidegger's discussion of 'the existential constitution of the There' (*Die existentielle Konstitution des Da*) in the fifth chapter of *Sein und Zeit* (1927; *Being and Time*) is largely responsible for this decisive shift in the history of hermeneutic thought. Heidegger had already alluded to the central place of hermeneutics in his philosophy early in this work, when he labelled his task, the phenomenology of *Dasein*, a hermeneutic undertaking in the original sense of the word. In contrast to his teacher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who tried to introduce a rigorous 'scientific' method into philosophy, Heidegger's equation of phenomenology and hermeneutics announces an abandonment of this methodological path for 'non-scientific' truth. Later in the work, however, he is concerned more with clarifying the actual relationship between *Dasein* and *Verstehen* (understanding). Although for convenience *Dasein* may be thought of as human existence, it should not be confused with the Cartesian or the Kantian subject. Rather, it is that particular type of being for whom the question of Being arises, rather than the subject of cognition.

Heidegger makes clear that by understanding he does not mean a mode of cognition opposed to explanation, as Dilthey had defined the term. For him understanding is something prior to cognition, a primordial state or power of being. The essence of understanding does not entail grasping the present situation, but rather projection (*Entwurf*) into the future. It has to do with the grasping of *Dasein*'s own potentiality-for-Being, the Being-possible that is essential for the structure of *Dasein*. Thus understanding has two aspects in Heidegger's thought. On the one hand, it designates the existentially prior order to *Dasein* and, on the other, the possibility of Being belonging of *Dasein*. This latter aspect Heidegger associates with interpretation (*Auslegung*), which is always grounded in understanding. Indeed, for Heidegger interpretation is actually what we have already understood or the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding. This conception of understanding and interpretation has enormous ramifications for literary criticism. To understand a text in Heidegger's sense does not involve ferreting out some meaning placed there by the author, but rather the unfolding of the possibility of Being indicated by the text. And interpretation does not entail imposing a 'signification' on a text or placing a value on it, but clarifying the

involvement that is disclosed by the text in our always prior understanding of the world.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's Truth and Method

Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* (1960; *Wahrheit und Methode*) can be considered an explication and expansion of the most important passages on hermeneutics in *Being and Time*. Indeed, the title reiterates Heidegger's basic position concerning the nature of understanding in human endeavour. Unlike Heidegger's own use of 'and' in the title of his book, Gadamer's conjunction should not be read in its connective, but rather in its disjunctive sense. Rejecting Husserl's notion of consciousness, Heidegger sought a new basis for phenomenology by investigating temporality, thus connecting Being with time. Gadamer's title, by contrast, must be read as an implicit dissociation of 'truth' from 'method'. Like Heidegger, the question of truth for Gadamer is prior to or outside of methodological considerations. The main target of the book in this regard is the experimental method of the natural sciences, which has too often been associated with truth in everyday consciousness. Much of what Gadamer opposes, of course, is a stereotypical picture of nineteenth-century methods rather than actual scientific practice; his criticism does not take into consideration more recent theorizing on scientific method by writers such as Kuhn, Feyerabend, or Lakatos. None the less, his criticism is a valid refutation of traditional conceptions of our approach to natural phenomenon. Method for Gadamer is something that a subject applies to an object to yield a specified result, which then in turn is labelled true. Gadamer's continuation of Heidegger's hermeneutic project is meant to counter this pernicious association of truth and method. Against the tendency of natural science to ignore the primordial scope of understanding, Gadamer proposes hermeneutics as both a corrective and a metacritical orientation that would oversee the whole field of methodology. Gadamer, unlike Dilthey and like Heidegger, thus claims for hermeneutics a universal status. He is interested in explaining understanding as such, not in its relationship to a particular discipline, but conceived as the essence of our being-in-the-world. In this sense his book is best viewed as an attempt to mediate between philosophy and natural science by going beyond the narrow horizon of scientific inquiry.

Gadamer's concerns, like Heidegger's, are thus philosophical and ontological in nature; *Truth and Method* introduces hermeneutics not to provide a new and better method, but to question methodology and its relationship to truth. To accomplish this task Gadamer constructs two philosophical narratives in his book. The first, heavily indebted to

Heidegger, tells the story of the Western philosophical tradition in the form of a fall from grace and a possible future redemption from this fallen state. In some pre-Cartesian time – Heidegger specifies pre-Socratic Greece, but Gadamer remains evasive on this point – the scientific method had not yet come to dominate the notion of truth. Subject and object, being and thinking, were not radically severed from each other as they became later. But with the advent of Cartesian dualism the alienation of Western human beings, which had presumably been detectable long before Descartes, became the cornerstone of Western philosophy. According to this view of the history of philosophy the unstated task of speculative activity from the seventeenth to the twentieth century has been to conceal and to justify the alienation of mind and matter, subject and object, by constructing a philosophical basis for the scientific method. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the most important philosophical document in this tradition, since he supplies the most ingenuous epistemological apology for the natural sciences.

Critique of aesthetic consciousness

To highlight the hegemony of the natural scientific method, Gadamer devotes the first section of his book to a topic that would seem diametrically opposed to science: aesthetic consciousness. His point here is that art has been consistently and systematically excluded from truth, and that the aesthetic sphere has been reduced to a realm of mere appearance (*Schein*) by the dominant scientific method. Art and truth are dissociated as the result of an epistemological model that relegates all possibilities of cognition outside of those in accord with the new method to an arena of non-truth. Art thus constitutes a sphere that suffers a marked devaluation in the face of the privileged method; but it is also an area in which the deficiencies of this same method are most pronounced. Art, therefore, is precisely the realm of philosophical inquiry that interests Gadamer most. For ultimately he is concerned with disclosing the opposition to the scientific method and with narrating the tale of the break-down of this method's tyranny. The completion of this first narrative sequence involves both the return to the traditional question of Being, such as Heidegger raised in the opening passages of *Being and Time*, and an examination of the traces of resistance to modern science's perversion of these questions. Both Heidegger and Gadamer himself, as revivers of the concern with understanding as an ontological category, are accordingly cast in the role of the most important authors of the final chapters of this philosophical story.

The critique of aesthetic consciousness that Gadamer undertakes depends heavily on a differentiated evaluation of Kant's *Kritik der*

Urteilkraft (1790, *Critique of Judgement*). He finds himself in fundamental agreement with Kant concerning the nature of aesthetic judgements. Although their status is certain, in that they cannot be disproven or refuted, and although they are binding for all human beings, they differ from other judgements in several respects. They cannot be reduced to concepts; they do not entail purposefulness; nor do they involve definitive conclusions about objects. Gadamer disagrees with Kant concerning their place in the cognitive hierarchy, of course. While Kant privileges knowledge based on subjects confronting objects, it is precisely the absence of this model for aesthetic judgement that is attractive to Gadamer. In art and in the aesthetic judgements it precipitates he sees a truth that is more fundamental than that of the natural scientific model. Gadamer elucidates this truthfulness in his discussion of play or game (*Spiel*), a notion that is found in both Kant (*Critique of Judgement*, § 14) and, more prominently, in the theories of Friedrich Schiller, especially in his *Über die ästhetische Erziehung* (1795, *On the Aesthetic Education*). But in contrast to his predecessors and to all purely hedonistic aesthetic theories of play Gadamer conceives of play or game as a way of overcoming the subject–object dichotomy. In a game we give ourselves over to a set of rules beyond any individual subjectivity. We do not confront the game as an object, but rather participate in it as an event. And in this participation the subject is itself transformed. Our relationship to art is analogous. We do not confront the artwork as a subject confronting an object. Instead we participate in the game that constitutes genuine art and are ourselves transformed. Indeed, for Gadamer play is the truth and essence of authentic art.

The hermeneutic tradition

The second narrative embedded in *Truth and Method*, the history of hermeneutics, has similar concluding chapters, but a slightly different plot, since the hermeneutic tradition is generally associated by Gadamer with an opposition to the dominant scientific mode of thought. It has a connection with art too, in that Gadamer sees art as paradigmatic for the notion of understanding in general. But the beginning of this story lies in the pre-romantic era with the tradition of Biblical exegesis and humanism. For Gadamer the origins of hermeneutics are intimately linked with the concern for discovering the correct sense of texts; hermeneutics seeks to reveal original meaning, whether the texts it treats are from the religious or the secular tradition. If the activity of legal interpretation is added to these two traditions, then we can see why pre-romantic hermeneutics is presented in terms of a threefold power: *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding), *subtilitas explicandi* (explication), and *subtilitas applicandi* (application).

Once again this narrative is concerned primarily with the loss of an original state of existence. For Gadamer's thesis is that hermeneutics in the course of its rather uneven development forgets its three-fold power and is stripped eventually of its explicatory and applicative functions. Schleiermacher's writings represent a turning point in this development since he reduces hermeneutics to its power of understanding. Like Dilthey, Gadamer tends to associate his romantic predecessor with a psychologized version of hermeneutics, ignoring for the sake of his narrative the linguistic element in his work. The historians of the nineteenth century, especially Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–1884), added to hermeneutic reflection by considering the question of how tradition is mediated, and Gadamer credits Droysen in particular with debunking the notion of objectivity in historiography. But as heirs to the romantic tradition Gadamer considers their work to be deficient as well: they considered history as a text that is understood in much the same fashion as the work of an individual author is understood by Schleiermacher. Dilthey, according to Gadamer, has the distinction of recognizing the problem clearly. He saw the conflict between the psychology of understanding and the philosophy of history and sought to overcome the dichotomy by providing the human sciences with a new epistemological base. But Dilthey, like his predecessors, is unable to extricate himself from methodological thinking. He, too, sought objectivity and objective knowledge. His conception of the human sciences retains the subject–object duality inherent in the 'rival' scientific method.

The resolution to the hermeneutic dilemma, like the resuscitation of Western philosophy, involves Heidegger's overcoming of one final metaphysical obstacle, Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl, of course, regarded his philosophy as opposed to objectivism and metaphysics also. With his recourse to eidetic reduction (the bracketing of the actual existence of the world) and the view of consciousness as transcendental subjectivity, he endeavoured to establish a rigorous basis for certain knowledge that would transcend Cartesian dualism. But his critique of the objectivism of all earlier philosophies was, according to Gadamer, really a methodological continuation of tendencies in modern philosophy. Heidegger's project, by contrast, was conceived as a return to the basis of Western philosophy; in the very first section of *Being and Time* he announces that he will return to the Greeks in order to take up again the neglected question of Being. In opening the ontological question, Heidegger did not seek a radical grounding of philosophy itself, as Husserl has done, nor the solution to the problem of historicism, which was Droysen's task, nor a foundation for the human sciences *à la* Dilthey. Rather in his fundamental ontology the whole idea of grounding itself experiences a total revision.

Heidegger's thesis in *Being and Time*, as restated by Gadamer in an abbreviated and simplified form, is that 'Being itself is time'.¹ This radical rethinking of the historicity of *Dasein* has the effect of negating precisely the transcendental reduction that made Husserl's phenomenology possible. If the essence of *Dasein* is in its finitude and temporality, being-in-the-world rather than transcendental ego, then the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) could not be reduced or bracketed as Husserl demanded. Nor could reflection set aside the facticity or situatedness of *Dasein* for a proto-I or transcendental subject. The ramifications of the historicity of *Dasein* for hermeneutics are enormous. Whereas for modern science and even for Dilthey historicity had been an obstacle to the ideal of objective knowledge, it was now transformed into a universal philosophical concept that enabled knowledge. As we have already seen in *Being and Time*, understanding becomes the way in which the historicity of *Dasein* is itself carried out. Dilthey's conflict between the psychology of understanding and the philosophy of history is thus dissolved by reformulating the question of Being and the role of hermeneutic reflection.

The rehabilitation of 'prejudice'

Gadamer understands his contribution to hermeneutics as a continuation of Heidegger's rethinking of Being. Especially important for him is his predecessor's affirmation of the prestructured nature of understanding. While previous theory had advocated purging preconceptions to arrive at unbiased, objective knowledge about the world, Heidegger claims that it is precisely our being-in-the-world with its prejudices and presuppositions that makes understanding possible. This is made clear in his discussion of interpretation. For Heidegger interpretation is always grounded in something we have in advance, in a fore-having (*Vorhabe*), in something we see in advance, in a fore-sight (*Vorsicht*), and in something we grasp in advance, in a fore-conception (*Vorgriff*). This is another way of saying that we do not come to any object or text innocent of all presuppositions; we are always already filled with the primordial understanding Heidegger assigns to all *Dasein*. Analogously, the meaning we derive from an object or a text must be conceived as the result of our presuppositions. Heidegger thus defines meaning as 'the "upon-which" [*Woraufhin*] of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception'.²

¹ 'Das Sein selber ist Zeit' (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 243; *Truth and Method*, p. 228).

² 'Sinn ist das durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff strukturierte Woraufhin des Entwurfs, aus dem her etwas als etwas verständlich wird' (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 151; *Being and Time*, p. 193).

Gadamer takes up this issue most directly in his discussion of prejudice (*Vorurteil*). The German word, like its English equivalent, although etymologically related to pre-judging or merely forming a judgement about something beforehand, has come to mean a negative bias or a quality that excludes accurate judgement. The enlightenment, Gadamer claims, is responsible for this discrediting of the notion of prejudice. But this discrediting, he continues, is itself the result of a prejudice that is linked to the methodological claims to truth proposed by the natural sciences. Prejudice, because it belongs to historical reality itself, is not a hindrance to understanding, but rather a condition for the possibility of understanding. Gadamer thus proposes a fundamental rehabilitation of this notion to do justice to the finitude of human existence and the necessarily historical mode of being-in-the-world. When Gadamer clarifies his use of 'prejudice' in this fashion, the reader can see that he is merely affirming with a different word the Heideggerian principles of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. That he selects the word prejudice instead of some more innocuous word can be explained by his desire to achieve a shock effect.

But Gadamer's use of prejudice raises more serious problems than those arising from a spontaneous reaction to this infelicitous, albeit deliberate, choice of words. A central difficulty is how to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate prejudices or false prejudices from the true variety. Gadamer indicates at various points that false and illegitimate prejudices cause misunderstanding. By conceding this point, however, it is difficult to see what distinguishes Gadamer's requirement for the elimination of false prejudices from the ideal propagated by the enlightenment, against which he argues so strongly. In this regard it appears that Gadamer confounds the issue of prejudice by refusing to differentiate among its various types. What he suggests at various points in his book, but never details, is that individual prejudices can be separated from those belonging to an epoch, and that only the latter are valid or admissible in that they are a *sine qua non* for understanding. At another point he makes a similar distinction between prejudices that become conscious during interpretation and those that do not. 'Productive prejudices' enable understanding while prejudices that hinder understanding lead to misunderstanding. This somewhat circular manner of arguing weakens the original Heideggerian notions, but the reason that Gadamer does not make an effort to draw his distinctions more sharply is not difficult to understand. To do so he would need a further meta-theory of interpretation. He would thus either fall into the same enlightenment snare that he tries to avoid in proposing an objective science of interpreting prejudices, or have to embrace the absurdly relativist position that all prejudices, as part of our finite existence, are equally valid.

Finally, the very notion that the enlightenment ideal of eliminating prejudice is a prejudice is itself subject to a similar claim from anyone who takes Gadamer seriously. If we accept the contention concerning the historicity of *Dasein*, then Gadamer too is bound and 'prejudiced' in his dealings with enlightenment. There is no absolute or objective vantage point from which he can make a judgement about the prejudiced nature of the enlightenment's ideals. Gadamer is aware of this contradiction. Indeed, he recognizes that his entire theory cannot be subject to the very premises it propounds: he cannot postulate relativity without conceding the relativity of his own statements. His defence against critics who would turn his hermeneutics back upon itself is that formal refutation does not necessarily destroy the truth value of an argument. This may be true, but in denying formal logic, Gadamer gives his reader no method to verify its veracity. We are compelled either to reject this claim or accept it on trust.

Effective history and horizon

Despite its problems, the notion that one's prejudices and preconceptions are a fundamental part of the hermeneutic situation has been extremely suggestive. In contrast to previous hermeneutic theory the historicity of the interpreter is not a barrier to understanding. A truly hermeneutic thinking must take account of its own historicity (*die eigene Geschichtlichkeit mitdenken*). It is only a 'proper hermeneutics' when it demonstrates the effectivity (*Wirkung*) of history within understanding itself. Accordingly Gadamer calls this type of hermeneutics effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). He is quick to caution that he is not trying to promote research that would develop a new method that would take into account factors of effect and influence. He is not making a plea for a new and independent discipline ancillary to the human sciences. Rather, he calls for a new type of consciousness, what he terms, somewhat awkwardly, 'effective-historical consciousness' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), which would recognize what is already occurring when we encounter documents from the past. Whether we approve of effective history or not, it is, according to Gadamer, intimately intertwined with our understanding, and effective historical consciousness simply makes us aware of this reality. It is consciousness of the inevitability of the hermeneutic situation.

To clarify further what this hermeneutic situation entails, Gadamer introduces the notion of 'horizon'. It is a term that he borrows from Husserl and the phenomenological tradition; in the phrase 'horizon of expectation' it later became a central concept of Hans Robert Jauss' aesthetics of reception (see below, pp. 320–6). In Gadamer's usage it

designates 'a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision'³ and is thus an essential part of the concept of situation. Horizon describes and defines our situatedness in the world. It should not be conceived, however, in terms of a fixed or closed standpoint. Rather, it is 'something into which we move and which moves with us'.⁴ It may also be defined with reference to the prejudices that we bring with us at any given time, since these represent a horizon beyond which we cannot see. The act of understanding is then described in one of Gadamer's most notorious metaphors as a fusion of one's own horizon with the historical horizon (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Gadamer concedes that the very idea of a separate horizon for something like a literary text is illusory. There is no line that separates past from present horizon. The world of the text is not alien to us since it has contributed to the formation of our own horizon. Indeed, Gadamer claims at one point that in reality there is really only one horizon that 'embraces everything contained in historical consciousness'.⁵ Nevertheless, the illusion of a separate horizon, the necessary projection of a historical horizon, is a requisite phase in the process of understanding. It is immediately followed by historical consciousness recombining what it had distinguished in order to fuse and become one again. The fusing of horizons actually takes place, Gadamer maintains, but it means that the historical horizon is projected and then cancelled or eliminated as a separate entity. In an almost Hegelian manner, it seems that understanding is historical consciousness becoming aware of itself.

'Application' and the 'classical' in Gadamer

This activity of consciousness is connected with what is possibly Gadamer's most original contribution to modern hermeneutics. Relying on legal hermeneutics as a paradigm, Gadamer insists that every interpretation is simultaneously an application (*Anwendung*). Restoring the *subtilitas applicandi* to hermeneutics, however, is not a mere gesture towards recapturing the original function of the interpretive enterprise. Rather, it is an affirmation and a logical consequence of principles developed in connection with effective-historical consciousness. Understanding means application for the present; tradition affects the present as the mediation of historical understanding. Thus legal hermeneutics is not a special case for Gadamer, but rather a paradigm for all hermeneutic activity. As in his

³ 'einen Standort . . . der die Möglichkeit des Sehens beschränkt (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 286; *Truth and Method*, p. 269).

⁴ 'Der Horizont ist vielmehr etwas, in das wir hineinwandern und das mit uns mitwandert' (Gadamer, *ibid.*, p. 288; p. 271).

⁵ 'In Wahrheit ist es also ein einziger Horizont, der all das umschließt, was das geschichtliche Bewußtsein in sich enthält' (Gadamer, *ibid.*, p. 288, p. 271).

use of the term 'prejudice', he employs a provocative wording to elucidate an idea that is actually much less controversial. Application is not to be understood as a praxis in the Marxist sense, or as any performance of a physical deed. It does not entail a perceptible taking from the text and putting into activity in the real world. Rather, it is more akin to what Roman Ingarden has called 'concretion', an actualizing or making-present for the interpreter. In this sense a comparison could be drawn between a theatre director interpreting a script and realizing it in performance, and the activity of a reader in understanding a text. Both include application in Gadamer's sense of the word. But we might also think of application within the frame of Gadamer's central analogy between the process of understanding and the dialogue. According to this model, when we encounter a text we enter into an open conversation with a past in which the give-and-take, the questioning and answering, leads to understanding. Application, then, can be described as a mediation between the then of the text and the now of the reader, as a conversation between the 'thou' of the past and the 'I' of the present. Seen as concretion or mediation, the concept of application loses some of its provocative appeal, and Gadamer's revival of the lost unity of legal hermeneutics is thus less radical than it appears at first glance.

It would be false, on the other hand, to go to the other extreme and to think of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a conservative enterprise, even though his plea for a rehabilitation of the notions of authority, the classical, and tradition suggests a retrograde direction. Again the problem is largely, although not exclusively, one of provocative terminology. Gadamer accuses the enlightenment of setting up an illicit opposition between authority and reason or freedom and points out in contrast to this view that authority as embodied in individuals is not the consequence of subjugation, but of a recognition that the person in authority has superior insight and judgement. Submission to authority is therefore grounded in reason and freedom, not power and arbitrariness. Tradition is seen as a form of authority, and it is also allied with reason and freedom in Gadamer's thought. For tradition is merely what generations have sought to preserve against the ravages of time. The act of preservation, Gadamer states, is no less a moment of freedom than that of rebellion or innovation. Rather than trying to cancel or avoid tradition, Gadamer feels that we have to recognize it as a part of historical relations and take account of its hermeneutic productivity. Much the same holds true for the classical (*das Klassische*). This notion should not be exclusively identified with antiquity or works of German classicism. It designates, rather, that which has distinguished itself over the years, works that have persevered in the face of variable tastes and changing times. In a certain sense such works are timeless, but Gadamer emphasizes that their timelessness lies precisely

in their historical being, in their ability to continue to speak to successive generations. The classical, in the Gadamerian usage, thus affirms both the appeal and the fundamentally limitless interpretability of a work. Classical works are simultaneously a testimony to the variability of human consciousness and the greatness of the finest products of human culture.

Despite Gadamer's differentiated views on tradition and the heritage, there are good reasons for conceiving his theory as a basically conservative undertaking. At one point he maintains that 'understanding should not be conceived so much as an activity of subjectivity, but rather as inserting oneself in a happening of tradition'.⁶ This notion of hermeneutics is too passive. It serves to legitimize the norm of a mainstream heritage and to disallow the use of alternatives to the canonical texts. Moreover, the proclivity for the classical, even if it is defined as what has been preserved because it has been found worthy of preserving, ignores power relationships inherent in any socially mediated text or in any social exchange. Gadamer would seem to be ignorant of theorists like Michel Foucault who find language itself to be implicated with power and prejudice. In this respect, Gadamer's dialogical model, the ideal communication between past and present as conversation between two speakers, is not only a distortion of what understanding actually entails, but is itself an ideology serving to obfuscate the concrete social relations within which communication occurs. Indeed, Gadamer's failure to integrate a social perspective into his general theoretical framework remains a weakness in his work. Like Heidegger, he seems able to admit historicity only on an abstract theoretical level. When he himself analyzes texts – whether it is a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke or a novel by Karl Immermann – the potentially radical notion of being-in-the-world produces a philosophical criticism akin to the most ahistorical, New Critical readings.

Habermas' response to Gadamer

Perhaps the most important challenge to the ontologizing of hermeneutics as propounded by Heidegger and Gadamer came from Jürgen Habermas (1929–), the foremost representative of the second generation of the Frankfurt School. It is important to note first, however, that there is fundamental agreement between Habermas and Gadamer about several issues, especially those concerning language and dialogue. In his lengthy review of *Truth and Method*, for example, Habermas at first apparently sides with Gadamer against Wittgenstein in a discussion of translation.

⁶ 'Das Verstehen ist selber nicht so sehr als eine Handlung der Subjektivität zu denken, sondern als Einrücken in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen, in dem sich Vergangenheit und Gegenwart beständig vermitteln' (Gadamer, *ibid.*, pp. 274–5; p. 258).

His main point is that ordinary language grammar supplies us with the ability to transcend the language that it defines and thus gives us the ability to translate from one language into another. When we learn a language, we do not merely learn a language game that simply enables us to function in one particular language, but also what one might call a 'universal grammar' that allows us to go between languages. Wittgenstein can thus only conceive of translation as a transformation according to general rules, but he cannot admit these general rules into our practice of language learning. For Habermas, who uses Gadamer liberally to support his argument, the possibility of translation is founded upon ordinary language usage, and translation itself is only an extension of what occurs in normal conversation. What unites Gadamer and Habermas against Wittgenstein, therefore, is the notion of language as dialogical as opposed to the conception of language as a set of formalized rules. Although Wittgenstein recognized language as a life form, he conceived the linguistic practice as the reproduction of fixed patterns. For Habermas – and for Habermas' positive evaluation of Gadamer – language remains an open structure, which allows native speakers both to interpret the rules that govern linguistic utterance and to distance themselves from these rules.

Habermas also finds an ally in Gadamer in two other areas. The first of these is their mutual opposition to various forms of objectivism. For Gadamer objectivism was related in general to method, particularly to that of natural science. Habermas is more specific in his designations. In the first instance hermeneutic self-reflection opposes positivism, but it also furnishes a critique of phenomenological and linguistic foundations of the human sciences that retain objectivist vestiges. What Habermas finds especially useful in Gadamer is the notion of the always already situated nature of the interpreter. This notion argues against the claims to non-reflexive impartiality and scientific accuracy propounded by some brands of human science. Ultimately all forms of objectivism are incompatible with historicity as Gadamer conceives it. Effective history supplies an antidote not only for historicist reductions, but also for positivist, neo-positivist, and quasi-positivist ahistorical thought. Habermas supports his (and Gadamer's) position with reflections on historiography. Eye-witness accounts, although they may be empirically accurate, are inevitably poorer than the historical description of events in the course of time. This is so simply because the later observer partakes in a more complete and richer narrative by being able to grasp cause and outcome more fully.

These observations on history lead Habermas to a second area of agreement with Gadamer with regard to his reintroduction of application into hermeneutic reflection. Comprehending events historically means

for Habermas that we understand them in a scheme of possible action. Hermeneutics thus plays an important role in what Habermas would later develop in his theory of 'communicative action', since it mediates understanding of the past as well as between present cultures and groups and thereby promotes the formation of consensus. In this regard we can see the attraction for Habermas in a theory of hermeneutic understanding that is 'structurally oriented toward eliciting from tradition a possible action-orienting self-understanding of social groups'.⁷

Despite Habermas' recruitment of Gadamer for his battles with protean positivist tendencies, he feels that Gadamer is fundamentally mistaken in his rigid dichotomy of truth and method. For in separating hermeneutic reflection from the natural sciences, Gadamer unwittingly confirms precisely the devaluation of hermeneutics undertaken from the standpoint of its opponents. In contrast to this view Habermas contends first that hermeneutics cannot afford to remain metacritical. It must also partake in methodology if it is to be worth anything for the human sciences. Like his colleague Karl-Otto Apel (1922–), Habermas seems uncomfortable with the total lack of objective standards in Gadamer's theory. If we are going to be able to distinguish between understanding and misunderstanding, then we must have some criteria on which to base this distinction. In short, we cannot be concerned solely with the structure of understanding or the possibility of understanding; we must also take into account the validity of understanding.

Second, Habermas points out that developments in the natural sciences have drastically altered the philosophical tradition and thus our present situation. To pretend that we can exclude the natural sciences is to ignore precisely the horizon of our own age and to deny the historicity of knowledge. Method, including the method Gadamer associates with the natural sciences, is an integral part of our heritage. In general, then, Habermas wants to link the empirical and the analytical methods of natural sciences with hermeneutic procedures. Although he too separates these realms in other writings (under the rubric of instrumental reason and communicative reason), he rejects a theory that would eliminate hermeneutic experience from methodological concerns and isolate it in an abstract realm of truth.

Habermas' more serious objections, however, concern the implications of Gadamer's work for emancipatory politics. Like many critics, he takes strong exception to his anti-enlightenment polemics with regard to prejudice, authority, and tradition. He accuses him of accepting the incomplete

⁷ 'Das hermeneutische Verstehen ist seiner Struktur nach darauf angelegt, aus Traditionen ein mögliches handlungsorientierendes Selbstverständnis sozialer Gruppe zu erklären' (Habermas, *Sozialwissenschaften*, p. 278; 'A review', p. 353).

and undialectical view of the enlightenment propagated by romanticism. In contrast to the acceptance of authority, Habermas reaffirms the opposition between authority and reason. In contradistinction to the ontologizing of tradition undertaken by Heidegger and Gadamer, he introduces the notion of reflection. According to Habermas, Gadamer's championing of the prejudices handed down by tradition denies our ability to reflect upon these prejudices and to reject them. Agents appear as passive recipients caught in the endless stream of their heritage. What Habermas wants is a critical dimension in hermeneutic thought, one that would enable us to carry out a critique of ideology (*Ideologiekritik*). This can be accomplished only if we possess some ability to counter the hegemony of tradition or to choose an alternative tradition. In Gadamer's framework this would appear to be impossible in view of his claim for the universality of hermeneutics and its ontological status. Thus Habermas must oppose both these claims.

But the difference between Gadamer and Habermas with regard to ideology and emancipation are directly related to the ways in which they idealize the dialogical situation. For Gadamer idealization appears to be built into the normal interchange. Language is conceived as a pure system of exchange not subject to distortion by power or social processes. Thus Habermas objects to Gadamer's idealized meta-institution of language, reminding us that 'language is *also* a medium of domination and social power; it serves to legitimate relations of organized force'.⁸ Habermas' own idealization of dialogue occurs as a kind of utopian projection that informs actual interchanges. 'The anticipation of possible truth and true life is constitutive for every linguistic communication which is not monological',⁹ and only this anticipation enables us to posit a regulative principle of understanding. Gadamer's idealization is incorporated into our conversation with the other; Habermas' is the condition for the possibility of our entering into an understanding with the other.

To counter effectively Gadamer's idealization as well as his claim for hermeneutic universality, Habermas resorts to a psychoanalytic model. Psychoanalysis provides him with a theory that establishes the limits of normal hermeneutics. The reason for this is that in the analytic situation we are no longer dealing with the usual dialogue, but rather with systematically distorted communication. Drawing on the work of Alfred Lorenzer, Habermas outlines a depth hermeneutics that is

⁸ 'Sprache ist *auch* ein Medium von Herrschaft und sozialer Macht. Sie dient der Legitimation von Beziehungen organisierter Gewalt' (Habermas, *Sozialwissenschaften*, p. 287; 'A review', p. 360).

⁹ 'die Antizipation möglicher Wahrheit und richtigen Lebens [ist] für jede nicht monologisch sprachliche Verständigung konstitutiv' (Habermas, 'Universalitätsanspruch', p. 155; 'Hermeneutic claim', p. 206).

guided by specific theoretical assumptions rather than by adherence to tradition. These theoretical assumptions take account of the fact that language is no longer employed in a public fashion and that there is no necessary congruence between the intentions, actions, and speech of the patient. Depth hermeneutics also presupposes an organization of symbols at a pre-linguistic level; the logical and public use of symbols we expect in everyday communication is not operative, for example, in dreams, as Freud had pointed out at the beginning of the century. Thus instead of 'elementary hermeneutic understanding' (*einfaches hermeneutisches Sinnverstehen*) we must turn to 'scenic understanding' (*das szenische Verstehen*), ('Universalitätsanspruch', p. 137; 'Hermeneutic claim', p. 194), which makes clear the meaning of utterances and symbols by clarifying the original scene. Apparent nonsense at the level of consciousness is explained by causes from unconscious sources. Meaning is not determined by a content, by answering the question 'what?', but rather by reference to an initial situation, by answering the question 'why?'. Depth hermeneutics is therefore explanatory understanding and presupposes not only the possession of communicative competence, but a theory of communicative competence as well. Only a theory of communicative competence can explain the deformations in the normal dialogical situation caused by the unconscious on an individual level or by power and ideology at the level of a society.

E. D. Hirsch: meaning and significance

A large part of Gadamer's reply¹⁰ to Habermas consisted in his reaffirmation of the ontological status of the hermeneutic enterprise. By shifting hermeneutics onto methodological ground, Habermas has distorted the thrust of Gadamer's thesis and confounded a notion of primordial understanding with a universal method. Much the same could be said about Gadamer's chief critic in the United States, E. D. Hirsch. Indeed, the very title of Hirsch's book, *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), indicates that he is concerned with a method for discriminating between correct and incorrect interpretations. In his quest for validity Hirsch actually opposes two traditions in theory. The first is composed of critics who, like Gadamer, might be called radical relativists. These critics deny that a single determinate meaning can be tied to any written document or work of art. They contend, rather, that something other than the work itself,

¹⁰ Found in the 'Nachwort' to the third and fourth edition of *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 513–41; 'Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik: Metakritische Erörterungen zu "Wahrheit und Methode"', *Kleine Schriften I: Philosophie und Hermeneutik* (Tübingen, 1967), pp. 113–30; 'On the scope and function of hermeneutic reflection', in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 18–43.

whether this is called reception or reading or 'the happening of tradition' (Gadamer), determines or co-determines understanding, interpretation, and meaning. Unlike Habermas, therefore, whose discussion of history makes it clear that events assume different meanings for observers in different historical contexts, Hirsch objects to the very notion of historicity that informs Gadamer's effective history. The second tradition Hirsch opposes is his native heritage of New Criticism. Although he vigorously defends one of the central tenets of this movement, the necessity for 'intrinsic criticism', he equally vigorously rejects its denial of authorial intent as the basis for meaning.

Hirsch's project is thus directed against two foes, those who would relativize meaning and those who would attach meaning to words rather than to consciousness. Accordingly it has two aims: to show that meaning is determinate and that the sole standard for validity in interpretation is the original intention of the author. The first of these aims would seem to be empirically false. For it is undeniable that throughout history texts, in particular literary works, have been given different and often mutually incompatible interpretations. Moreover, it seems likely that these different interpretations are somehow related to the times in which they were offered, or at least related to factors external to the text itself: Marxist or Freudian criticism obviously could not develop until after the time in which the writings of Marx and Freud were received by literary critics. Hirsch counters this empirical observation by distinguishing between two kinds of meaning in a text. The first he calls meaning, the second significance. Hirsch claims that this distinction is drawn from Gottlob Frege's seminal essay 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' (On sense and reference) from 1892. In this piece Frege actually shows that identical senses (*Sinn*) can have different truth values or referents (*Bedeutung*); his concern is thus substantially different from Hirsch's.

What Hirsch wants to demonstrate is that there is a consistent level of meaning, sometimes referred to as verbal meaning, and a variable level of significance. Verbal meaning Hirsch defines as a 'willed type' (*Validity*, p. 49). The word 'willed' in this expression refers to the necessity of a consciousness intending meaning. 'Type' implies two things for Hirsch: first, a boundary that separates out what belongs to it and what does not, and second, the ability to be represented by different instances or different contents. It follows, then, that 'type' assures that verbal meaning is both shareable and determinate. Significance, by contrast, is always 'meaning-to', never 'meaning-in'. It is defined as a relationship between the verbal meaning and something outside this meaning. The range of and possibilities for significance of a literary text are therefore limitless but not arbitrary. Because the meaning of a text is determinate, the significance is bounded on one side by verbal meaning, but because there are an infinite

number of things to which it can be related, its possible manifestations are boundless.

This distinction between meaning and significance allows Hirsch to account for the variety of interpretations and at the same time to retain a determinate meaning. It also aids him in answering hypothetical critics, while providing the foundation for a number of other basic distinctions. Perhaps the most obvious criticism of Hirsch's theory of determinate meaning could come from psychoanalytically oriented theorists. As Habermas has shown, the analytic situation appears to fall outside of normal hermeneutic experience because meaning is not attached to the utterance in the usual fashion. Hirsch meets this kind of objection by drawing the distinction between 'signs' and 'symptoms'. The former are voluntary and conventional, while the latter are involuntary and independent of convention. Thus unconscious motivations are accounted for as symptomatic meanings, which are part of the textual significance belonging to the invariable meaning associated with signs.

This separation of two levels on which we confront texts, meaning and signs, on the one hand, and significance and symptoms, on the other, suggests that two terms are also needed to describe our activity as readers and the faculties we exercise in these activities. Hirsch first employs the term 'commentary' to refer generically to any writing or speaking about literary texts. 'Interpretation' is a subclass of commentary, designating remarks made specifically about meaning, while 'criticism' is reserved for commentary that pertains primarily to significance. These distinctions are not original with Hirsch. As he himself notes, they are found most prominently in the writings of Philip August Boeckh (1785–1867), a classical philologist and student of Schleiermacher, who wrote an *Encyclopedia and Methodology of the Philological Sciences* (1886) containing extended treatment of both hermeneutics and criticism. Interpretation for him, as for Hirsch, signifies something like intrinsic criticism for the New Critics, i.e. grasping the object on its own terms, while criticism proper comprehends the object or text in relationship to something else, whether that be the linguistic usage of the time, the historical circumstances, or the literary heritage. The faculties Hirsch assigns to these two tasks appear to be borrowed from Boeckh as well. Hirsch maintains that *understanding* is at work when we interpret the meaning of a text; *judgement*, the act of construing relationships, is employed when we criticize a work for its significance.

Hirsch and authorial intention

From Hirsch's affinity with New Criticism in his plea for intrinsic meaning and from his coupling of sign and meaning, it might appear that he would

side with most trends in twentieth-century criticism in marginalizing the author. But this is most decidedly not the case. Indeed, Hirsch has been one of the few and one of the strongest voices arguing for the connection between meaning and authorial intent. In doing so he situates himself in the heritage of the psychological theorists in the history of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Dilthey. This rehabilitation goes against the tide of modern criticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley in their celebrated essay on the intentional fallacy argue that the 'design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art',¹¹ but this contention has been commonly understood, for better or for worse, as a denial that authorial intent is relevant for the meaning of a text. Hirsch, however, is also opposing a variety of other critics, among them structuralists as well as philosophers like Gadamer who contend that language itself conveys meaning independent of human agency. Indeed, in keeping with his theory of effective history, Gadamer goes so far as to say that meaning surpasses the intention of its author not just sometimes, but always, although he hastens to add that we should not speak of understanding better, but of understanding differently.

Hirsch's reinstatement of the author in the centre of interpretive concerns has to do with his desire to establish a basis for determining the validity of an interpretation. Validity for him is a relationship of correspondence; a valid interpretation is one that corresponds to the meaning represented by the text. Rejecting all variants of semantic autonomy, he contends in an argument influenced by phenomenology that meaning is invariably an affair of consciousness. While this may be true, even Hirsch admits that this consciousness may belong to the reader as well as to the author of the text. If we take the reader's consciousness as our standard, however, Hirsch believes that we sacrifice any yardstick for measuring validity. His strongest defence of authorial intent is thus that it alone offers us a genuinely discriminating norm against which we can compare various interpretations. Against each of the most common objections to such a norm he offers a counter-argument. Those who maintain that the meaning of a text changes according to the conditions under which it is read are guilty of a confusion of meaning and significance. Those who claim that the intention and hence the verbal meaning of an author is inaccessible, although they cannot be refuted, are discredited by the very fact that most authors believe in the accessibility of their verbal meaning and in the possibility of sharing it with a reader. And those who think that what the author intended is irrelevant are usually confounding conscious

¹¹ W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The intentional fallacy', in *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington, 1954), p. 3.

meaning with unintended or unconscious meaning, two separate issues in Hirsch's theoretical undertaking. Ultimately, however, none of these refutations proves either determinacy of meaning or that meaning is tied to the will of an author. In the final analysis, it is only Hirsch's desire for a valid norm and not the weight of his arguments that leads him to identify the meaning of a text with authorial intent.

Paul Ricoeur's strategy of reconciliation

Examining the objections of Habermas and Hirsch to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, we find a number of fundamental conflicts in contemporary hermeneutic theory. Hirsch adheres to an objectivist notion of interpretation, opposing the relativist tendency of Gadamer's ontological position. In this he is allied not only with Schleiermacher and Dilthey, but also with theorists like Emilio Betti, whose *Teoria generale della interpretazione* (1955) similarly argues for linking the hermeneutic enterprise with methods and with objective standards. Gadamer's position, however, also has many adherents, most notably the theologian Rudolf Bultmann and his students Gerhard Eberling and Ernst Fuchs. Influenced primarily by Heidegger's existential philosophy, Bultmann developed the notion of demythologizing to assist the exegesis of symbols in the New Testament. Like Heidegger and Gadamer, as opposed to Betti and Hirsch, the hermeneutic theologians deny objective meaning in history, since history is only known through the subjectivity of the interpreter. In the Gadamer–Habermas debate a slightly different controversy emerged. One of Habermas' central contentions is that the surface message is subject to distortion by ideology or by the unconscious. For this reason a depth hermeneutics or a critical hermeneutics must be employed if one is to recover meaning. In contrast to Gadamer, who would find Hirsch and Betti allies in this dispute, Habermas maintains that we must strip away surface meaning to find the true message. Gadamer, Hirsch, Betti, and Bultmann, for divergent reasons to be sure, base their hermeneutics on an understanding of the message conveyed by the words of a text.

In the post-war era, the chief mediator of these disputes, as well as controversies between hermeneutics and other areas of philosophy, has been Paul Ricoeur (1913–). Because he has so often reconciled rival claims to priority in what he has termed the 'conflict of interpretations', his own position tends to be less fully articulated than that of other contemporary hermeneuticians. This accounts perhaps for the diverse labels and affinities associated with his work. For some his project is identified with 'structural hermeneutics'; for others with 'phenomenological hermeneutics'. He is seen as close to Gadamer, yet siding with Habermas, as indebted to Bultmann, yet receptive to Hirsch's concerns. In all of

his writings on hermeneutics, however, perhaps one aspect stands out as most original: his theory of the symbol. For Ricoeur language stands at the centre of every interpretive theory. But not every linguistic artefact requires the application of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is needed only in those instances in which there exists a surplus of meaning, or when multivocal expressions are employed. Ricoeur identifies such occurrences with symbolism, which is defined as 'any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first'.¹² The task of interpretation is thus limited to dealing with symbols. It is the mode of thought that deciphers 'the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning' or that unfolds 'the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning'.¹³

In Ricoeur's view theories of interpretation can be divided into two categories. The first type attributes to hermeneutics the function of recapturing or 'recollecting' meaning (*De l'interprétation*, p. 36; *Freud*, p. 28). Although this variety of hermeneutics could be associated with many theorists, Ricoeur is thinking primarily of Bultmann's theological works. The hermeneutics of faith or hermeneutics of the sacred that he associates with Bultmann seeks to make manifest or to restore a meaning, understood as a message, a proclamation, or a *kerygma*. It tries to make sense of what was once understood, but has become obscure because of distantiation. Bultmann's demythologizing illustrates such a hermeneutic endeavour because it emphasizes an original and sacred meaning in the symbols of the New Testament. Demythologizing is not meant to debunk symbols, but to recover original meaning. Ricoeur associates this brand of hermeneutics with the phenomenology of religion. It presupposes a confidence in the power of language, but not necessarily as a medium of communication between individuals. Rather, the ability to interpret symbols stems from the fact that humans are born into language, 'into the light of the logos'.¹⁴

Opposed to this religiously tinged hermeneutics of the sacred is a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Ricoeur identifies this type of interpretation specifically with three of the most seminal thinkers for the twentieth century: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Like Habermas, who draws from

¹² 'toute structure de signification où un sens direct, primaire, littéral, désigne par surcroît un autre sens indirect, secondaire, figuré, qui ne peut être appréhendé qu'à travers le premier' (Ricoeur, *Confit*, p. 16; *Conflict*, p. 12).

¹³ 'le sens caché dans le sens apparent . . . les niveaux de signification impliqués dans la signification littérale' (Ricoeur, *Confit*, p. 16, *Conflict*, p. 13).

¹⁴ 'ques les hommes sont nés au sein du langage, au milieu du logos.' (Ricoeur, *De l'Interprétation*, p. 38; *Freud*, p. 30).

all three in his depth hermeneutics, each of them distrusted the word and sought to go below the surface to some more authentic realm of meaning. Implicit in this approach to interpretation is the belief that surface phenomena are concealing an essential reality, and that to arrive at truth one must penetrate to a totally different realm of existence. The hermeneutics of suspicion is thus not concerned with recovering the object, but rather with tearing away masks, with disclosing disguises, with revealing false consciousness. In relation to the philosophical tradition their hermeneutics casts doubt upon the last realm of certainty for modern thought since Descartes: human consciousness. In contrast to Bultmann's demythologizing, the hermeneutics of suspicion advocates the most radical demystification (*De l'interprétation*, pp. 40–4, *Freud*, pp. 32–6).

The Gadamer–Habermas debate is obviously a particular version of the larger conflict between these two hermeneutics. Habermas' call for a critique of ideology depends on insights developed in the hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer's ontological theory of understanding, like the hermeneutics of faith, aims to mediate tradition, disclosing some earlier meaning in the light of present concerns. Ricoeur tries to reconcile these differences by a general strategy of mutual implication. As regards Habermas and Gadamer he shows how a true hermeneutic theory must include critical elements and how any critique of ideology cannot do without some notion of hermeneutic understanding (see Ricoeur, 'Habermas and Gadamer'). In his book on *Freud and Philosophy* he joins the two traditions through a reading of psychoanalytic theory. His own interpretation of Freud's work falls more into the category of a hermeneutics of the sacred, recovering the meaning of psychoanalysis for the present moment; and Ricoeur admits not only that he himself is drawn to this tradition, but also that he would see no point in hermeneutics if it did not arrive at some message of hope. Yet his analysis attempts to mediate dialectically between the putative oppositions. Proceeding from 'the dispossession of consciousness as the place and origin of meaning' through 'an antithetic of reflection'¹⁵ in which meaning is generated by successive figures to a staged confrontation between Freud's archaeology and Hegel's teleology, he arrives at a reconciliation in a redefinition of the symbol. True symbols are not merely polysemic, as he had defined them elsewhere, but indicative of a double movement. If we think of the two hermeneutics as involved with, on the one hand, 'the revival of archaic meanings' and, on the other, 'the emergence of figures that anticipate our spiritual adventure', in short, with archaeology and teleology, then

¹⁵ 'dessaisissement de la conscience en tant que lieu et origine du sens ... une antithétique de la réflexion' (Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, p. 476; *Freud*, pp. 494–5).

the symbol stands 'at the crossroads of the two functions'.¹⁶ Symbols disguise our instinctual desires, while simultaneously revealing the process of self-consciousness. Thus the two hermeneutic traditions are deeply implicated in the same cultural process.

Ricoeur: phenomenology and hermeneutics

Ricoeur employs the same strategy of mutual implication to link phenomenology and hermeneutics. These two branches of philosophy had been connected previously, of course, most memorably in Heidegger's *Being and Time* in conjunction with his analytic of *Dasein*. But Ricoeur opposes this 'short route' because it by-passes methodology (which he, in contrast to Gadamer, does not think is outside the scope of his inquiry) and the level of semantic analysis. He too opposes Husserl's idealization, but he cannot subscribe to a direct description of *Dasein* because he believes human beings can only know themselves through their expressions, through the symbols they create. Thus his more arduous path must proceed with a dialectical process of distantiation and appropriation that resembles Hegelian method.

Before reconciling and sublating hermeneutics and phenomenology, however, Ricoeur must establish them as putative opposites. Taking on the one hand Husserl's afterword to *Ideen* (1930) as his illustration of phenomenology and on the other a hermeneutics based on Gadamer's writings, he outlines in the seminal essay 'Phenomenology and Hermeneutics' five areas in which these two disciplines differ. First, Husserl's notion of scientificity has its limit in the ontological condition of understanding. Husserl's conceptuality proceeds from a subject-object relationship whose absolute validity is called into question by the concept of 'belonging-to' (*Zugehörigkeit*), according to which the questioner shares in the thing questioned. Second, Husserl's use of intuition is methodologically on the level of the human sciences and is therefore opposed by the hermeneutic notion that understanding is always mediated by interpretation. Prior to even the employment of linguistic symbols a speaker and a hearer must interpret the context within which their dialogue occurs. Moreover, in encounters with texts we never achieve a total vision, as phenomenological intuition suggests, but rather are always caught up in an open process of understanding. Third, the ultimate foundation of subjectivity posited by Husserl is a dubious proposition, called into question by psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and

¹⁶ 'la résurgence de significations archaïques', 'l'émergence de figures anticipatrices de notre aventure spirituelle', 'au carrefour des deux fonctions' (Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, pp. 478–9; *Freud*, pp. 496–7).

by theories of ideology, on the other. A 'hermeneutics of communication' is necessary for self-comprehension because it can reveal structures of pre-comprehension as well as contribute to a critique of ideologies. Fourth, against the primacy of subjectivity, hermeneutics posits the theory of the text. Since consciousness ultimately has its meaning beyond itself, 'the idealist theory of the constitution of meaning *in* consciousness has thus hypostasized subjectivity' ('Phenomenology and Hermeneutics', p. 9). The theory of the text shifts meaning from the intention of the author to the 'thing of the text'. Finally, in contrast to the 'ultimate self-responsibility of the mediating subject' (*ibid.*, p. 94), hermeneutics makes subjectivity the final stage in a theory of understanding. Rather than conceiving of itself as a ground, subjectivity is a goal achieved through the interaction with the text.

These five oppositions, however, show only the incompatibility of a certain type of phenomenology (developed during the period when Husserl proposed the transcendental ego) with a hermeneutic theory strongly influenced by Gadamer. In principle Ricoeur feels that phenomenology remains the 'indispensable presupposition' of hermeneutics and that hermeneutics is necessary for any phenomenology. To justify these contentions and to counter his five oppositions, he discusses several areas of mutual implication. First of all, following the later work of Husserl, he finds that consciousness only becomes self-conscious after becoming conscious of something. Consciousness is thus 'outside itself', that is, directed towards meaning, and this pre-eminence of meaning over subjectivity suggests a basic harmony between a theory of understanding and a phenomenology of subjectivity. But Ricoeur also sees a basic parallelism between hermeneutics and phenomenology involving the notions of distanciation and *epoché* (bracketing). Both distanciation and the *epoché* imply a distancing from lived experience that is later recuperated in, respectively, belonging-to (*Zugehörigkeit*) and 'the lived' ('Phenomenology and Hermeneutics', pp. 97–8). This parallelism is particularly important for Ricoeur since the notion of distanciation provides the moment of 'suspicion' necessary for a 'critical hermeneutics'. The most important shared presupposition, however, is 'the derived character of merely linguistic meanings' (*ibid.*, p. 98). In contrast to structuralists and poststructuralists, both Gadamer in his ontologizing of play and Husserl in his noemic analysis of a non-linguistic realm refer the linguistic order back to the more fundamental structure of experience. In the development of phenomenology towards a concern with the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) Ricoeur sees a final signal of the proximity of hermeneutics and phenomenology. He interprets this late concern of Husserl as a spreading of 'the phenomenology of perception in the direction of a hermeneutic of historic experience' (*ibid.*, p. 99). Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* and

Husserl's notion of the *Lebenswelt* are thus viewed as complementary developments in the approach of phenomenology to hermeneutics. In sum, Ricoeur contends that if phenomenology is to carry out its mission as the explicator of experience, as a science that explicates 'the sense of this world for us all', as Husserl states,¹⁷ it can only be actualized as hermeneutics. As long as Husserlian idealism is submitted to the critique of hermeneutics, phenomenology and hermeneutics 'remain the presuppositions of each other' ('Phenomenology and Hermeneutics', p. 101).

Structuralism, poststructuralism and hermeneutics

During the 1950s and 1960s a more powerful challenge to hermeneutics came from another method that claimed scientific status: structuralism. Again Ricoeur's discussion of this tendency in French thought bears witness to his strategy of reconciliation. The opposition between structuralism and hermeneutics is apparent. As a pretender to scientific objectivity, structuralism aims at distancing, at objectifying, at eliminating subjectivity from its method. Hermeneutics, by contrast, emphasizes the situatedness of the observer and the necessity for taking into account unavoidable preconceptions. While structuralism subordinates diachrony to synchrony, hermeneutics would appear to reverse this relationship, valorizing the mediated tradition over the static message. In linguistic terms, structuralism chooses syntax over semantics. For Ricoeur's notion of hermeneutics in particular this is an inversion of the proper order. Since potential meaning always exceeds its function in a synchronic order, he posits a dual notion of historicity: in the tradition, which 'transmits and sediments the interpretation', and in the interpretation, which 'maintains and renews the tradition'. Ricoeur summarizes the differences as follows:

The structuralist explanation bears (1) on an unconscious system which (2) is constituted by difference and oppositions (by varying signifying variations) (3) independently of the observer. The interpretation of transmitted sense consists in (1) the conscious recovery of (2) an overdetermined symbolic substratum by (3) an interpreter who places himself in the same semantic field as the one he is understanding and thus enters the 'hermeneutic circle'¹⁸.

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie* (The Hague, 1950), p. 177; *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, 1960), p. 151.

¹⁸ 'L'explication structurale porte 1) sur un système inconscient 2) qui est constitué par des différences et des oppositions [par des écarts significatifs] 3) indépendamment de l'observateur. L'interprétation d'un sens transmis consiste dans 1) la reprise consciente 2) d'un fond symbolique surdéterminé 3) par un interprète qui se place dans le même champ sémantique que ce qu'il comprend et ainsi entre dans le "cercle herméneutique"'. (Ricoeur, *Conflit*, p. 58; *Conflict*, p. 55).

Despite these apparent incompatibilities Ricoeur again employs his strategy of mutual implication to join the two theories. On the one hand, structuralism cannot do without a theory of interpretation. At the base of structural homologies there is always a residual layer of semantic analogies that enables comparison. The ‘apprehension of similitude precedes formalization and founds it’; a hermeneutic ‘semantics of contents’ grounds the structuralist ‘syntax of arrangements’.¹⁹ On the other hand, Ricoeur claims that we cannot hope to recover meaning without some structural comprehension. This is most evident in considering the polysemy of symbols. What gives the symbol meaning is not something inherent in it, but its place in an economy of the whole. Meaning cannot emerge without a structure of relationships. Thus structuralism provides for hermeneutics a *sine qua non* for a theory of interpretation.

The endeavour to mediate between the structuralist approaches of the French and the hermeneutic tradition associated with Germany can also be found in writings of several contemporary German theorists, most notably Peter Szondi (1929–1971) and Manfred Frank (1945–). In contrast to Ricoeur, however, who most frequently cites twentieth-century hermeneuticians, both Szondi and Frank suggest that a reexamination of the work of Schleiermacher is the most fruitful way to join structuralist and hermeneutic concerns. In the linguistically oriented aspect of his work they see an anticipation of the impersonal structure (*langue*) and its individual realization (*parole*), while they are able to connect traditional hermeneutic speculation with his psychological or technical understanding.

Indeed, one of Szondi’s tasks was to try to construct a specifically literary hermeneutic theory based on Schleiermacher’s foundation. In perhaps his most seminal essay on this topic, ‘On Textual Understanding’ (1962), he begins by noting that with regard to literature understanding is an interpretive goal opposed to scientific and positivistic tendencies in literary studies. However, no one has tried to discover what precisely are the peculiarities of philological scholarship as opposed to scholarship in the natural and social sciences. To a large extent, Szondi’s is therefore a first attempt at drawing these necessary distinctions. He contends that philological knowledge is different from other kinds of knowledge because it is ‘perpetually renewed understanding’ (*perpetuierte Erkenntnis*). By this he means not only that it is altered by new points of views and new findings – for this would apply to all branches of knowledge – but also that its condition for existence is a constant reference back to understanding itself. The task of philological studies is not to convey knowledge of an

¹⁹ L’appréhension de la similitude précède ici la formalisation et la fonde. . . . une sémantique des contenus’ . . . ‘une syntaxe des arrangements’ (Ricoeur, *Conflict*, p. 60; *Conflict*, p. 57).

object, which is what other disciplines do, but rather to refer the reader to the process of cognition. The reflexive structure Szondi proposes brings his theory close to Ricoeur's. What makes Schleiermacher most relevant for a fusion of modern French thought with hermeneutics, however, is his emphasis on a material hermeneutics. In contrast to most of his contemporaries, who saw words and language as a mere vehicle for the transmission of ideas, Schleiermacher stresses the constraints imposed by genre, poetic form, and the letter. His insistence on the letter makes him for Szondi a forerunner of various brands of poststructuralism and suggests a basic compatibility between French and German theory.

Frank's unification project is different in two respects. First, it is less concerned with a specifically literary hermeneutic and more concentrated on philosophical congruity. Secondly, since Frank agrees with poststructuralist criticisms of structuralism, his work, unlike Ricoeur's earlier efforts, is focused primarily on how poststructuralist thought can be integrated into a hermeneutic enterprise. In terms of the history of philosophy he points out that poststructuralism and hermeneutics have much in common. Both share the problems of philosophizing in a post-Hegelian, post-Nietzschean, post-Heideggerian epoch; both take account of the absence of transcendental values; and both recognize that the subject is no longer master in its own house. Frank also notes the indebtedness of both philosophies to the German tradition, not only to Nietzsche and Heidegger, the most obvious common precursors, but also to the language philosophy of Humboldt, Schleiermacher, and Steinhilber. Poststructuralism and hermeneutics diverge most significantly, however, in their view of dialogue or conversation. Relying on Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theory, Frank develops the notion of dialogue as both an individual and a general activity. It is an individual generality (*individuelles Allgemeines*). Understanding would be impossible without a shared, supra-individual code. But it would also be impossible without the individual construction and actualizing of that code.

If we accept this analysis, then significant variants of poststructuralism and hermeneutics fall into similar traps. For in regarding a code, the 'materiality' of language, or tradition as an absolute force that swallows up the individual, subjective, human dimension, modern theory forgets perhaps the most important lesson of its romantic forerunners. Although Gadamer, according to Frank, sometimes wavers between a refurbished notion of the Hegelian world spirit and a headlong subjectivism, his hermeneutics can be rescued by turning to the work of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, Frank's chosen representative of poststructuralist thought. What Frank finds valuable and similar in their work is their ultimate affirmation of the conjectural nature of the dialogical situation, the 'insurmountable asymmetry' (*die unüberwindbare Asymmetrie*) ('Grenzen',

p. 197) pertaining to every encounter between speaking subjects. This reliance on conjecture recalls Schleiermacher's notion of divination and his emphasis on the individual (technical and psychological) aspects of understanding. Although this perspective does not supply the validity in interpretation which more traditional hermeneutics deems necessary (Betti, Hirsch), neither does it open the floodgates to the complete arbitrariness which some of the more cavalier poststructuralists embrace. Hypotheses, Frank points out, are always motivated, and in this sense they can also be called upon for (relative) accountability. In the final analysis innovation and the understanding of innovation are grounded in the subject, not in the arbitrary play of a structure, and Frank believes that he can call upon both Lacan and Derrida for support of this thesis. Although some may therefore judge Frank's work to be a taming of poststructuralism and a radicalizing of hermeneutics, he succeeds, as few contemporary theorists do, in providing an arena in which hermeneutic thought can enter into productive relationships with other critical currents.

PHENOMENOLOGY

Introduction

‘Phenomenology’ is usually used to designate a major movement in twentieth-century philosophy. The word itself stems from the Greek verb ‘phaino’ meaning ‘to bring to light’ or ‘to make to appear’, and has the literal meaning of ‘science of appearances’. It was first used by the German philosopher Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777) in his *Neues Organon* (1764); Lambert, however, considered phenomena to be illusions and thus his notion of phenomenology was a science of illusions. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) employs the word in his natural philosophy to distinguish the study of the realm of appearances for us (phenomena) from the study of the realm of essences or things as they are in themselves (noumena). In Hegel’s (1770–1831) philosophy, which denies this Kantian division, phenomenology refers to different appearances of consciousness; the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) describes the various stages of human consciousness as it comes to complete awareness of itself. Later in the nineteenth century, particularly in the writings of Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) and C. S. Peirce (1839–1914), the term becomes associated with the study of facts or things as they really are. Only in the early part of the twentieth century, however, in the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) did phenomenology become a designation for a philosophical school. Today the term is usually identified with Husserl, his students, or the various philosophers who were influenced by Husserl’s work. In discussions of literature two distinct tendencies emanate from phenomenology. The first, associated with philosophical investigations in aesthetics and poetics, was developed centrally by Husserl’s own students, especially the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1895–1970); the other, a more practical direction involving literary criticism, is associated with the work of the Geneva School in the middle of the century.

Edmund Husserl

Husserl developed his notion of phenomenology during the first four decades of the twentieth century in several seminal works: *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900, *Logical Investigations*), *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (1913, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*), and *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (1954, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*). Extensive lecture notes and unpublished manuscripts published after Husserl's death have greatly enriched our knowledge of his phenomenological project. His concern was fundamentally epistemological and might be defined in its most abbreviated form with the phrase 'the description of essences'. His was to be a pure and rigorous enterprise that would eschew all prejudgements and dogmas. His work is related to Cartesianism in that it adopts radical scepticism and tries to eliminate all presuppositions. It unwittingly returns to a position close to Kant's because it ultimately investigates pure or transcendental consciousness. Although Husserl drew heavily on the philosophical tradition and was aware of his predecessors, he considered his work to be a radically new beginning. Phenomenology as he conceived it was to be a foundational philosophy that secured indubitable truths. The celebrated slogan of phenomenology is 'Zu den Sachen!', a phrase that means literally 'to things', but that has the connotation of getting down to the real business of philosophical inquiry.

Husserl arrived at his philosophical position by opposing two dominant schools of thought: naturalism and psychologism. Naturalism is important for Husserl because it too makes claims to rigour and objectivity. It is essentially the doctrine that claims all phenomena are part of nature; the only things that are real for the naturalist are part of the physical world. Thus all ideas, ideals, and norms, indeed consciousness itself is naturalized. Husserl refutes naturalism with three arguments. First he points to the non-natural basis of formal-logical principles. They are not drawn from nature, nor do they represent laws of thought. Second, naturalism is founded on the contradictory assumption of positing an ideal objectivity while simultaneously denying idealism. Finally, Husserl maintains that naturalism and the natural sciences are unable to account for themselves as intellectual developments. Naturalism is thus unable to explain itself and cannot be an encompassing world view. Psychologism poses an equal threat to Husserl from the opposite direction, for it tries to subsume all normative disciplines, e.g. logic, under psychological laws. Husserl's polemic against psychologism is particularly harsh because he himself in his early years had subscribed to its premises. In his *Philosophie der Arithmetik* (1891, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*) he had attempted

to derive fundamental laws of mathematics from psychological acts. By the early part of the twentieth century, however, he was convinced of his error and found psychologism lacking in several ways. One reason he turned against psychologism had to do with the dangers of relativism. Psychologism reduces knowledge to either the individual human mind or, in the anthropological variant, to the species. Both reductions lead to a notion of relative truth. A proposition is true for either an individual or for the species. But this contradicts Husserl's notion of truth, which is absolute: truth is never for someone, but always self-contained, ideal, and eternal. His most general objection to psychologism, however, is that psychology is a specific science that, like other sciences, develops laws based on observation and induction. Phenomenology, by contrast, is involved with apodictic evidence and certain knowledge, and these cannot be obtained through examining empirical facts of psychic life.

The basis of the phenomenological method is the theory of intentionality that Husserl borrowed from his teacher Franz Brentano (1838–1917). According to this theory consciousness does not passively receive or internalize objects from the external world. Rather consciousness is a designation for psychic acts or intentional experiences. Consciousness is always consciousness *of* something; it has a direction towards or a goal in the object. Indeed, intentionality is what allows us to constitute an intentional object from the stream of sensory perceptions with which we are confronted. What is present in our consciousness is not the object itself or a representation of the object, but the experience of the intentional act. The other cornerstone of Husserl's philosophy is his notion of intuition (*Anschauung*) and the related term *Wesensschau*. The German word *Anschauung*, usually rendered somewhat misleadingly as 'intuition', is related to sight and seeing. It is used by Husserl, however, to designate a faculty somewhat different from normal sight or sensory perception in general. Intuition in phenomenological theory allows us to perceive essences, not merely empirical qualities. If we restricted perception to empirical features, our knowledge would always be contingent, and Husserl's aim was to secure knowledge that is unchanging. Besides sensual intuition, however, Husserl posits categorical or ideal intuition. We can best understand why he does this if we consider certain abstract concepts such as 'number', 'unity', or 'similarity'. Although we can never perceive these through our senses, we can reach a full and complete understanding of them intuitively. The goal of phenomenology can be viewed as the *Wesensschau* or perception of essences.

In order to apply phenomenological intuition and reach genuine knowledge Husserl proposed a series of 'reductions'. The natural attitude with which we encounter the world in everyday life must be put in abeyance so that we can clear the path for a presuppositionless, essential knowledge.

For phenomenological reduction Husserl often employs the word *epoché*, a term borrowed from ancient sceptical philosophy. We can think of *epoché* as consisting of four different parts or aspects:

- 1 Historical bracketing: every opinion or presupposition that we have accumulated as historical beings must be excluded.
- 2 Existential bracketing: the very existence of the intuited object and the existence of the ego intuiting it are also to be eliminated as unimportant for knowledge. I can attain knowledge of essences just as well from non-existent objects (e.g. products of fantasy) as from existing objects.
- 3 Eidetic reduction: this entails the bracketing of everything individual, the movement from particular facts to general essences.
- 4 Phenomenological reduction (also called transcendental reduction): this stage frees the phenomenon from all non- or transphenomenal aspects, leaving us only what is absolutely certain. We move from naive consciousness and givens to the pure consciousness of transcendental phenomena.

Husserl's phenomenological method thus tries to secure for us a constant and eternal realm of knowledge isolated from all cultural, historical, social, and existential fluctuations.

The atemporal dimension of phenomenological procedure was challenged by Husserl's student Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). *Sein und Zeit* (1927, *Being and Time*) argues that the very essence of human existence is being-in-the-world. Perhaps under Heidegger's influence or perhaps as a result of his own relentless pursuit of methodological refinement, Husserl appears to have expanded his views somewhat during his later years. In *The Crisis of European Sciences* and in later manuscripts, most of which became known only after Husserl's death in 1937, the notions of environing world (*Umwelt*) and, more importantly, life-world (*Lebenswelt*) occupy a central position. Indeed, existential phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) regard the notion of the life-world as Husserl's most important theoretical development. When Husserl advocates the study of the life-world, however, he is not referring to the external world formerly excluded by phenomenological reduction. Rather the life-world designates the pre-reflexive structure in which consciousness is embedded or which surrounds consciousness; it is like a horizon within which we operate, but which is not apparent to normal thought. It is 'objective' only in the sense that it escapes pure subjectivity, guiding and influencing the direction of consciousness. It became important for Husserl in his reflections on the course of European history since he sensed an erosion of the life-world by the naturalist method of the sciences. The life-world is not accessible to us through the natural attitude; analogous

to essences, it can be attained only by means of reduction. Indeed, Husserl suggests that the life-world is the ultimate foundation for all our theoretical knowledge, including that of the natural sciences.

Early phenomenological aesthetics

Waldemar Conrad (1878–1915) was the first member of the phenomenological movement to apply the philosophical insights developed by Husserl to the discipline of aesthetics. In a three-part study entitled 'Der ästhetische Gegenstand' (1908–09, 'The aesthetic object') he sketches a phenomenological approach to works of art and illustrates his method with discussions of music, poetry, and the pictorial arts. From Husserl's philosophy he takes three principles of special methodological significance: (1) the absence of presuppositions, (2) the description of ideal objects rather than individual empirical objects, and (3) the restriction of the scope of one's own observations. Of these the second is the most important for an understanding of Conrad's undertaking. If we speak about a particular poem, the poem that we refer to is not any individual written or spoken instance, but according to Conrad, an ideal object, and in seeking to describe this object phenomenologically, we do not ignore or exclude the specific instance, but rather try to isolate the essential features of the poem. In the section of his study in which he deals with poetry Conrad proceeds from an analysis of the word, relying heavily on Husserl's discussion of expression and meaning, to observations on Wilhelm Müller's poem 'Ungeduld' ('Impatience'). He finds that the most important aspect in normal language usage, the object to which language refers, is overshadowed in the aesthetic object by meaning and expression. But Conrad also suggests two other possible directions for a phenomenological aesthetics. Instead of looking at the aesthetic object, one could undertake a description of the subjective side of aesthetic phenomena, the effects of art on the individual subject. A second possibility suggested by Conrad is to concentrate on the ideal forms of various genres. This phenomenological task would reach a culmination in describing the essence of art as such.

The proposition that phenomenological aesthetics consists of an objective side that deals with the aesthetic object and a subjective dimension that examines responses and effects is the foundation for the work of Moritz Geiger (1880–1937), a theorist virtually forgotten for a half century, but rediscovered during the seventies in the wake of the critical activities of the Constance School of reception theory. Indeed, one of Geiger's earliest and most noteworthy contributions to phenomenology examines the notion of aesthetic pleasure (*Genuß*). Geiger proceeds neither inductively nor deductively, but intuitively in order to establish whether

there are characteristics that separate pleasure from other related concepts such as enjoyment (*Gefallen*), delight (*Freude*), or desire (*Lust*). Most decisive for him is the recognition that aesthetic pleasure is a variant of the more general notion of pleasure, and he proceeds to determine just what this subjective phenomenon entails. He defines a series of qualities that distinguish pleasure from other feelings. First, pleasure is unmotivated: it is separate from all striving, willing, and feeling. In this sense it is characterized by an almost pure passivity of reception. Although in accord with the phenomenological theory of intentionality we are directed towards the object, in experiencing pleasure we allow the object to act on us. The relationship of the ego to the object is thus one of surrender (*Hingabe*). Finally, according to Geiger pleasure is centered on the ego; pleasure can never be something outside of or opposed to the ego. Aesthetic pleasure is revealed to be a purer form of pleasure, associated with distance, non-involvement, and profundity. It is defined as 'pleasure in the uninterested contemplation of the fullness of the object'.¹

In a later work, the essay collection *Zugänge zur Ästhetik* (1928, *Approaches to Aesthetics*), Geiger discusses in more general terms his conception of phenomenological aesthetics. He cites three ways in which we can conceive of aesthetics: as an autonomous science, as a branch of philosophy, and as an area for the application of other sciences. Geiger's preference for the first of these alternatives is obvious. Aesthetics in his view has the function of dealing with aesthetic value, which, in turn, is not something found in the object in reality, but in the aesthetic phenomenon. In turning our attention to a phenomenal realm, however, Geiger does not mean to suggest that there is a noumenal or essential substance from which we are abstracting. Rather we deal with phenomena because there is nothing else. The aesthetician is thus concerned with general essences, not with particular objects. The effects of art are also unimportant, since our task is to distill general principles from particular phenomena. Geiger is here distancing himself from the psychological aesthetic theories so popular around the turn of the century. In this regard his discussion of internal and external concentration (*Innen- und Außenkonzentration*) is of special interest. In passages similar to those found in the work of T. E. Hulme or T. S. Eliot, Geiger rails against romantic, puerile, sentimental, anti-intellectual, and anti-rational penchants for judging art by relating it to one's own feelings. Rejecting this concentration on internal reactions, Geiger contends that only *Außenkonzentration* is the specifically aesthetic

¹ 'Genuß im uninteressierten Betrachten der Fülle des Gegenstandes' (Mortiz Geiger, 'Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses', *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, 1 (1913), 663).

attitude. The aesthetic experience must have a profound effect on the ego, lifting it into spheres that are removed from daily life, but the proper relationship to an aesthetic phenomenon entails a distancing that allows us to grasp it in its essential structural characteristics.

Roman Ingarden

By far the most important of Husserl's students to deal with issues related to aesthetics was Roman Ingarden. Like most of his colleagues Ingarden was attracted to such questions by their philosophical implications. His particular occupation with literature stems from the conviction that literary works of art present phenomenology with a unique theoretical opportunity. Husserl's theory of transcendental idealism had sought to demonstrate that the real world consists of intentional objectivities that have their origins in pure consciousness. As Ingarden himself writes in the original introduction to *Das literarische Kunstwerk (The Literary Work of Art, 1930)*, the literary work of art provides him with an object whose intentional structure is beyond question. It therefore allows him to investigate and to critique central tenets of Husserl's phenomenology. In particular the literary work of art highlights problems arising from the conflict between realism and idealism. It would appear that all objects can be classified as either real or ideal. The things we encounter in the empirical world – desks, pencils, books, etc. – are real; they exist in time and space. By contrast the objects we construct as abstractions, for example, circles, squares, or any of the countless abstract nouns, are ideal; they have no empirical existence and are unchanging. Literary works of art, however, seem to fall outside this dichotomy. They are obviously not real in that they have no empirical existence, but neither are they ideal, since they are able to change with each reader and even for the same reader at different moments. The phenomenological study of literature thus raises several questions about boundaries, and the subtitle of Ingarden's work, 'An Investigation on the borderline of ontology, logic, and theory of literature' captures well this aspect of its author's concerns.

The strata of a literary work

Like previous phenomenologists, Ingarden abjures psychology and relies upon the intuitive method. In *The Literary Work of Art* he is concerned primarily with investigating the ideal structure of the literary work of art. He considers the literary work of art to be an ontologically heteronomous formation. It is neither determinate nor autonomous, as both real and

ideal objects are, but rather dependent on an act of consciousness. Although it originates in the mind of an author, its continued existence depends on both the real word signs that make up the text and the ideal meanings that can be drawn from the author's sentences. Furthermore, Ingarden maintains that it consists of a number of well-defined strata or layers. The first comprises the raw material of literature, the 'word-sounds' (*Wortlaute*) and those phonetic formations built upon them. In this strata we encounter not only the sound configurations that are the ultimate bearers of meanings, but also the potential for special aesthetic effects such as rhythm or rhyme. The second stratum includes all meaning units (*Bedeutungseinheiten*), whether they are words, sentences, or units containing multiple sentences. This is the most important of the four layers since it forms the skeleton for the entire work. It determines the other strata by supplying the meanings that enable them to exist.

The third layer of the literary artwork consists of what Ingarden calls schematized aspects (*schematisierte Ansichten*). The primary function of schematized aspects is to prepare the way for the appearance of represented objects (*dargestellte Gegenstände*), the fourth and final stratum of the literary work of art. Schematized aspects are best understood as the skeletal or schematic structure of every concrete aspect of an object. In his discussion of aspects Ingarden distinguishes between the thing as an object existing independent of the human mind and the aspect or manifold of aspects experienced by the perceiving subject. A red sphere, for example, has an autonomous existence not dependent on my apprehension of it. Its aspects, by contrast, exist in reference to the subject; if the subject closes his eyes or stares into space, the aspect disappears or is significantly altered. No aspect, therefore, can be equated with the object or with the qualities of the object. The red sphere is spherical, but the aspects merely present different views of the object. The perceiving subject sees the outside of the sphere as a disc or circle that varies in size according to the distance from the sphere and varies in colour depending on lighting, etc. Thus the aspects merely refer to this spherical quality or allow for the intuition of sphericity. Schematized aspects are what give the concrete aspects their consistency or sameness for different perceivers. They are the constant elements in the concrete aspects, the substructure that remains unchanged during the experiencing of an object. They are particularly important for Ingarden since only schematized aspects, not concrete aspects, appear in a literary work of art. Schematized aspects do not have their basis in real objects or in the experience of an individual, but rather in the state of affairs projected by the sentences in the literary work. They are the projections of the second layer of meaning units.

The final layer of the literary work of art is the one most familiar to us. Ingarden refers to it variously as the stratum of represented objects

or represented objectivities. Objects include for him not only things and persons, but also occurrences and acts performed by persons. Indeed, this stratum encompasses everything that the work of literature represents. The represented objects may resemble real objects – people, houses, streets, animals – and Ingarden even mentions (*Literary Work*, p. 221) that they have ‘the same type of existence as real objects’ (*die dem Typus des realen Seins angehören*). But obviously they are not real objects since they do not have an independent existence, and they possess therefore a different ontic character. To maintain that represented objects do not partake in reality at all seems equally untrue, however, and Ingarden suggests that they assume the character of ideal objects. The problem in ascertaining the manner in which represented objects exist is pursued by Ingarden in his discussion of their spatial and temporal dimensions. It is evident that these objects do not belong to real world space, nor do they exist in the temporal continuum associated with reality. It is just as obvious, however, that they do not exist in ideal space and time. Ingarden posits, therefore, ‘represented space’ and ‘represented time’ to account for the ontic realm of represented objects. Represented space has structural affinities with objective real space, but it differs from it because it is not unlimited as objective real space is. Represented time, by contrast, exhibits a structure different from real time. In real time the present takes priority over the past and the future, whereas in represented time there is a dissolution of temporal priorities even when narration occurs in the present.

Ingarden briefly mentions one other essential feature of the literary work of art: sequential order. We may think of this as the temporal dimension comprised of the sequence of sentences, paragraphs, and chapters that are contained in the literary work. It must be distinguished from two other temporal structures. Quite obviously it does not correspond in any sense to real time; but neither does it have any necessary connection with represented time. What we call a later point in a novel can quite frequently refer to an earlier event in represented time. Indeed, in a very real sense there are no temporal differences in the work of art at all; all of its words, meaning units, schematized aspects, and represented objects exist simultaneously. Ingarden explains what he means by sequential order in terms of phases. Although he does not come up with a cogent definition of this term, it is evident that every phase except the first one has in some fashion its foundation in a previous phase. Ingarden further distinguishes elements within phases. Elements can either be founding elements, that is, those that serve as the basis for some later phase or the elements in it; they can be elements that are founded and thus ontically dependent on an earlier phase; or they can be both founding and founded. The relationship of elements and phases lends the work an internal dynamic and a determinate line of temporal development.

Indeterminacy, concretization, and concretion

Ingarden's notion of the cognition of the literary work of art, outlined most extensively in his *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks* (1968, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*), is closely connected with his conception of its structure. The layers and dimensions he describes form a skeleton or 'schematized structure' to be completed by the reader. This process is most readily understood on the level of represented objects, the fourth layer of the literary work. In the phenomenological framework real objects are 'univocally, universally (i.e. in every respect) determined'.² This means that a real object has no place where it would not be determined in itself. By contrast the objects represented in a literary work exhibit 'gaps' or 'points' or 'places' of indeterminacy (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*). 'We find such a place of indeterminacy', Ingarden writes, 'whenever it is impossible, on the basis of the sentences in the work, to say whether a certain object or objective situation has a certain attribute'.³ All objects, according to phenomenological theory, have an infinite number of determinants, and no single act of cognition can ever take into account every determinant of any particular object. But a real object must have particular determinants: a real object cannot be merely coloured; it must have a particular colour; a real man cannot be simply tall; he must have a specific height measurable in feet and inches.

Another way of stating this is that every real object is absolutely individual. This is not the case with the represented objects of a literary work. These objects do not exist autonomously, but rather are intentionally projected from meaning units and aspects. As such they retain a degree of indeterminacy not found in real objects. If, for example, we read the sentence: 'The child bounced the ball', we are confronted with a myriad of 'gaps' in the represented object. Whether the child in this case is ten years old or six; whether it is male or female; black, Asian, or Caucasian; brunette, red-headed, or blond – all of these features and countless others are not stipulated in this sentence and thus constitute gaps or points of indeterminacy. Every child must have an age, a sex, a skin colour, and a hair colour, but even if the sentence in question or following sentences mentioned these specific attributes of the child, others would necessarily remain unspecified or indeterminate. Alternatively, a text can suggest limitations on the scope of indeterminacy by indirect

² 'Jeder reale Gegenstand ist allseitig (d.h. in jeder Hinsicht eindeutig bestimmt)' (*Literary Work of Art*, p. 246).

³ 'Eine solche Stelle zeigt sich überall dort, wo man auf Grund der im Werk auftretenden Sätze von einem bestimmten Gegenstand (oder von einer gegenständlichen Situation) nicht sagen kann, ob er eine bestimmte Eigenschaft besitzt oder nicht' (*Cognition*, p. 50).

means. If the sentence above had occurred in a novel whose setting was a typical Swedish community of first graders, we would be inclined to imagine the child as a blond Caucasian of about six years of age. But in theory at least the text could not eliminate all indeterminacy. Each literary work, indeed, each represented object and every aspect possesses an infinite number of indeterminate places.

Indeterminacy and its elimination play a central role in Ingarden's depiction of the reading process. According to him we interact with the literary work in a variety of ways and on a variety of levels. Our cognition, he contends, plays an active part with respect to all layers of the work. The stratum of word-sounds may become manifest through recitation or merely through realizing the sounds and sound configurations in silent reading. In a like manner individual readings, if they are at all competent, can hardly avoid actualizing a good portion of the meaning units. Gaps in the order of sequence, the so-called second temporal dimension of the literary work, also need to be bridged for the text to be comprehensible. Indeed, if we are to make the represented world approximate the real world, then the reader will have to fill in gaps in the text. But perhaps the most important activity readers undertake entails filling out the indeterminacies, gaps, or schematized aspects in the text. Ingarden usually refers to this activity as concretization, although he also uses the term, especially in *The Literary Work of Art*, to distinguish the apprehended literary work from its substructure, to separate the aesthetic object from the artefact. In the narrow sense concretization designates any 'complementing determination' (*ergänzendes Bestimmen*), any initiative taken by the reader to fill in a place of indeterminacy (*Cognition*, p. 53). Although this activity is often not performed consciously, it is an essential part of apprehending the literary work of art. Without concretization the aesthetic work with its represented world would not emerge from the schematic structure. Neither text nor reader can completely dictate the outcome, and there are an infinite number of possible concretizations for any single indeterminacy. The text supplies limits or boundaries within which the reader must work imaginatively. Indeed, Ingarden emphasizes that filling in gaps in the substructure calls for creativity as well as skill and perspicuity. Variations in concretization may be influenced by external as well as internal factors. Since concretization is an individual activity, personal experiences, moods, and a whole array of other contingencies can alter the final outcome. No two concretizations are ever precisely identical, even when they are the product of the same reader reading the same text in the same circumstances.

In a broader sense Ingarden employs the word 'concretization' to designate the result of actualizing the potentialities, objectifying the meaning units, and filling in the indeterminacies in a given text. To avoid confusion

with the first usage of the term (the actualizing of particulars in a text), we might adopt the word ‘concretion’ to refer to this more encompassing realization of potentials. Concretion occurs when aspects attain a degree of concreteness. This concreteness may be apprehended as perceptual experience (e.g. when a play is staged) or imaginal experience (e.g. when a poem is recited). It is imaginal when an individual reads a text. By its very nature concretion has a dual origin. On the one hand, it is the product of the reader and thus conditioned in its existence by corresponding experiences in the reader – although Ingarden is careful to distinguish between individual concretions and the subjective experiences of apprehension. On the other hand, it is determined by the structures and schemata Ingarden has discussed and therefore possesses ‘its second ontic basis (*Seinsfundament*) in the literary work itself’. With regard to the experience of apprehension a concretion is just as transcendent as the literary work itself.⁴ But while the number of concretions of any single work is infinite, the work itself is invariable. Ingarden draws a sharp theoretical distinction between the stable structure of the work, the strata and dimensions referred to above, and what the reader does in realizing this structure in reading.

Varieties of cognition

Moreover, while concretizing a literary work may involve an aesthetic experience, this is only one of four alternatives. Ingarden first distinguishes between two types of reading experiences: the nonaesthetic or extra-aesthetic experience and the aesthetic experience itself. Examples of the former variety of experience are found when people read to pass the time, for amusement, to gain cultural sophistication, or to learn about the social customs of a period. A genuine aesthetic experience does not depend solely on the work itself, since the same work is capable of eliciting a nonaesthetic as well as an aesthetic experience. The latter appears to be dependent upon our ability and willingness to assume a specifically aesthetic attitude (as distinct from the practical and the investigative attitudes). In the practical attitude we set out to change something in the real world; in the investigative attitude we seek some knowledge about the world. By contrast, in the aesthetic attitude we contemplate something, attempting to view an object in its totality. The aesthetic attitude involves a recognition that the represented objects are not real, that the intuited world created by our concretizations is distinct from, albeit related to,

⁴ ‘zugleich hat sie [die Konkretisation] ihr zweites Seinsfundament in dem literarischen Werke selbst und ist andererseits den Erfassungserlebnissen gegenüber ebenso transzendent wie das literarische Werk selbst’ (*Literary Work of Art*, p. 336).

external reality. In perceiving an object with an aesthetic attitude we may enter into an affective process and create a harmonious aesthetic object, which for literature is identical with the concretion that is the end product of a properly aesthetic apprehension of the literary work.

In addition to these two varieties of cognition, Ingarden discusses two modes of cognition that seem to be more analytical and suited for scholarly activity. The pre-aesthetic investigation of the literary work of art concerns itself with the substructure of the work, i.e., those elements of the work of art that are independent of the aesthetic experience. In contrast to a concretion, which is the product of both our aesthetic and nonaesthetic experience, Ingarden employs the word 'reconstruction' to designate the results of pre-aesthetic investigation. On this level of analysis scholars identify the places of indeterminacy, stipulate the latitude the text permits in filling them, and determine the possibility for generating aesthetically worthwhile concretions. The reconstruction allows us to attain objective knowledge of the literary work; in theory, therefore, we are able to reach absolute agreement with regard to those structures that constitute the inner skeleton of a piece of literature. Ingarden calls the final mode of cognition 'aesthetic-reflective', which can be best understood as a reflection upon the already constituted aesthetic object that we experience (possibly) as the product of the concretizing process. Ingarden suggests that we can proceed in two ways: we can either cognize parts of the work, interrupting the reading process, or try to carry out an aesthetic-reflective cognition during the aesthetic experience. Both ways have disadvantages, but each serves as the foundation for an assessment of aesthetic value, the chief function of aesthetic-reflective cognition. In contrast to pre-aesthetic cognition, aesthetic-reflective cognition is dependent on aesthetic emotion, which allows us direct access to what is aesthetically valuable or to the aesthetic values of the work.

Adequate concretization, harmony and metaphysical values

Ingarden's theory of the literary work of art and its realization by the reader is at its most vulnerable in its inadvertent recourse to determinacy. In general his work is an attempt to account for the great variation in individual responses to the same literary text by deploying the notions of concretization and concretion. But even if we agree with Ingarden that concretions of a given work differ from reader to reader and even from one reading to the next, there is no reason for us to think that absolute agreement is possible with regard to the structures that permit and condition these concretions. Although we might concur that some stable structure exists – there is no denying the identity of graphic marks on a page – it does not follow that this structure is immune to the same types

of contingencies that affect concretizations. Ingarden does not provide any rule by which we can determine whether indeterminacy is actually present or what the extent, scope, and nature of the indeterminacy is. In fact, if indeterminacy is always infinite in a text, Ingarden's level of reconstruction and the hypothetical agreement among scholars on objective structures would be impossible to achieve. Ingarden has shifted the problem of determinacy from the arena of the represented objectivity and the aesthetic work to the level of structure and reconstruction, but by defining the structure of the literary work in terms of potentials that can be realized in an infinite number of ways, he negates the very determinacy that he postulates as the foundation for concretization.

With regard to determinacy Ingarden vacillates occasionally in his discussion of concretization as well. Although he clearly allows for an infinite number of concretizations, with regard to aesthetic value he develops the notion of adequate and inadequate concretization. To be adequate for an aesthetic experience concretizations have to conform to three criteria. (1) They must be based on a faithful and accurate reconstruction of the work. (2) They must remain within the limits set out explicitly and implicitly by the substructure. (3) They must be 'as "similar", as "close" to the work as possible'.⁵ Ingarden recognizes the difficulty these criteria, particularly the last one, present for his theory. Obviously the notion of proximity to the work is on one level nonsensical since Ingarden's entire theory maintains that the work consists of a scheme to be filled in by the reader. Thus we cannot speak of one concretization being closer to the work than another since there is no concrete thing for it to be closer to. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how we could establish a measure for the adequacy of concretizations.

Since none but a completely subjective reader-response theory can completely eliminate the notion of adequacy, we may simply want to register Ingarden's problem as an issue yet to be resolved. A more serious difficulty, however, arises from the way in which Ingarden adjusts concretization to comply to certain traditional literary values. We can trace this normative or 'classical' bias in reading back to the description of the substructure of the literary work. Although at times Ingarden endeavours to incorporate modern literary movements into his theoretical framework, the preponderance of terminology and examples from the traditional canon suggest a neglect, if not the total exclusion, of non-realist, non-mimetic, experimental works. Ingarden's literary work of art is repeatedly associated with such loaded terms as 'harmony', 'polyphony', or 'unity' (*Literary Work*, p. 298). His discussion of the aesthetic attitude and the aesthetic experience relies on notions

⁵ 'dem Werk möglichst "verwandt" ist, ihm "nahe steht"' (*Cognition*, p. 386).

of a totality associated with traditional poetics. This tendency to posit a classical norm for the work and its reception is most evident in Ingarden's remarks on metaphysical qualities, such as the tragic or the sublime, which, he believes, are manifested in literary works of the highest order. Inadequacy of concretization becomes equated with an inability or unwillingness on the reader's part to realize the work as a whole with its concomitant metaphysical qualities. Perfection in art is associated with a polyphonic harmony and with the expression of an essence rather than with dissonance, conflict, or the questioning of traditional 'essences'. Ingarden's initial openness to subjective response on the level of the work of art therefore seems to be negated by the claim for underlying objective structures and the adherence to an evaluative bias informed by classical norms.

Heidegger's 'work of art'

The aesthetic theories of Martin Heidegger are more tenuously related to the project of phenomenology than those of Conrad, Geiger, or Ingarden. In *Being and Time* he decides that phenomenology is inextricably intertwined with hermeneutics (see chapter 9). Since phenomena are not immediately apparent, they require interpretation. But the goal of phenomenology is ultimately to gain access to the realm of Being via the investigation of *Dasein*. Phenomenology is thus an ontological as well as a hermeneutic project. In his later writings, however, including those devoted to language and art, the term phenomenology ceases to play a central role. 'The origin of the work of art', Heidegger's most sustained discussion of aesthetic theory and an important transitional work between his early and late thought, retains the ontological concerns, but they are no longer couched in phenomenological terms. His major interest is in exploring the relationship between art and truth. He starts by pointing out that the origin of the work of art cannot be the artist or creator of the work since the evaluation of any work as a work of art is responsible for our recognition of its creator as artist. The notion of art appears to be more fundamental, more original than either artist or work of art. But the recourse to 'art' does not avoid circular thinking either, since art and the work of art are themselves mutually conditioned notions. Heidegger does not seek to escape these circles of thought, but rather to engage in or join them at a productive point, and he selects as his entrance the actual work of art and its 'thingness' (*Dingheit*).

The actual analysis of the work of art thus begins with the question of its 'thingly character' (*das Dinghafte*) since this is a quality common to all works. Heidegger discusses three ways in which thingness has been conceived in the philosophical tradition: as the bearer of different

features or characteristics, as the unity of sensations, and as formed content. But he rejects all these definitions as unsatisfactory and turns instead to a consideration of works of art. His specific illustrations are van Gogh's paintings of peasant shoes. In normal use we may not notice anything about the shoes; they function in a world of objects that is present to us, but we do not discover their thingness. On the canvas, however, we encounter the shoes in a different fashion, as ready-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*). What the peasant woman who wears the shoes may know instinctively and without reflection, we come to know in the presence of the painting. The work of art thus allows the thingness of the entity to appear; it speaks to us, revealing what shoes are in truth. A work of art does not reproduce a presence, but an essence. Heidegger goes on to give art a privileged position with respect to truth. For Heidegger truth is not simple correspondence to reality or correctness, but proximity to Being. He introduces the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, and cites its etymological meaning as 'unconcealedness' (*a-letheia*). In Heidegger's thought art functions to strip away the outer facade adhering to the everyday world, disclosing truth as the Being of beings. In short, art is the becoming and happening of truth. Within the arts, the linguistic arts have a privileged position, and within the linguistic arts poetry reigns supreme. Indeed, Heidegger claims that poetry is the essence of all art, because only in language does Being disclose itself. Language speaks Being by allowing what is to appear, to come into the open.

Phenomenology in France

Heidegger's reflections on art and literature mark a split in the phenomenological movement that has had tremendous impact in France. While phenomenology in Germany has been generally conceived as an outgrowth and extension of epistemological problems articulated in Husserl's writings from the early and middle period, the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas*, French phenomenology, by contrast, has had an existential and ontological profile, having been influenced decisively by Husserl's later thought and by the works of Max Scheler and Heidegger. Scheler's impact was particularly strong among French Catholic intellectuals; his book *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (1921, *On the Eternal in Man*), which concerned itself with the reconstruction of European values, was well received in France, and of the major German phenomenologists he was the first to visit France in 1924. Heidegger's influence, however, was more pervasive. His major work, *Being and Time*, appeared to be the logical development of Husserl's own thought, and many early enthusiasts for phenomenology in France conceived of the thought of Heidegger and Husserl as part of an identical project. The work and activities of Emmanuel Lévinas are exemplary for

this fusion of Heidegger and Husserl. Lévinas is best known today for his book on Husserl's theory of intuition; he was also the cotranslator of the *Cartesian Meditations*. But he was also prominent in popularizing Heidegger's thought and considered Heidegger's work to be completely compatible with Husserl's. When Lévinas was in Freiburg in 1928–9 he attended Heidegger's lectures and was one of the first to write about Heidegger's philosophy of Being in the early 1930s. Lévinas and others of his generation were therefore responsible for the easy, but somewhat confusing, identification of Husserl's rigorous phenomenological method with Heidegger's existential and ontological project. As a result, what the French have called phenomenology often resembles 'existentialism'. Two of the most noted French phenomenologists, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), are better known for their existentialist views, the former for his 'Christian existentialism', the latter for his more politically engaged Marxist existentialism. Indeed, even the magnum opus in Sartre's philosophical oeuvre, *L'Être et le néant* (1943, *Being and Nothingness*), included the qualifying subtitle: *An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Husserl may have been recognized by the French as the founder of phenomenology and as its most seminal theorist, but by the thirties, when the phenomenological movement gained a foothold in France, this branch of philosophical investigation had a much broader perspective than its German counterpart.

In contrast to Germany, where the rise of National Socialism in 1933 put an end to the careers and influence of Husserl and many of his students, phenomenology thrived in France during the period between the two world wars in a variety of different guises. The person most consistently identified with French phenomenology during the immediate postwar years, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is also the theorist who drew most directly from German sources, particularly from the later work of Husserl. Merleau-Ponty was attracted to phenomenology because it overcomes two equally one-sided traditions of thought. It is an alternative to both the objectivism of the traditional natural sciences and the subjectivism associated with the Cartesian tradition. In opposing this later tradition, Merleau-Ponty is breaking with mainstream German phenomenology and assuming a position at odds with both the Husserl of the *Cartesian Meditations* and Sartre's continuation of the Cartesian heritage in *Being and Nothingness*. None the less, he feels that his work is compatible with phenomenology since it adheres instead to notions advanced in Husserl's later writings and to major portions of Heidegger's work. In general, Merleau-Ponty is not concerned with things in their essences, as Husserl was in his early years, but with the 'life-world' of the *Crisis* and the later posthumous notes. He rejects, therefore, the bracketing of the world, and considers our being to be always within the world (*L'Être-au-monde*). This

focus can be compared with the existentialist shift from the concern with essences to a preoccupation with existence.

But in Merleau-Ponty's thought it is connected more intimately with his insistence on the 'primacy of perception'. Although the dependence on perception is posited quite obviously as a provocation to Descartes' rejection of sensory data as unreliable, Merleau-Ponty does not subscribe to a naive empiricist notion, nor does he consider perception to be definitive. Rather, he believes that perception is the ultimate grounds for being and for all modes of consciousness. Both scientific thought and subjective/rationalist philosophy are based in perception. But neither is perception conceived as the act of a sovereign subject apprehending an independent world of objects. For Merleau-Ponty the subject and the object, consciousness and world, mutually and reciprocally determine each other. The terrain on which he philosophizes is the 'entre-deux' (between the two), neither the subject nor the object, neither the Sartrean for-itself nor the in-itself; the body as both perceiving and perceived assumes a central role in his philosophical discourse. The Cartesian cogito is thus not rejected entirely, but it is removed from the centre of philosophical investigation.

Merleau-Ponty did not develop any system of aesthetics, nor did he write an extended treatise on literary criticism. However, particularly in his later works he took up issues related to art and aesthetics. The last essay he saw published before his death, 'L'Oeil et l'esprit' ('Eye and Mind'), is an extended phenomenological treatment of painting. He argues that science manipulates things, while art, particularly painting, inhabits or lives with them. Painting for Merleau-Ponty becomes the prototypical phenomenological activity. It unveils both the visible and the invisible means that make objects appear before our eyes, that makes them perceptible. In the essay 'Le Langage indirect et les voix du silence' ('Indirect language and the voices of silence'), his most complete and mature statement on language, Merleau-Ponty likens the technique of the painter to that of the writer. He rejects the usual distinction between the pictorial artist using the silent world of colour and lines and the verbal artist employing signs already laden with meaning. Citing the diacritical theory of Saussure for support, Merleau-Ponty contends that language expresses itself in the silences between words, as much as in the words themselves. Ultimately all art, whether painting or writing, is inseparable from perception. Although art gives voice or shape to what is perceived, this apprehension of the world captured in art should not be understood as an individual act. Rather, the work of art should be seen as part of an intersubjectivity, as the product arising from the intersection of individual and shared meaning.

Mikel Dufrenne

The impact of French phenomenology on aesthetic theory is most evident in the work of Mikel Dufrenne (1910–). His *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (1953, *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*), the single most important book on this subject in France during the postwar years, draws heavily on Ingarden's work, but it also reveals the influence of Heidegger, Sartre, and, in particular, Merleau-Ponty. Dufrenne divides his study into four parts. The first and second deal with the aesthetic object and the work of art, and correspond to discussions found in *The Literary Work of Art*. The third section deals directly with aesthetic perception and thus takes up matters Ingarden explores later in *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*. The final part, a 'critique of aesthetic experience', announces itself as a Kantian examination of the conditions for the possibility of aesthetic experience in general.

Dufrenne, like Merleau-Ponty, attempts to do away with the subject-object dichotomy, insisting that the work of art, despite a certain autonomy, exists for a spectator. Indeed, he postulates a correlation between aesthetic perception and the aesthetic object, and announces that this correlation lies at the centre of his concerns. Like Ingarden, Dufrenne repudiates psychological theories, claiming that the aesthetic object is not to be equated with any individual mental act. He also follows Ingarden closely by distinguishing between an aesthetic object and a work of art. The latter, analyzed in the second part of the study, is the objectively existing, self-identical work. By contrast, the aesthetic object, to which Dufrenne devotes forty percent of his study, is the work of art as it is perceived. What is essential for the aesthetic object is the sensuous or perceptible element (*le sensible*), a notion that marks Dufrenne's links with Merleau-Ponty and his fundamental difference from Ingarden. For Ingarden, whose interests were clearly geared towards the cognitive, the layer of represented objects was the bearer of meaning. Dufrenne, along with Merleau-Ponty, sees meaning wholly contained within the sensuous. Although he admits a non-sensuous aspect, the sensuous encompasses it and is the ultimate ground for the constitution of the aesthetic object. A final important distinction between Dufrenne's notion of the aesthetic object and Ingarden's concerns the 'world' associated with the work of art. For Ingarden this world was circumscribed by the represented objectivities produced by the reader's activity of filling in indeterminacies. Dufrenne insists, by contrast, that a world must be self-sufficient and determinate, and he therefore posits an 'expressed world', whose source is the consciousness of the artist. This world is not a cognitive unity, but rather an affective totality with an internal cohesion. The sensuous thus forms the basis for the 'in-itself' of the aesthetic object, and in this regard,

despite its dependence on aesthetic perception, the aesthetic object can be conceived as possessing a certain autonomy.

To complete the analysis of the aesthetic object, Dufrenne develops a phenomenology of aesthetic perception and distinguishes three successive moments: presence, representation, and reflection. These correspond loosely to the three elements located in the aesthetic object: the sensuous, the represented object, and the expressed world. The first moment of perception, presence, is derived from the writings of Merleau-Ponty. It refers to a pre-reflective realm of perceptual activity where subject and object are not yet distinguished. Dufrenne's most important point is that presence relates to perception at the level of the body, and that the aesthetic object as sensuous object 'seduces' or provides pleasure in an immediate way. Perception cannot remain on this level, however; immediate presence yields to a level of representation and imagination, to a moment at which an object, whether real or represented, is apprehended. Imagination, which appears to function similarly to Kant's faculty, has a transcendental and an empirical aspect. Transcendentally it sets the conditions of possibility for representation; empirically, it endows the given representations with meaningfulness. This use of imagination leads Dufrenne to hypothesize that imagination is less important for aesthetic perception than for general perception. Since the aesthetic object is self-sufficient and represents an unreal object or state of affairs, since its representation is controlled, the function of imagination is reduced. More important for aesthetic perception is the moment of reflection. Initially Dufrenne's notion is closely related to Kant's reflective judgement in the *Critique of Judgement*. Kant distinguished reflective judgements from determinant judgements; the former proceed from the general to the particular; the latter from the particular to the general. Dufrenne's point is that one orientation of reflective judgement or reflection is towards understanding in general. The other orientation – and this is the essential one for aesthetic perception – is towards feeling. This somewhat hazily defined notion of feeling entails a receptivity toward the expressed world of the aesthetic object. Through it we return to presence on a higher level and are able to participate in a pure aesthetic perception.

The final goal in Dufrenne's study is not phenomenological, but rather ontological. In the final section of the *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* Dufrenne subjects aesthetic experience to a critique that culminates in an exploration of Being. He begins by discussing the affective *a priori*, the general conditions of possibility for the world to be felt. In Kantian philosophy such conditions are located in subjectivity. But Dufrenne rejects this location for the affective *a priori*, insisting instead that it is situated in Being, a Heideggerian notion encompassing both subject and object. The reconciliation of subject and object is thus grounded in

an *a priori* unity of Being. The realm of Being becomes the ultimate bearer of meaning as well as the site of truth, and aesthetic experience gives us access to this realm. It does so by illuminating what Dufrenne refers to as the real, since reality is likened to the obverse side of Being. In general, art partakes in truth in that it expresses and elicits the affective essence of the real.

French phenomenological critics

The undeniably pervasive influence of phenomenological thought in French intellectual life in the middle of the twentieth century extended to writers associated with literary criticism as well, notably Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962). Beginning his career as a teacher of chemistry and physics, Bachelard soon turned his attention to the pre-scientific world and the images that inform thought in the natural sciences. He tried to accomplish this by analyzing the significance and the representation – increasingly in literary texts – of the four cosmic elements: fire, water, air, and earth. Although these works can be seen as a variation of phenomenological method insofar as they examine the background against which various objectivities appear, he himself categorized his early work as psychological. His main theoretical sources were Freud and Jung; his central objective was the explication of psychological values in the human mind that are anterior to conceptualization. In his later work, however, he departed from this psychological method and turned to what he terms a phenomenology of the imagination or a phenomenology of the soul. Bachelard distinguishes his phenomenological method from psychology and psychoanalysis because the latter seeks to understand images conceptually. Phenomenology, by contrast, goes beyond the confines of causality, and both grasps the essence of poetic imagination as the source of original poetic images and illuminates the consciousness of a subject awed by the images it encounters. Two of his last two books, *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957, *The Poetics of Space*) and *La Poétique de la rêverie* (1961, *The Poetics of Reverie*) are the best illustrations of his adaptation of phenomenology to literary studies.

Unlike the writings of Bachelard the work of Maurice Blanchot (1907–) has never been self-consciously phenomenological, although it is obvious that it has connections with phenomenological thought, especially with the work of Heidegger. A novelist himself, Blanchot is a practical critic rather than literary theorist, although most of his essays on specific literary works are starting points for reflections on more general philosophical issues, in particular the nature of language. Thus in contrast to phenomenological aestheticians, who tend to conceive the literary artwork as the production of a world in the consciousness of

the reader, Blanchot emphasizes the linguistic autonomy and ontological priority of the text. In a certain sense the literary work is the product of the two conflicting subjectivities or intentions of the author and the reader. From the perspective of writing, however, the work is a projection of consciousness that is never finished since it is destined for another time and place. Indeed, Blanchot remarks that the writer is always estranged from his/her creation, belonging to a world that always precedes the work. From the perspective of reading the work is completed, but not because the reader adds something to what already exists. Blanchot emphasizes that reading does not change anything; rather, it allows the work to come into existence, to write itself or be written, to affirm its independence from both writer and reader. For Blanchot a literary work functions to destroy or to undermine the subjectivities that appear to constitute it. Ultimately it is the result of an impersonal act, persistently pointing to the absences evoked by its linguistic essence.

The work of George Bataille (1897–1962) is perhaps even less obviously phenomenological than that of Bachelard or Blanchot. Like Blanchot, Bataille is also a writer of *belles lettres* and often discusses literature in the context of larger philosophical issues. Like Bachelard, he seems to be searching for anthropological constants in the human psyche that constitute the horizon for scientific thought. Associated with the surrealist movement in his early years, Bataille soon developed into one of the most influential critics on the French intellectual scene. He became a resolutely oppositional voice, championing notions of transgression, crime, and evil against the hegemony of reason. His thought has two connections with phenomenology. First, it may be considered a counterpart to the discourse of the absolute spirit in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. Bataille partook in the Hegelian renaissance in France during the thirties and appears to have admired the Hegelian dialectic, but he continuously strives to preserve the negative moments that are recuperated in sublation (*Aufhebung*). Secondly, and related to these negative moments, Bataille's work can be read as an attempt to examine the 'life-world' of human reason. His interest in mysticism, ethnology and primitive cultures, his view of poetry as the transgressor of ordinary language, his study of eroticism and death, his fascination for sexual and intellectual outsiders such as Sade and Nietzsche – all point to a fundamental concern with examining the frontiers of human existence.

The Geneva School

The 'Geneva School' has been especially associated with phenomenology. Less concerned with aesthetic theory than Ingarden or Dufrenne, and less interested in general philosophical speculation than Bachelard or

Blanchot, the members of this school have concentrated on more conventional critical practice. They include Marcel Raymond (1897–), Albert Béguin (1901–1957), Georges Poulet (1902–91), Jean Rousset (1910–), Jean-Pierre Richard (1922–), and Jean Starobinski (1920–). The name of the school stems from the fact that all but Poulet and Richard have had links with the University of Geneva. Occasionally the American critics J. Hillis Miller (1928–), in his early works, Paul Brodtkorb (1930–), and the Swiss-German scholar Emil Staiger (1908–87) are also included as sympathetic to the main concerns of Geneva School criticism. These concerns centre upon a notion of literature as a form of consciousness. In contrast to a view of literature as a mediator of another world or of objectivities experienced by the author, the critics of the Geneva School often conceive of literature as a manifestation of the author's consciousness that the critic attempts to understand. Like Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), they try to duplicate the mind of the writer. In contrast to Dilthey's psychological method, however, they opt for a phenomenological approach. In a gesture reminiscent of Husserl in his discussion of *epoché*, they bracket out the world and all subjective interference in order to grasp the consciousness of the author in its purity. Criticism therefore becomes 'primarily consciousness of the consciousness of another, the transposition of the mental universe of an author into the interior space of the critic's mind' (Miller, 'The Geneva School', p. 307).

The study that inaugurated Geneva School criticism was Marcel Raymond's *De Baudelaire au Surréalisme* (1933, *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*), and because of his preeminence in Geneva, Raymond himself may be considered the founder of the school. A classic of contemporary criticism, Raymond's book rejects traditional 'Lansonism' the notion of literary history in France named after the noted scholar Gustave Lanson (1857–1934), and proposes instead a history of modern poetry based on the appearance of a new consciousness of reality. His emphasis in this study is on the poet as a visionary or seer. In contrast to the classical poet who relies on reason or discursive thought, the modern poet is concerned with a metaphysical unity of inner experience and the feeling of the universe. In this book and in his later studies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Raymond is interested in interiority in two ways. In contrast to traditional biographical methods, he focuses primarily on the interior spaces of authorial consciousness. And in accord with the New Criticism, which recognizes Raymond as one of its precursors, he concentrates our attention on the actual written artefacts. Indeed, although Raymond embraces an empathetic notion of reading in which the task of the critic is to identify with the consciousness of the author, he shares with the New Critics the belief that literature, and in particular poetry, conveys a special type of knowledge, distinct from the intellectualized, objective knowledge

of the natural sciences. His intuitive criticism with its leanings towards the irrational, although it seems at first glance to contrast sharply with Husserl's ultra-rationalist proclivities, reveals some of the mysticism at the root of the phenomenological project. Never entirely free from the traditionalism he himself helped to undermine, Raymond's work may be best seen as part of a transition away from the positivist and historical method towards a concern for metaphysics and ontology.

Probably influenced by Raymond's metaphysical leanings, Albert Béguin also displays a distrust for contemporary methods of criticism, although he too is not able to break away from them entirely. He shares his Swiss colleague's concerns with an empathetic exploration of consciousness, and his first and most important monograph, *L'Ame romantique et le rêve* (1937, *The Romantic Soul and the Dream*), is devoted primarily to the spirit of German romanticism. What attracts him to writers such as Hamann, Novalis, Tieck, and Hoffmann is their visionary tendencies. In all these writers he detects a breakdown of subject and object, an ambivalence with regard to dream and reality, an interplay between the material world and its metaphysical other. His preference for examining mystical or intuitive, pre-rational experience should not be confused, however, with a valorization of mystery and ambiguity. For, as J. Hillis Miller has pointed out, Béguin prizes a 'state of lucid astonishment' in which the concrete presence of the Creator and his creation are felt. ('The Geneva School', pp. 311–12) His romantic orientation can be seen in the three myths he delineates at the close of his study. The myth of the soul is part of a reaction against the rationalist tradition of the enlightenment. The myth of the unconscious aims to link up with a more fundamental reality underlying everyday thought. And the myth of poetry affirms the poet as someone who has access to a deeper, and more human dimension of existence. The quasi-religious thread already apparent in Béguin's early monograph becomes openly devotional with his conversion to Catholicism in 1940. The occupation with literature becomes for him a personal road to salvation, and the ease with which his ontological criticism of the thirties becomes an affirmation of belief in the forties and fifties once again points to a possible mystical substratum in the phenomenological method of sympathetic identification.

Although he held no post at the University of Geneva, the work of Georges Poulet has become closely associated with the central propositions of this branch of phenomenological inquiry. Influenced by both Raymond and Béguin, Poulet developed their insights into a systematic procedure for the study of all literary periods while avoiding their metaphysical and religious trajectory. He has also been the most prominent representative of the School in the English-speaking world, in part because of his teaching positions at the University of Edinburgh

(1927–1952) and at Johns Hopkins University (1952–1957). Most of his books are collections of essays that treat individual French authors from a particular perspective. The first part of the multi-volume study *Études sur le temps humain* (1949, 1952, 1964, 1968, *Studies in Human Time*), for example, examines the temporal consciousness of selected French authors from the Renaissance to the twentieth century; the English edition from 1956 even includes some short sketches of the American writers Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Henry James, and T.S. Eliot. The second volume, which has the subtitle *La Distance intérieure* (1952, *The Interior Distance*), focuses more on the spatially defined, mental terrain on which literature and thought occur. *La Métamorphoses du cercle* (1961, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*) likens consciousness to concentric circles around a central point. Each of these collections therefore treats the authors of literary works by examining a central aspect of consciousness, the ultimate goal being to enter the mind embodied in the texts of individual writers.

The methodological centrepiece of Poulet's approach, which he has called 'genetic criticism', is the *cogito*. Introduced into literary criticism by Raymond, the *cogito* is the ultimate source of the literary work, the spiritual essence from which the text emanates. Although the term is obviously derived from Cartesian philosophy, Poulet employs it in a slightly different fashion. For Descartes the *cogito* represented the only certainty in a world of deceptive sense impressions. It was the instance and the location of pure consciousness, prior to all confrontations with objects. In the writings of Poulet the *cogito* relinquishes some of its rationalist origins and takes on a more phenomenological profile. In the first place it is individualized; each consciousness has its own contours and texture, but Poulet makes the tacit assumption of a fundamental trans-individual unity over time and across works. This *cogito* is also subject to historical change. The first chapter of *Études sur le temps humain* contains a discussion of how consciousness of time changed from the Renaissance to the modern age. Each author in a given period partakes in the common consciousness, although individual variation inside an era is also possible. At these moments in his criticism Poulet comes closest to the German school of *Geistesgeschichte*, with which he felt a close affinity. Finally, the *cogito* used by Poulet also entails at times the overcoming of the subject–object dichotomy. 'The awareness of self', writes Poulet, 'would be simultaneously an awareness of the world' ('The self', p. 49). The notion of a varying *cogito* subject to historical and empirical contingency clashes with Poulet's descriptions of it in terms of self-discovery and self-awareness, and the term seems to oscillate rather freely at times between the strict philosophical definition and a notion closer to 'ego' or 'self'.

The aim of discovering or revealing the *cogito* structures Poulet's conception of both reading and criticism. The process of reading involves delivering books from their materiality and immobility ('Phenomenology of reading'). A book is an object, a material thing, but this material substrate is only important as a vehicle for the consciousness of another as it opens itself up for the reader. During reading, the existence of the book shifts, as if were, from the material reality of paper and ink to an internal location in the innermost self of the reader. This shift entails an overcoming of the division between subject and object. The objects that result from the comprehension of the words are not objects opposed to a subject, such as one finds in normal cognition, but rather 'subjectified objects', the products of an interiority. An even more astonishing aspect of our encounter with texts is the relinquishing of our own subjectivity and the assumption of another, foreign subjectivity. In reading, Poulet claims, we think the thoughts of another; we have the experience of exchanging our own subjectivity for another's. Poulet is able to make these claims because he considers reading a passive process. Unlike Ingarden, who feels the reader must fill in indeterminacies to complete the aesthetic object, the reader in Poulet's conception is stripped of all subjectivity. The work not only defines the reader's consciousness, it also 'takes hold of it, appropriates it, and makes of it that *I* which, from one end of my reading to the other, presides over the unfolding of the work, of the single work which I am reading'. ('Phenomenology of reading', p. 59).

Ultimately, however, it is the author, not in the biological, but in the literary sense, that controls and shapes the reader's mind. Poulet rarely concentrates exclusively on one text in his essays; the unity he establishes is not textual but authorial. He therefore assembles citations from a variety of sources, from published and unpublished texts, letters, memoirs, or non-literary writings. Throughout his oeuvre he is concerned with the consciousness of the individual author embodied in written texts. Criticism is a duplication of the authorial consciousness, the verbal mimesis of the *cogito* of another. It differs from reading only in that the critic is compelled to express consciousness of consciousness in written form. Poulet's shortcomings in expounding his notion of criticism derive from his neglect of language. However, in connection with the work of Jean-Pierre Richard he notes the difficulties inherent in the medium of language. Although it allows criticism to 'express the sensuous life in its original state', it is too 'congealed and opaque' to reproduce subjectivity in its pure form ('Phenomenology of Reading', p. 61). Ultimately Poulet's critical project – and perhaps the project of phenomenological criticism as a whole – rests on the questionable presupposition of the transparency of both authorial and critical consciousness in language, on the access to a prelinguistic realm through linguistic signs. That Poulet so assiduously

avoids explicit reference to the weakest point of his theoretical foundation, however, may be considered not so much a self-deception as an enabling silence (Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 79–101).

The later Geneva School

Poulet's 'genetic criticism' is also open to the objection that he pays too little attention to formal aspects of the text. His focus upon the consciousness behind an entire oeuvre tends to dissolve the boundaries between written artefacts, rendering the notion of the work itself meaningless. Jean Rousset, a Swiss critic educated at Geneva, could be cited as a corrective to Poulet in this regard. Like the American New Critics, Rousset is centrally interested in the unique form of the individual work rather than in the *cogito* of an author. His first major study, *La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France* (1953, *The Literature of the Baroque Age in France*), analyzed individual works in order to arrive at an understanding of the baroque imagination. Rousset's most important theoretical statement, however, comes in the introduction to his essay collection *Forme et signification* (1962, *Form and Signification*). In contrast to Poulet he does not view form as something external to the consciousness expressed in the work, but rather an indispensable means for the mind to become aware of itself and to express itself. Yet Rousset is not a formalist critic. Although he subscribes to Balzac's maxim that each work has its own form (*Forme et signification*, p. x), the goal of his criticism is still defined in terms of experience and consciousness. He constantly seeks the *foyer* from which emanate the forms and meanings of a work, and this term becomes his dominant metaphor for what other critics of the Geneva school call consciousness. The *foyer* is both a centre and a source, the locus of experience and the ultimate ground for the work of art.

In contrast to Rousset, Jean-Pierre Richard, like Poulet, takes the author as the most significant unit of literary criticism. His first two books, *Littérature et sensation* (1954, *Literature and Sensation*) and *Poésie et profondeur* (1955, *Poetry and Profundity*), contain essays on French writers from the nineteenth century. The former volume dealt with the prose writers Stendhal, Flaubert, Fromentin, and the Goncourts; the latter with the poets Nerval, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud. In these studies Richard takes seriously the phenomenologist maxim that consciousness is only consciousness *of* something. Since Richard believes that consciousness is never empty of contents, perception and sensation become central concerns of his criticism. This type of experiential criticism brings him close to Poulet, but Richard combines his interest in the act of consciousness with notions of imagery drawn from the writings of Gaston Bachelard. In contrast to Poulet, Richard focuses on the

objects and images of perception. He also adopts Bachelard's notion of *rêverie* (daydream) to designate the internal mechanism by which the mind creates and links images. Richard is particularly concerned with patterns of images and sensations, not for their own sake, but for what they reveal of the consciousness that creates and orders them. Like most phenomenological critics, he examines stylistic and formal elements only insofar as they reveal the perceiving subject.

Our final Geneva critic, Jean Starobinski, has displayed the most varied concerns. Trained in both medicine and literature, he has written on subjects ranging from the history of melancholia to art and literature. After Poulet he is also the best known member of the Geneva School in the English-speaking world. His phenomenological criticism draws on insights from both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Like the former, he emphasizes the inextricable link between consciousness and the body; human beings know the world not as pure mind, but rather via the body. Like Sartre and in contrast to other Geneva School critics, he investigates in his literary criticism the intersubjective nature of consciousness. For Starobinski the vital aspect of an author or a text is not the subjective patterns by which the world is organized or the objects as they appear in the mind, but the relations between one consciousness and another. This concern for the mutual determination of consciousnesses extends into his reflections on literary theory. In the introductory chapter to *L'Oeil vivant* (1961, *The Living Eye*), entitled 'Le voile de Poppée' (Poppaea's veil), Starobinski emphasizes that the critical vision (*le regard critique*) has two sides to it. The first belongs to the critic viewing the work and involves both an attempt to empathize with the consciousness of the author and a contrary tendency that reconstructs context and thereby causes the author to disappear. The second vision, however, emanates from the work itself, from the consciousness that lies behind the text. The critic not only interrogates the text but is interrogated by it. Criticism thus entails the intersubjective encounter of one consciousness with another.

The impact and limitations of phenomenological criticism

The difficulty in assessing phenomenological criticism is attributable to its protean nature. At times it can resemble New Criticism. It is not surprising, for example, to find Wellek and Warren in *Theory of Literature* (1955) insisting on the formal and internal analysis of texts by drawing upon arguments derived from phenomenology. But at other moments phenomenological readings focus on the biographical author, on the reader in the manner of reader-response criticism, or on the spirit of an age or epoch, as one finds in German *Geistesgeschichte*. In general, however, one can delineate three strands of influence. The first is associated with

the German tradition originating in Husserl and continuing through his students Ingarden and Heidegger. The works of Emil Staiger, who taught at Zurich with Poulet, reveal the impact of Heidegger's discussions of temporality. In more recent years Erwin Leibfried's *Kritische Wissenschaft vom Text* (1970, *Critical Science of the Text*) relies explicitly on the work of Husserl. And Wolfgang Iser's *Akt des Lesens* (1976, *The Act of Reading*) draws heavily on Ingarden's notions of the structure and cognition of literary works (see chapter 11). The second strand of influence is tied more directly to the Geneva School, in particular to Poulet. The best representative of this line of influence is the American critic J. Hillis Miller, whose early studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century English and American literature combine the Genevan concern for consciousness with stylistic and formal analysis. Similarly phenomenological is Paul Brodtkorb's study of *Moby Dick*, which seeks to distill an 'Ishmaelian consciousness'. The final strand relates exclusively to the more specifically ontological and linguistic insights in Heidegger. Exemplary in this area is the American journal *boundary 2* and its editors William V. Spanos, Paul A. Bové, and Daniel O'Hara, who have expanded on the Heideggerian perspective and applied its insights to questions of postmodernism.

It is uncertain, however, whether Heidegger's influence should be counted as supportive of the phenomenological method or viewed as indicating its limitations. For inherent in Heidegger's project is a critique of Husserl's atemporality and idealism. The notion of Being-in-the-world, of Being as inseparable from time, contradicts Husserl's demand for a pure science achieved by bracketing the world and its contingencies. Heidegger's later linguistic and poetic studies may be seen as a continuation of this attack on Husserlian phenomenology from the perspective of a philosophy of language. Indeed, the criticism of phenomenology undertaken in the sixties, frequently in the name of poststructuralism or deconstruction, entails most frequently either temporality or language; its main targets are Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, but by implication phenomenology in general is criticized. What phenomenological criticism strives for is a pure presence of consciousness, a transparency of one mind to another, or the total identification with the other. It presupposes a unified subjectivity, the possibility of perfect and immediate self-knowledge, and a centralized consciousness from which perception and cognition emanate. But what poststructuralism has repeatedly stressed is the necessary discrepancy involved in self-awareness and the accompanying ruptures inside the subject. Derrida's notion of *différance*, which incorporates both 'differing' and 'deferring', refers to the dimension of temporality effaced in phenomenological theory. Moreover, the phenomenologist's dream of reaching some original, pre-linguistic realm is also disputed by the poststructuralist critique. Deconstructive readings demonstrate the

illusory nature of conceiving consciousness to be the origin of experience and prior to linguistic structuration. The perceived limitations in phenomenology have contributed no doubt to its decline in popularity during the seventies and eighties. Its failure to gain a stronger foothold in critical circles is ultimately connected to its resort to superannuated notions of subjectivity and consciousness. Although criticism that calls itself phenomenological may continue in various Heideggerian and Derridean guises, the connection with the project Husserl developed during the first third of the century has all but vanished.

RECEPTION THEORY: SCHOOL OF CONSTANCE

Introduction

Reception theory is commonly used to designate a direction in literary criticism developed by professors and students at the University of Constance in West Germany during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The School of Constance advocated turning to the reading and reception of literary texts instead of to traditional methods that emphasize the production of texts or a close examination of texts themselves. To this extent its approach is related to reader-response criticism as it appeared in the United States during these same years, although the School of Constance for a time was much more homogeneous in its theoretical presuppositions and general outlook than its American counterpart. Also known as ‘The Aesthetics of Reception’ (*Rezeptionsästhetik*), the approach developed by the School dominated literary theory in Germany for about a decade. It was virtually unknown in the English-speaking world until around 1980 when it was made more readily accessible by a number of translations of the most seminal works. Hans Robert Jauss (1921–) and Wolfgang Iser (1926–) are the two most original theorists of the Constance School, although several of Jauss’ students, among them Rainer Warning, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Wolf-Dieter Stempel and Karlheinz Stierle, also made important contributions to this branch of theory. In response to the writings of Jauss and Iser, scholars from the German Democratic Republic such as Robert Weimann, Claus Träger, Manfred Naumann, and Rita Schober raised objections to some propositions and suggested Marxist alternatives, and the most productive East–West postwar dialogue in literary theory involved issues of reception and response.

The rise of reception theory to pre-eminence in the Federal Republic has to do with a number of societal and institutional factors. Chief among these were the turbulence and subsequent restructuring of higher education in West Germany during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Reception theory comes out of a climate of change and reform and is itself a signal of a decisive shift in direction in post-war German

critical methods. Indeed, the history of literary criticism in postwar Germany can be divided most convincingly into two phases with a turning point occurring in 1967 when reception theory burst onto the scene. For the first two decades of the post-war era most scholars adhered to traditional forms of research informed most frequently by the positivistic, historicist, or existential-phenomenological heritage. The most popular introductory works to the study of literature were rather conservative, and like New Criticism they extolled texts for their linguistic perfections or as self-contained works of art. By the mid-sixties, however, the demand for change had become apparent. On the one hand, external pressures emanating from the student movement called into question traditional values and methods, and this more general radicalization of the universities had a significant effect on scholarly methods. The reevaluation of the canon, the demand for a critical approach which had relevance beyond the walls of academia, and the politicization of literature itself during these years seemed to evoke an altered view of literary theory. On the other hand, scholars themselves, having sufficiently recovered from their anti-ideological reaction to the National Socialist perversion of the university, began to reexamine their role as mediators of knowledge. And in doing so they started to recognize the inadequacy of the dominant practices in their discipline, especially close reading and 'practical criticism'.

Jauss' provocation to literary history

The spirit of those years demanded a provocative response, and this is precisely what took place. In April of 1967 Hans Robert Jauss, the recently appointed Romance language scholar at the new, experimental university in Constance, delivered perhaps the most celebrated inaugural lecture in the history of German literary criticism. The title he selected echoed another famous inaugural essay, one held on the eve of the French Revolution at the University of Jena by the playwright and theorist Friedrich Schiller. Schiller had spoken on the topic: 'What is and for what purpose does one study universal history?' (*Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?*); Jauss modified this title by substituting the word 'literary' for 'universal', but this slight alteration did not diminish the impact in the least. Indeed, Jauss suggests, as his idealist predecessor had 178 years before him, that the present age needs to restore vital links between the artefacts of the past and the concerns of the present. Such a connection can be established only if literary history is no longer relegated to the periphery of the discipline, Jauss maintains. He does not advocate literary history in its nineteenth-century form as the panacea for current ills, but rather a rethinking of the very notion of what

literary history entails. The revised title of this lecture, 'Literary history as a provocation to literary scholarship' (*Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*), captures the innovative challenge which Jauss is posing to his colleagues. The task of literary studies is to revitalize our dealings with texts on the basis of a novel approach to tradition.

The name Jauss gave to this innovative approach was *Rezeptionsästhetik*. In its most general sense we can understand this as a part of the shift in the study of literature from a preoccupation with authors and texts to a concern for reception and reading. Although his was not the only call for such a reorientation in literary studies during the late sixties – Harald Weinrich's essay 'Für eine Literaturgeschichte des Lesers' ('For a literary history of the reader') appeared in 1967 as well, and Wolfgang Iser's lecture at Constance, 'Die Appellstruktur der Texte', (translated as 'Indeterminacy and the reader's response in prose fiction') was delivered only a few years later – the 'Provocation' essay was certainly the single most important document for the movement which came to be known as reception theory. One of the reasons that Jauss was able to attract so much attention with this essay has to do with his ability to steer between two popular and competing alternatives: Marxism and Russian Formalism. Indeed, his reflections on a new course for literary history can be understood as an attempt to overcome the pernicious Marxist–Formalist or, in the most general terms, extrinsic–intrinsic dichotomy. Marxism represents for him an outmoded approach to literature, related to an older positivist paradigm. Yet Jauss also recognizes in this body of criticism, especially in the writings of less orthodox Marxists like Werner Krauss, Roger Garaudy, and Karel Kosik, a fundamentally correct concern with literature's historicity. The Formalists, on the other hand, are credited with introducing aesthetic perception as a theoretical tool for exploring literary works. However, Jauss also detects in their works the tendency to isolate art from its historical context, a *l'art pour l'art* aesthetics which valorizes the synchronic over the diachronic. The task for a new literary history, therefore, requires satisfying the Marxist demand for historical mediation while retaining the Formalist advances in the realm of aesthetic perception.

The aesthetics of reception proposes to do this by altering the perspective from which we traditionally have interpreted literary texts. In conventional histories of literature works are assigned a place in the heritage by referring to authors and texts. Many literary histories are in fact little more than a series of loosely connected biographical essays. Literary history can only be successful in depicting a process when it takes into account the interaction between text and reader and thereby ceases to exclude the reception of literary works. Jauss thus seeks to meet the Marxist demand for historical mediations by situating literature in

the larger continuum of events; he acknowledges the Russian Formalist achievements by placing the perceiving consciousness at the centre of his concerns. The aesthetic dimension of texts receives its due because readers will test a work they read for the first time by comparing it with works they have already encountered. The understanding of the first readers is not lost or negated by later readers, but rather sustained and enriched in a chain that stretches from the initial reception to subsequent generations. Historical significance thus implies aesthetic value and vice versa. The historian of literary reception is called upon to rethink continuously the works of the canon in light of how they have affected and are affected by current conditions and events. The reception of the individual work across time is part of a larger process and coherence of literature. Indeed, literature is only meaningful for us insofar as it can be understood as the prehistory of a present experience. Past meanings are thus understood as an integral part of present practices, and literature acquires meaning as one important source of mediation.

The horizon of expectation

The integration of history and aesthetics is to be accomplished largely by examining what Jauss refers to as the 'horizon of expectation' (*Erwartungshorizont*). Both the philosopher Karl Popper and the sociologist Karl Mannheim had used the concept before Jauss. It had also appeared in the work of the art historian E. H. Gombrich, who, under Popper's influence, defined the horizon of expectation in *Art and Illusion* (1960) as a mental set which registers deviations and modification from a norm with exaggerated sensitivity. It is not very likely that the 'methodological centrepiece' of the most important essay in the history of reception theory is derived from these sources, however. In all likelihood, it is an adaptation of the notion of 'horizon' found prominently in the phenomenological and hermeneutic tradition associated with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Jauss' acquaintance with and use of the term was probably influenced most by the theory of his teacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer (see above, chapter 10). For Gadamer 'horizon' refers primarily to our situatedness in the world, our necessarily perspectival and limited purview. But it should not be conceived in terms of a fixed or closed standpoint; rather, it is 'something into which we move and which moves with us'.¹ It is also related to Gadamer's controversial notion of prejudice (*Vorurteil*), implying a restriction on our perception of any given situation. But perhaps most important is Gadamer's concept of understanding as a process of

¹ 'Der Horizont ist vielmehr etwas, in das wir hineinwandern und das mit uns mitwandert' (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 288; p. 271).

fusing one's present horizon with a past horizon (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Although he recognizes that the very notion of a separate horizon is illusory, that ultimately no line can be drawn between past and present, the procedure of projecting a historical horizon and then recombining it with a present horizon is quintessential for understanding as such.

Jauss' use of the term is slightly different. Although he never defines 'Erwartungshorizont' in his 'Provocation' essay, it appears to denote an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a 'system of references', or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual brings to a given text. All works are read against some horizon of expectation; indeed, certain types of texts – parody, for example – intentionally foreground this horizon. The task of the literary scholar, Jauss suggests, is to 'objectify' the horizon, so that we may evaluate the artistic character of the work of art. This is most readily accomplished when the work in question thematizes its horizon. *Don Quixote* plays off the tradition of tales of knighthood; *Jacques le Fataliste* evokes the horizon of expectation of the popular novelistic schema of the journey. The perceptive and educated reader will recognize this and be able to reconstruct the horizon against which these works are meant to be read. But even works whose horizon is less obvious can be examined with this method. Jauss suggests three ways to objectify the horizon of works that are historically less sharply delineated. First one could employ normative standards associated with the genre. Second, one could examine the work against other familiar works in its literary heritage or in its historical surroundings. Finally, one can establish a horizon by distinguishing between fiction and reality, between the poetic and practical function of language, a distinction that is available to the reader at any historical moment. Thus Jauss' proposal for a method of inquiry involves the application of generic, literary, and linguistic aspects.

Having objectified the horizon of expectation, the literary scholar can then proceed to establish the artistic merit of a given work by measuring the distance between the work and the horizon. If expectations are not 'disappointed,' then the text will approach the culinary; if, on the other hand, it breaks through the horizon, then it will be a work of high art. Sometimes a work may break its horizon of expectation and yet remain unrecognized as a great work of art. This case poses no problems for Jauss' theory. The first experience of disrupted expectations will almost invariably evoke strong negative responses from its initial audience, but the original negativity will disappear for later readers. The reason for this is that in a later age the horizon has changed so that the work in question no longer ruptures expectations. Instead, it may be recognized as a classic, that is, as a work which itself has contributed in an essential way to the establishment of a new horizon of expectation. Jauss illustrates

this principle in a short discussion of *Madame Bovary* and *Fanny*, a popular novel by Feydeau with a similar theme. Although both works discuss adultery, Flaubert's formal innovation (impersonal narrative) shocked his audience more than the familiar confessional style of his contemporary. *Madame Bovary* breaks through our expectations, to some degree calling attention to the very horizon it supersedes. It is a turning point in the history of the novel which then itself becomes a norm for later writers and readers. *Fanny*, by contrast, because it confirms reader expectations, fades into yesterday's best-seller.

Jauss' employment of the horizon as an objective measurement for aesthetic value has been the most controversial aspect of his aesthetics of reception, and the nature and function of the horizon has drawn attention from diverse critical circles in Germany. The most general objection contends that Jauss is still operating with an objectivist model despite his frequent and justified criticisms of such a procedure, and that he inadvertently negates the most important impulses drawn from Gadamer's hermeneutical model. While Gadamer continuously emphasizes our own historical situatedness, Jauss at times suggests that we could bracket our historicity in establishing an 'objective' past horizon. According to Gadamer past norms are not available to us as givens; they are themselves the product of a complex hermeneutical process of mediation. When Jauss later suggests applying a textual linguistics to detect 'signals' in works, he falls into a similar trap. For signals, like norms or genres, are not objective, but rather conventional, entities; they appear as such only within a certain mode or framework of perception. Our reconstruction of a horizon of expectation can never be objective, as Jauss implies, since we as historical beings have no transcendental vantage point from which we can objectively view the past. Furthermore, in reconstructing a horizon we use evidence (signals, norms, genre information, etc.) derived from literary texts which are then to be measured against the very horizon they have helped to establish. Indeed, Jauss' entire procedure for judging aesthetic value in terms of deviation from a norm is also open to criticism. The root of the problem lies in his almost exclusive reliance on the Russian Formalists' theory of perception through defamiliarization (*ostranenie*). Novelty apparently serves as the sole criterion for evaluation, and although Jauss makes an attempt at one point to consider 'the new' (*das Neue*) an historical as well as an aesthetic category, he often universalizes its function in determining aesthetic value. In the years following the 'Provocation' essay, Jauss returned to most of these questions and substantially revised his thoughts on value, but even in his most recent work the notion of an objectified or an objectifiable horizon is not completely abandoned or resolved.

Towards a new literary history

Despite these methodological problems Jauss' aesthetics of reception represents, even in the incipient stages of the 'Provocation' essay, a significant and suggestive departure from traditional approaches. Above all, by abandoning an obsolete model which focused on authors and their texts, he has been able to revitalize the way we think about literary history. Three formalist ideas were important here. The first concerns the notion of an evolutionary series. In contrast to previous histories, this model is able to maximize the linkage of aesthetic categories by focusing our attention on devices in literary texts. Second, Jauss' adaptation of Russian Formalist views eliminates the teleological control on which most previous literary histories depended. Instead of reading events backwards from a hypothetical end point, the evolutionary method postulates a 'dialectical self-production of new forms' (*dialektische Selbsterzeugung neuer Formen*). Finally, because novelty has been posited as both an aesthetic and a historical criterion, literary history can now account for artistic *and* historical significance, thus reconciling the antagonism which Jauss addressed at the outset of his reflections. The meaning and form of a literary work are no longer considered static or eternal entities, but rather as potentialities unfolding in a historical process. What is perhaps more important in Jauss' discussion of formalism, however, is his endeavour to overcome the objectivist dilemma that plagues his call for an 'objective' horizon of expectation. In criticizing the formalists, he highlights the central role played by the experience of the interpreter in construing the function of a text in its diachronic series. The introduction of the subjective category of experience (*Erfahrung*) is not without difficulties of its own, of course. It is a vague concept and it threatens to jettison the entire project of a new method of literary history by its resort to the apparently individual impressions of the literary historian. None the less, by calling on the experience, rather than the neutrality of the interpreter, Jauss remains truer to his Gadamerian roots.

The diachronic aspects Jauss adopts from Russian Formalism are complemented in his new version of literary history by synchronic observations. Jauss advocates that literary historians examine representative cross-sections to ascertain which works at any particular time stand out from the horizon and which works remain undistinguished. One aim of such a procedure would be to allow a comparison between cross-sections to determine whether and how a change in literary structure is articulated at a given instance. Two conceptual models aid Jauss in his endeavour. The first is Sigfried Kracauer's notion of the mixture or coexistence of contemporaneous (*gleichzeitig*) and non-contemporaneous (*ungleichzeitig*) features in any historical moment. This helps Jauss to explain the

heterogeneity of literary production in any synchronic cross-section and to see seemingly static moments as an inseparable part of the historical process. Indeed, for Jauss the historicity of literature manifests itself precisely at the point where synchrony and diachrony intersect. The second theory Jauss calls upon is derived from structural linguistics, especially as it was applied to literature by Roman Jakobson and Juri Tynyanov. Analogous to language, literature is viewed as a system or structure comprising a grammar and syntax that remain relatively fixed. Here Jauss has in mind such features as genres and rhetorical figures. In contrast, one might conceive of another more variable realm of semantics consisting of symbols, metaphors, and themes. This linguistic model provides a way to use synchronic evaluations for more than mere statistical correlations. It provides the historian with a theory for viewing the coherence of literature as the prehistory of its present manifestation.

On literary history, Jauss correctly notes that traditional literary histories subordinate themselves to general history. Literature is considered exclusively as a reflex of biographical, social, or political concerns. By contrast Jauss emphasizes the socially formative function of literature. As a social construct the horizon of expectation would thus consist not only of norms and values, but also of desires, demands, and aspirations. A literary text is not a mere reflection of some other part of the social order. Rather, it plays an active role in its reception, calling into question and altering social conventions. Jauss supplies *Madame Bovary* as an illustration of how a literary work can change attitudes not only by its content, but by its formal devices as well. What Jauss is suggesting in positing a socially formative function for literary history is a fundamentally new way of conceiving our relationship to our heritage. And the implications of such views extend far beyond literary studies. For the aesthetics of reception entails not only the introduction of the reader as a guide to value and interpretation, but implicitly a model for understanding encounters with the past in which we simultaneously form and are formed by artefacts. It is not merely a textual procedure, but ultimately a method for coming to terms with ourselves as readers of history and products of past meaning.

Iser and the indeterminacy of the text

The reception of Wolfgang Iser's work was also determined to a large extent by general cultural factors, and to a degree it parallels the response to Jauss' writings. His successful early piece, 'Die Appellstruktur der Texte' (1970; The structure of appeal in texts; translated as 'Indeterminacy and the reader's response'), was also originally a lecture delivered at the University of Constance, where he too taught. The impact of this talk

and its printed version, although perhaps not as intense or protracted as the reaction to Jauss' 'provocation', established Iser as one of the foremost theorists of the 'Constance School'. His major theoretical volume, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1976, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*), however, did not appear until the mid-1970s and, like Jauss' magnum opus *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (1977; revised and expanded, 1982; *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*), it did not arouse quite as much controversy as the less finished, but more explosive lecture.

But these similarities in the German response to the 'dioscuri' of reception theory should not obscure their fundamental differences. Although both were concerned with a reconstitution of literary theory by drawing attention away from the author and the text and focusing it on the text-reader relationship, their methods for approaching this shift diverged sharply. While the Romance-scholar Jauss was initially moved towards reception theory through his concern for literary history, Iser, a scholar of English literature, comes from the interpretive orientation of New Criticism and narrative theory. Whereas Jauss depended on hermeneutics and was particularly influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer, the major impact on Iser has been phenomenology. Particularly important in this regard has been the work of Roman Ingarden, from whom Iser adopts his basic model as well as a number of key concepts. Finally, even in his later work Jauss is most often interested in issues of a broad social and historical nature. His examination of the history of aesthetic experience, for example, is developed in a grand historical sweep in which individual works have chiefly an illustrative function. Iser, by contrast, has been concerned primarily with the individual text and how readers relate to it. Although he does not exclude social and historical factors, they are clearly subordinated to or incorporated in more detailed textual considerations. If one thinks of Jauss as dealing with the macrocosm of reception, then Iser occupies himself with the microcosm of response (*Wirkung*).

It is instructive for Iser's subsequent development to look first at his essay on 'Appellstruktur'. Iser begins his reflections in this piece by making two rather controversial statements about the nature of texts. First, he contends that meaning is not contained in the text itself, but rather is generated during the reading process. It is neither purely textual nor totally subjective (in the sense of being constructed solely by the reader), but the result of an interaction between the two. Secondly, he maintains that literary texts are constructed in such a fashion that a certain latitude for realization is allowed. The reader, by filling in gaps or indeterminacies in an already given structure, completes the literary work and thereby participates in the production of meaning.

Both contentions depend heavily on notions developed in the work of

Ingarden, the Polish phenomenologist and student of Edmund Husserl. For Ingarden the literary work was important as an object of study because it is, on the one hand, a purely intentional object and, on the other hand, one which falls outside the dichotomy of idealism and realism (see chapter 10). Every literary work has a determinate structure or layer of structures, but it becomes an aesthetic object only when it is read or completed by a reader. In contrast to real objects, which are determined in every respect, i.e. they are in principle never equivocal or indefinite, the objects represented in a literary work exhibit 'spots' or 'points' or 'places' of indeterminacy. Ingarden calls these places 'Unbestimmtheitsstellen' ('places of indeterminacy'), as Iser does in the subtitle to his lecture on the 'Appellstruktur'. They are found, according to Ingarden, 'whenever it is impossible, on the basis of the sentences in the work, to say whether a certain object or objective situation has a certain attribute'.² In phenomenological theory all objects have an infinite number of determinants, and no act of cognition can fully take into account any specific object. But while a real object must have a *particular* determinant, the objects in a literary work, because they are intentionally projected from meaning units and aspects, retain a necessary degree of indeterminacy. It is possible and normal for context and specific reference to limit the indeterminacy, but there is no amount of detail or suggestion that would eliminate it entirely. Thus the reader's task when confronting a text is to complete it. Ingarden refers to this process, the filling in of indeterminacies, as concretization; the completed aesthetic object, as distinguished from the skeletal structure, is called a concretion.

The text and the production of meaning

Iser criticizes the naive notion that literature mirrors an external reality or that it forms another reality. The reality of texts is not a reflection of a real world that exists prior to and outside of the text, but rather a reaction to the world constituted in a textual universe. The response to literary texts is different from the response to real situations and, therefore, implicitly different from the response to texts which refer to real situations. Our encounters with the world are by definition real, while our interactions with literature are fictional; the former are anchored in reality, the latter in the reading process. Two extremes are possible in our reaction

² 'Eine solche Stelle zeigt sich überall dort, wo man auf Grund der im Werk auftretenden Sätze von einem bestimmten Gegenstand (oder von einer gegenständlichen Situation) nicht sagen kann, ob er eine bestimmte Eigenschaft besitzt oder nicht' (Roman Ingarden, *Cognition* p. 50).

to literary texts: either we can feel that the worlds evoked are fantastic, that is, contrary to normal expectations, or we can experience them as banal, when they conform completely to our customary surroundings. The literary text neither explains nor evokes real objects; rather it presents us with an openness, offering the reader a different perspective. Although Iser refines several of these thoughts in his more detailed reflections in *The Act of Reading*, two fundamental considerations are retained. First is the notion that literary texts operate with an element of openness not found in other types of writing, a view not unfamiliar in other currents of literary theory, e.g., in Russian Formalism or in New Criticism. And second is the suggestion that literary texts, because of this openness, are somehow more emancipatory, less restrictive, and therefore of greater pedagogical value than other textual experiences.

Having described the literary text from the 'outside', Iser proceeds to his central concern: the internal structure of literary works. He begins by citing Ingarden's notion of 'schematized views or aspects' (*schematisierte Ansichten*). These are views which gradually constitute the object, simultaneously supplying the reader with a concrete form to contemplate. On the one hand, they endow the literary object with a degree of determinacy by delimiting the latitude of choices, by defining particulars of any given object. On the other hand, because they never completely define an object, they are constitutive of the fundamental indeterminacy characteristic of literary texts. Between aspects, Iser claims, there exists a gap or void (*Leerstelle*), a 'no-man's-land' of indeterminacy, where the reader is called upon to connect or bridge the schematized aspects. Literary texts, therefore, interact with readers in two fundamental ways. By providing schematized aspects and thereby limiting the infinite number of possibilities for an object, they steer the reader in a certain direction. Iser refers to this activity as 'Leserlenkung' (steering the reader). But by leaving open gaps for the reader to fill in or eliminate, they invite or even demand reader participation. The interaction with these passive and active facets of texts determines the nature of the reading process.

Thus far Iser's theory is not apt to be very objectionable, but in this early essay the further conclusions he draws from this model are both more daring and more revealing. Iser claims that the extent of our participation and the degree of the work's determinacy define the type of text with which we are dealing. According to him a novel with minimal indeterminacy tends to be tedious and approaches the trivial. Works informed by a dogmatic ideology or by a heavy-handed pedagogical intention allow the reader space for only affirmation or denial of a proposition and thus restrict openness. Furthermore, Iser makes some claims which would relate the realism of a given work to the extent of its gaps. Since he feels that we have a penchant for ascribing a degree of reality to those things

that we have made ourselves, a text which allows us a certain latitude of choice will enhance the effect of realism. These hypotheses, however, are questionable. Texts with many gaps may not overtly advocate an ideology, but this does not mean that they are less ideologically informed than other pieces of writing. Moreover, filling in gaps will only produce an effect of realism if we are inclined to treat texts in a fashion analogous to real objects. However, what is important about these conclusions – which Iser modifies, refines, but never totally abandons in his later theoretical work – is not so much their actual claims as the general tendency they betray. For they strongly suggest what seems to be an ideological constant in Iser's writings of the 1970s: the concern for literature as a tool for a liberal pedagogy, which depends heavily on bridling the fantasy of readers by valorizing realistic response as the preferred norm.

The dangers of drawing general conclusions from the premise of gaps and reader involvement are perhaps most glaring in the final section of the 'Appellstruktur' essay. Here Iser claims that indeterminacy in literature has tended to increase since the eighteenth century. To prove this contention he briefly examines three representative novels from English literary history: Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. His analyses apparently produce the desired result, but the reader will probably feel uncomfortable with his theoretical assumptions. While we may initially agree that a novel like *Ulysses* is less determined or more open to concretization than a work by Fielding, closer examination will undoubtedly reveal that we are really dealing with a different kind of reading experience in the twentieth century, one which cannot be measured on a continuous scale involving the number of gaps. For theoretically, if we follow Ingarden and phenomenological theory, the amount of indeterminacy in any text is infinite; no matter how many gaps we fill in, there is always room for adding more detail, for eliminating new blanks as they arise from the non-conjuncture of schematized aspects. Joyce's work may seem less determinate therefore, because the narrative technique dictates that we come to terms with it in a different fashion, not because we can or must fill in more gaps. What Iser's theory lacked at this point was a more differentiated notion of the ways in which indeterminacies function in texts and of the possibilities open to readers for reacting to texts.

The interactive model

In his subsequent theoretical work Iser addressed both of these difficulties. Indeed, one of his central concepts, the 'implied reader', tries to bridge the gap between the text and the reader in a novel way. Developed as a counterpart to Wayne Booth's notion of an implied author in *The Rhetoric*

of *Fiction* (1961), the implied reader is defined as both a textual entity and a process of meaning production. It encompasses both the prestructuring of the potential meaning (and thus incorporates the schematized aspects from Ingarden) as well as the reader's concretization of this meaning. It is anchored in the structure of the text, but partakes also of the activity of reading itself. It is literary and textual, on the one hand, but imbued with consciousness and intentionality (in the phenomenological sense of the word), on the other hand. The implied reader thus differs significantly from the various alternative readers developed by Michael Riffaterre, Stanley Fish and Gerald Prince. What Iser wants is a way to account for the reader's presence without having to deal with real or empirical readers. But at the same time he seeks to avoid the ideal abstractions and predetermined constitution of 'super-readers', 'informed readers', and narratees (see chapter 5). In short, in opting for a transcendental model, he develops what might be called a 'phenomenological reader', one that excludes empirical interference, but encompasses all pre-dispositions necessary for the text to have its intended effect.

Iser may have recognized that the term 'implied reader' had to bear too many diverse senses, for in *The Act of Reading* it disappears almost entirely. Instead Iser discusses in more detail and refinement the various textual structures and reading processes that had previously been subsumed under this single concept. Traditionally critics have looked at texts in terms of content and form, and although Iser shuns conventional terminology, his notions of 'repertoire' and 'strategies' parallel closely this more familiar aesthetic vocabulary. The repertoire of a text consists of various conventions related to social and cultural norms. Iser maintains that conventions in literary works are organized 'horizontally' in contrast to the 'vertical' organization in normal speech. By this he means that conventions are defamiliarized – taken out of their usual context and placed in a new setting that allows the reader to scrutinize them critically. Through the repertoire the literary text reorganizes norms as well as the literary tradition so that the reader may assess their function in real life. Strategies supply a structure for the repertoire. They entail both the ordering of materials and the conditions under which those materials are communicated. Like the implied reader, they are both immanent to the text and an act of comprehension triggered in the reader. Iser supplies two sets of examples. 'Foreground' and 'background' refer to the relationship that permits certain elements to stand out while others recede into a general context. 'Theme' and 'horizon', terms borrowed from phenomenological theory, involve the selection from multiple perspectives in a text. The tension between theme and horizon creates a mechanism that regulates perception, while allowing space for individual interpretation.

Phenomenological theory also plays a central role in Iser's description of the reading process. It is helpful to remember that he, like Ingarden, distinguishes between the text, its concretization, and the work of art. The first is the artistic aspect, what is placed there for us to read by the author. The second term refers to our own productive activity. The work of art, by contrast, is neither text nor concretization, but something in between. It occurs at the point of convergence of text and reader, a point which can never be completely defined, and is characterized by its *virtual* nature. To describe the way in which a reader interacts with the text, Iser develops the notion of the 'wandering viewpoint'. This term is meant to describe the presence of the reader in the text, and it enables him to grasp the text from the 'inside', rather than externally. The wandering viewpoint partakes in various overlapping procedures essential for the comprehension of the work of art. The first is the dialectic of 'protention' and 'retention'. Like much of Iser's terminology, these concepts are borrowed from phenomenological theory. Iser applies them to our activity in reading successive sentences. In confronting a text we continuously project expectations which may be fulfilled or disappointed; at the same time our reading is conditioned by foregoing sentences and concretizations. Because our reading is determined by this dialectic, it acquires the status of an event and can give us the impression of a real occurrence. If this is so, however, our interaction with texts must compel us to endow our concretizations with a degree of consistency – or at least as much consistency as we admit to reality. This involvement with the text is seen as a type of entanglement in which the foreign is grasped and assimilated. Iser's point here is that the reader's activity is similar to actual experience. Although he distinguishes at one point between perception (*Wahrnehmung*) and ideation (*Vorstellung*), structurally these two processes are identical. But perhaps the most important point of Iser's outline of the reading process concerns its implications for epistemology. Relying on Georges Poulet (see above, chapter 10), he notes that reading temporarily eliminates the traditional subject–object dichotomy. At the same time the subject is compelled to split into two parts, one which undertakes the concretization and another which merges with the author (or at least the constructed image of the author). Ultimately the reading process involves a dialectical process of self-realization and change: by filling in the gaps in the text, we simultaneously reconstruct ourselves.

Blanks, negation, and the structure of negativity

Having examined textual structures and the reading process from a phenomenological perspective, Iser turns to the topic of communication. Here the blank (*Leerstelle*) returns to play a central role. As a universal of

communication theory, the blank functions in several different ways. At the simplest level it merely connects various segments in a text. A plot will break off at one point and resume at a later time, and the reader is called upon to fill in the 'blank' by supplying missing information about what occurred in the interim. But Iser also conceives of the blank in a more complex fashion. When segments are connected by the reader they form, according to Iser, a field of vision for the reader. This referential field contains segments that are structurally of equal value, and the confrontation produces a tension that must be resolved by the reader's ideation. One segment must become dominant, while the others recede temporarily in importance. This process of resolution is also conceived as the filling in or eliminating of a blank. Finally, blanks also appear on the level of theme and horizon. When a certain theme becomes dominant, the theme it replaces becomes part of the horizon, allowing a change in focus. Because this variety of blank involves the movement of the wandering viewpoint into a thematically empty position, Iser prefers the term 'vacancy' here. A blank thus relates more to suspended connectability, while a vacancy deals with non-thematic segments within the referential field of the wandering viewpoint. Together they chart the course of interaction by organizing the reader's participation in meaning production.

Blanks and vacancies mark out the syntagmatic axis of our interaction with texts by guiding us along a path that is internal. As readers, however, we also relate to texts paradigmatically. Through filling in blanks on the syntagmatic level the reader acquires a perspective from which previously held opinions are rendered obsolete or invalid. When this occurs, a 'negation', defined as a dynamic blank on the paradigmatic axis in the reading process, takes place. Negation is important for Iser because of its ramifications for evaluation and for literary history. Good literature, Iser implies, is characterized by the negation of specific elements and the subsequent search for a meaning that is unformulated, but nevertheless intended in the text. When the negation is within the reader's expectations, Iser, like his colleague Jauss, feels the literary quality is low. Only disappointed expectations (Jauss' term) or negations of high quality (Iser's designation) produce outstanding literature. But Iser also detects a change in the quality of negation over the centuries. Complementing primary negations are what he labels 'secondary negations'. These arise from contradictions between textual signals and the *gestalten* produced by the reader. During the eighteenth century, primary negation predominated; different views in the text are continuously problematized by changing perspectives. In the self-reflexive texts of the twentieth century secondary negations become more prevalent. Here the reader encounters a constant invalidation of all images constructed during the reading process. The

effect is to make us conscious of the very activity of communication in which we are engaged.

The structure of blanks and negations constitute an unformulated subtext, an absence between the words or below the surface. Iser calls this unwritten substructure 'negativity' and outlines its three general functions. First, in terms of form, negativity acts like a deep structure for the text, organizing the blanks and negations perceived by the reader. It traces out a pattern of absences and thus facilitates communication. On the level of content Iser relates negativity to the negativity of human effort as it has been depicted in literature from Homer to the present. Like many of Iser's concepts it assumes a dual function: as the cause of failure and deformations, and as their potential remedy. In allowing the reader to comprehend the deformed positions as themes, negativity points to the possibility of overcoming these positions. It thus acts as a mediator between representation and reception, initiating the formulation of the unformulated. In this function Iser calls it the infrastructure of the literary text. Finally, from the perspective of reception negativity is the 'non-formulation of the not-yet-comprehended'. It allows the reader to escape momentarily from the world in order to formulate a larger question concerning the world. It thereby assists us in disengaging ourselves temporarily from the daily lives we live so that we might assimilate the views of others to our own. Negativity in all of its functions, therefore, is for Iser the most fundamental component in the communication of literary texts.

Marxist reception of the School of Constance

The work of both Jauss and Iser elicited a variety of critical comments from colleagues in the Federal Republic. Some of the most strident objections to reception theory, however, emanated from Marxist critics in the German Democratic Republic, in particular from Robert Weimann, Claus Träger, and Manfred Naumann. It is not difficult to understand why the East Germans were so concerned about the theories of the Constance School. In the first place, reception theory touched a sore point for Marxist criticism in general. Although some writers in the Marxist tradition had dealt tangentially with issues of reception and response, the main heritage of Marxist aesthetics had concerned itself with 'production'. Basing themselves on a Hegelian aesthetics of content, critics like Georg Lukács, undoubtedly the most influential critic during the first two decades of the GDR's existence, had marginalized the very questions raised by Jauss and Iser. Second, and with some justification, writers in East Germany felt Jauss had presented a vulgar version of Marxist literary theory in his writings. Identifying it with a superannuated positivist

paradigm, Jauss had basically rejected its usefulness for the writing of literary history. Perhaps most important, however, GDR critics recognized that the change in the West from textually oriented criticism to historical concerns – and this was particularly true of Jauss' writing – implicitly threatened their hegemony in this area. Jauss' claim to overcome the weaknesses of Russian Formalism and Marxism (while preserving their advantages) was therefore perceived as a direct challenge to the Marxist tradition.

GDR critics attack reception theory for failing to address completely and adequately the very issues it raises. The specific objections can be grouped under three headings. The first of these is one-sidedness. The East Germans feel that reception theory has gone too far in emphasizing the response to a work of art. While they admit that this is an important aspect – and one which has perhaps been downplayed somewhat in the Marxist tradition – Jauss and his colleagues, in positing reception as the sole criterion for a revitalization of literary history, destroy the dialectic of production and reception. Citing an analogy in Marx's method for analysing capitalist society, they contend that production must be considered a primary category, and that consumption (or reception) must be seen as important, but derivative. Second, Weimann in particular detects a danger in the totally subjective apprehension of art and the resultant relativizing of literary history. The problem here is that if we follow Jauss (and Gadamer) in relinquishing all objective notions of the work of art, then our access to history would be completely arbitrary. This criticism can be understood best by considering the relativizing tendency inherent in the notion of a horizon of expectation. While several Western critics pointed out that Jauss breaks with Gadamer in positing an objectivization of the horizon, writers in the GDR find the notion of an ever-changing past horizon objectionable. They point out that in historicizing the norms of one's own prehistory, the interpreter relativizes any notion of objectivity connected with the work itself and any historical connection to the work. Since according to Jauss' model the essence of the work lies in its reception, there is neither an objective basis, nor a metacritical principle for evaluating any previous evaluation. In this universe of total relativity all interpretations would seem to be equally valid. We would possess no criteria for disqualifying the legitimacy of even the most objectionable criticism, even blatantly racist or fascist interpretations.

Finally, critics in the East have noted that the Western model of reception theory provides scant sociological grounding for the reader who supposedly stands at the centre of its concerns. Iser, for example, is charged with ignoring the ideological biases that surround any reader in his/her encounter with a text. In proposing a phenomenological model to overcome the pernicious effects of the subject–object dichotomy, he

has in fact avoided the social nature of reading and response. Jauss has been subjected to similar criticism. Although East German critics have most often agreed with his postulate concerning the historicity of literature, i.e., its fundamental situatedness in a historical process, they have disagreed with Jauss' formulation of this situatedness. Jauss' categories, they claim, remain too abstract. The reader he conjures up is not a historical force, but rather a passive recipient in an undifferentiated flux. Similarly, the public that determines his horizon of expectations, like Iser's reader, is primarily a literary construct with little or no connection with social reality. Experience and expectations are defined in terms of previous encounters with literature, not with regard to interaction with the world. Since neither Jauss nor Iser appear to take into account the social praxis of the recipients of literature – GDR critics have in mind especially their class or relationship to the means of production – they propagate an idealization that circumvents rather than illuminates the social function of literary texts.

Neither Jauss nor Iser shrank from responding to their critics in the other Germany. But their responses were not so much replies to the specific points raised by GDR reception theorists as objections to the Marxist model. Both draw attention to an alleged contradiction between granting legitimacy to reception while still retaining a notion of reflection (*Widerspiegelung*). The mimetic function of literature, Iser claims, is irreconcilable with the pedagogical task imputed to it by GDR culture. Jauss, noting the same contradiction, traces it back to an 'idealist embarrassment' in Marx's writings themselves. Marx's notion of the artwork creating an appreciation for beauty, found in the 'Preface' to *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (1859, *Critique of Political Economy*), is at odds with any possible theory of art as a mirror of reality. But Jauss and Iser also find more ominous political overtones in their colleagues' reflections, especially with regard to the 'freedom' accorded to the reader in constituting the meaning of the text. Since GDR writers assume that something is given and determinate in the text – they refer specifically to 'Rezeptionsvorgabe' (pregivens of reception) – the possibilities for interpretation are limited from the outset. What Jauss and Iser maintain is that GDR reception theory propagates a conformist model of reading that effectively negates the genuine emancipatory role of literature. At least the first part of this evaluation appears to be accurate, but it is not evident how this distinguishes the Marxist variant of reception theory from its 'bourgeois' counterpart. Jauss and Iser, as well as all other West German reception theorists, argue that textual constraints are essential for the production of meaning. East German critics who openly advocate principles of determinacy in their theory would therefore seem to differ from their

Western colleagues only in their view of what these constraints are, not whether they exist.

The response to reception theory in the United States

The writings of Jausss and Iser have experienced a quite different reception from critics in the United States. Their responses came over a decade after the initial statements from the School of Constance, and because the critical scene has been so preoccupied with poststructuralism and deconstruction, they have not been extensive. In contrast to East Germany, where Jausss' theory was at the centre of contention, Iser has attracted more attention in the Anglo-American world, no doubt because of his field of study (English literature) and his proximity to more familiar critical traditions. Despite Iser's generally positive reception, his work has not been uncontroversial. His chief detractor in the US has been Stanley Fish, whose review of *The Act of Reading* in *Diacritics* in 1981 sparked a minor debate. Fish objects to Iser's critical timidity, claiming that Iser is a kind of theoretical chameleon, able to stand on both sides of all important issues. After a brief summary of the chief arguments in the book, he sets out to examine how exactly he manages to be so inoffensive to so many potentially antagonistic camps. He thinks that he has found the answer to this enigma in Iser's use of the opposition determinacy/indeterminacy. Fish starts by questioning the validity of the first half of this pair. According to Iser the reader's activity consists largely of filling in blanks in the text. What Fish questions is the nature of these blanks. While Iser suggests that blanks are somehow there in the text and therefore independent of the reader, Fish contends that they do not exist before a prior act of interpretation. The issue is thus really one of epistemology as much as of the literary theory. Perception for Fish is a mediated activity; it is never 'innocent of assumptions', while for Iser there are some things which simply exist and must be grasped by all perceivers. Because Fish disputes this point, he also attacks Iser's repeated endeavours to distinguish between our interaction with the world and with the text. There are differences, he concedes, but they do not involve a distinction between perception and ideation, as Iser claims, nor do they entail a difference in the degree of determinacy. Both activities – interacting with a text and interacting with the world – are equally conventional and mediated. What we see or understand is always already informed by a prior perspective or framework that enables the very seeing and understanding.

If there are no determinate objects for interpretation but only interpreted objects which are erroneously called determinate, one might suppose that Fish would then validate a totally arbitrary, subjective

indeterminacy. But this is most emphatically not the case. In fact, Fish disputes the notion of indeterminacy on the same grounds that he rejected determinacy. Because we are always operating inside an interpretive framework, because we have no access to a free subjectivity unconstrained by conventions, indeterminacy, considered as the locus of the individual contribution to the meaning of a text, is impossible. While Fish argues on the one hand, therefore, that there is nothing in the text that is given – he uses the terms given and determinate synonymously – and everything is supplied, he also maintains that nothing is supplied and everything is given. Although he seems to have backed himself into a corner, he is really quite consistent. The paradox dissolves once we recognize that he has simply viewed the problem of reading texts – and interacting with the world – from the perspective of a code (or convention) which informs and determines individual response. He has raised the entire problem, as it were, to a metacritical level. Thus he does not claim that the analysis of a text is impossible using Iser's model. An interpretation of any work could be performed using the distinction between textual givens and the reader's contributions. But every component in such an account is itself the consequence of a particular interpretive strategy which only possesses validity inside of a particular system of intelligibility.

Iser's reply to this assault sets out to clarify his own terms and to correct his adversary's mistakes. The central confusion in Fish's critique is exposed by setting up a tripartite distinction: 'The words of a text are given, the interpretation of the words is determinate, and the gaps between the given elements and/or interpretations are the indeterminacies' ('Talk like whales', p. 83). Using these terms he distinguishes between our interaction with the real world and our interaction with texts. The real world is given, according to Iser, and our interpretations of it are determinate; indeterminacy enters in the 'gaps' between given elements and/or interpretations. The literary text, by contrast, allows us to produce a world; in short, the realness of the world is not given, but the result of an interpretation. With these distinctions Iser goes on to argue that there has to be something which restricts interpretation. His need to defend himself on this point shows that he and Fish are not arguing on the same level. Fish is not taking the Berkeleyan stance Iser ascribes to him; he is not claiming that only what is perceived actually exists. He too admits the existence of words or marks on a page or at least something which is there before interpretation. His contention is, however, that these 'givens' are meaningless – they are not even 'pointable to' as givens – before we endow them with meaning as 'givens'. We might observe, then, that Iser's confusion comes from his using 'givens' in two distinct ways. On the one hand, he employs the term to denote mere existence, and Fish would probably accept this usage. But it also

designates for him the intersubjective recognizability of existing things. Fish's point is that elements are only given in the second sense of the word if they are situated in a system in which elements can be perceived. Interpretation or an interpretive convention precedes their determination as elements. Similarly, Fish does not maintain that on a practical level nothing in the text restrains interpretation. He maintains rather that the very perception of constraints or the ability to constrain is possible only because the interpreter is already operating within a convention or a set of assumptions.

The reception of Jauss' work by Paul de Man (see 'Introduction' to Jauss' *Towards an Aesthetic*, pp. vii–xxv), known in his later work for his deconstructive method, is of a somewhat different nature. De Man seeks to uncover the blindness in Jauss's considerable insight. Accordingly his remarks ostensibly praise his colleague's perspicuity and rigour. He is particularly laudatory with regard to Jauss' synthetic abilities. After briefly discussing the reception and shortcomings of Prague structuralism, he writes of Jauss' considerable merit in demonstrating the connection between reception and semiotics. What bothers de Man about the aesthetics of reception, however, is its inattentiveness to language, or more precisely, its illicit equating of the phenomenal with the linguistic realm. The hermeneutics of experience, the arena in which Jauss operates, and the hermeneutics of reading are not necessarily compatible. De Man is particularly concerned that the notion of a 'horizon of expectation' is not applicable to the linguistic realm. Jauss' deficiency may be attributed to his neglect of theorists who problematize the stability of signification and the determinacy of the signifier. At one point de Man refers to his lack of interest in the play of the signifier and semantic effects produced on the level of the letter, those elements, in short, that escape the network of hermeneutic questions and answers. Jauss is being chastized for failing to integrate the insights of French poststructuralist theorists, in particular for ignoring the linguistically unavoidable ambiguities which accompany any text. A third way to understand Jauss' shortcomings involves reexamining the grand synthetic project for which he is so heartily commended. From this perspective de Man suggests that Jauss is guilty of suppressing the potentially destructive force of rhetoric in order to complete his unification of poetics and hermeneutics unaffected by the disruption of the letter.

The radical nature of de Man's critique, however, can be most clearly discerned in connection with his discussion of Walter Benjamin. He points out that Benjamin's rejection of response in an early essay on translation should not be viewed as a conservative concession to some essentialist mode of interpretation, but rather as a recognition of the negativity inherent in the very process of understanding. De Man feels that 'Die

Aufgabe des Übersetzers' (The task of the translator) is particularly important because translation, as an interlinguistic process, negates the opposition between subject and object. His central concern is to expose tensions that invariably pertain in and are specific to language. There is always an irreducible distance between proposition and denomination, between literal and symbolic meaning, between what is being symbolized and the symbolizing function. De Man argues that the inclusion of a horizon of expectation as the focal point for *Rezeptionsästhetik* makes it a 'conservative' enterprise. With respect to the oppositions classical/modern and mimetic/allegorical, Jauss must be identified with the former terms. For the use of the horizon metaphor for understanding suggests perception, and thus understanding is brought into close association with the sensory. Thus even Jauss' category of allegoresis, which he opposes to mimesis is informed by a traditional 'aesthetics of representation'. By contrast, de Man praises Benjamin's 'anorganic' notion of allegory, which depends on the letter. Like translation and rhetoric, Benjamin's concept of allegory defies and questions the synthetic activity at the heart of Jauss' enterprise. Indeed, for de Man allegory is the rhetorical process which removes a text from the phenomenological realm of the world and places it in a grammatical, language-oriented realm of the letter. Thus Jauss is guilty of an illicit identification of word and world which Benjamin carefully avoids. In this confrontation so carefully staged by de Man, the aesthetics of reception appears as a method which, for all its advantages, fails to break with familiar and conservative presuppositions.

Second-generation reception theorists

Perhaps the most important book by a 'second-generation' reception theorist was Karlheinz Stierle's (1936–) *Text als Handlung* (1975; Text as Action); it combines structuralist, semiological, and communication theory in an attempt to develop a theory of literature as performative utterance. Stierle's most direct continuation of the work of reception theory occurs in the important essay 'Was heißt Rezeption bei fiktionalen Texten?', (translated as 'The reading of fictional texts'), a study of the 'formal' side of the reception process. His goal in this study is the derivation of specific criteria for the reception of fictional texts from the concept of fictionality itself. Thus, like Iser, he is interested in the phenomenal nature of textual communication rather than in the more Jaussian project of literary history. He agrees with Iser's contention that the formation of illusions and images is essential for the reading process; he labels this level of reading 'quasi-pragmatic,' a designation that distinguishes it from the reception of non-fictional texts ('pragmatic reception'). Stierle suggests that a quasi-pragmatic reading must be

supplemented with higher forms of reception which are capable of doing justice to the peculiarities of fiction. He argues for a pseudo-referential use of language, an application located between its usage in simple reference and its auto-referential function. What distinguishes narrative fiction is this pseudo-referentiality, which may be considered auto-referentiality in the guise of referential forms. Fiction is self-referential, although it appears to be referential. These higher forms of reception are important because they add another dimension to our reading of fictional texts. While a quasi-pragmatic reading leads to understanding (*Verstehen*), when we examine fiction for its pseudo-referentiality, we add cognition (*Erkennen*) or a reflexive dimension. We might think of this double reading process, first to produce illusion and then to thematize composition itself, in terms of the activity of the reader coupled with the analysis of the literary scholar. The former reads fiction pseudo-pragmatically, while the latter has the task of explicating the very nature of the fiction that has been read.

Unlike Stierle, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (1948–) is more concerned with the communicative function of literature. He sees Jauss' *Rezeptionsästhetik* as part of a new paradigm of scholarly activity, one which will constitute literary scholarship as a branch of the sociology of communication. His early work may be considered an initial contribution to a theory of literature as social action. With reference to the production of texts the task, according to Gumbrecht, is two-fold. First he advocates reconstructing as accurately as possible authorial intention, the subjective sense of texts as activities. Because of its accessibility, reconstructability, historicity, and constancy, the author's intended meaning is particularly suited for a descriptive approach. But Gumbrecht also advocates looking at the production of texts in terms of factors outside any conscious authorial intent. While the 'in-order-to motives' (*Um-zu-Motiven*) focus on the subjective activity of the communicative act, the 'because motives' (*Weil-Motiven*) take into account the level of historical and social structuration. Gumbrecht is here concerned with those historically enabling features which legitimate subjective desires for a certain meaning or effect, or that determine in general the form and content of literary works. Reception constitutes the reverse side of the communicatory process. Reading and understanding a literary text, like its production, are considered social actions, and again Gumbrecht has recourse to a descriptive approach. Parallel to the productive activity both the 'in-order-to' (subjective) and 'because' (social and historical) motives would be objects of investigation. But in this area he feels that it would be more difficult to acquire material and data. While certain experiments and surveys might assist in the determination of contemporary effects and responses, evidence from the past is scarce and unreliable. Furthermore, the ultimate impact of literature on 'practical activity' is nearly impossible

to ascertain with any degree of certainty. In this type of research, therefore, the scholar will often have to be content with educated hypotheses based on the accumulation of the best available information.

Wolf-Dieter Stempel (1929–) has concerned himself with the role of genre in the process of reception. Following the structuralist distinction between *langue* and *parole*, he suggests that genre provides the general rules (*langue*) which govern the reading of individual texts (*paroles*). But this model, Stempel argues, has difficulty accounting for the reader. Proceeding from Jan Mukařovský's distinction between the artefact or 'work-thing' (*dělo-več*) and the aesthetic object or realization of the artefact, Stempel explores the intricacies of the text–reader relationship. He argues that the generic aspects of a text are established by the recipients of texts. Concretization is itself a generic activity, and the reception of a literary text is essentially a generic process in two respects: first, by virtue of the conditions informing reception; and second, by virtue of the 'model of reality' which is the result of the reception process. This second aspect is especially important for him; indeed, he postulates that in the final analysis literary reception amounts to the experience of the semiotic production of a new generic configuration. But Stempel is also concerned with the intriguing question of the relationship between immanent features of literary texts, which he calls 'modes', and reception. The problem is how to conceive this relationship, since there appears to be an unbridgeable gulf between textual modes and reception as he has outlined it. He concludes that modes function in an analogous fashion to generic aspects. They are realized by historically conditioned codes at the basis of concretizations which result from them. Thus Stempel's work, like Stierle's and Gumbrecht's, ultimately explores the relationship between text and reality by means of the fruitful avenue of literary reception.

Jauss and the aesthetics of negativity

The Constance School rethought and reformulated their positions during the mid-seventies. Jauss' theory appears to have undergone the more significant transformations probably because Iser's early work seems to culminate in *The Act of Reading* in 1976, while Jauss' 'Provocation' does not lead directly to any larger work. Indeed, the effects of this seminal and inaugural essay were quite possibly more consequential for others than for Jauss himself. By 1972 Jauss had revised and refined several notions that were prominent in his earlier theoretical manifesto. During the 1970s the theories of the Russian Formalists diminished in importance for him. Their views on perception and defamiliarization as well as the evolutionary model of literary history are mentioned much less frequently. The horizon of expectation also plays a somewhat less important role. Gradually the more phenomenologically influenced horizon of experience gains in importance.

All of these changes in Jauss' outlook can be traced to his rethinking and devaluation of what he calls the 'aesthetics of negativity'. Reacting in particular to the posthumous publication of Theodor Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970; *Aesthetic Theory*) – for Jauss the paradigm of a negative theory of art – Jauss reconsiders the implications of his own 'negativity', influenced by the Formalists. What bothers Jauss about Adorno's views is that they allow a positive social function for art only when the artwork negates the specific society in which it is produced. They therefore leave no room for an affirmative *and* progressive literature, since literature in general is defined by its opposition to social practices, by its 'ascetic' character. Such a theory tends to valorize modernist directions, promoting an elitist, *avant-garde* concept of art and scorning communication in literature as anathema to genuine cultural achievement. Only art that stubbornly affirms its autonomy in the face of a reified culture, that becomes a simulacrum of social practice by removing itself from the social sphere, and that severs its ties with ordinary language is in Adorno's opinion authentic art. Furthermore, Adorno postulates a radical separation between art and pleasure or fulfilment, according to Jauss the primary function for art through the ages.

Adorno was not the only twentieth-century theorist to promote an aesthetics of negativity, however. According to Jauss it also occurs in the writings of the *Tel Quel* group in France. Only works that are identified with *l'art pour l'art* are seen as contradicting hegemonic tendencies in modern society. Like Adorno, however, the writers associated with this journal promote art without apparent social impact in maintaining a realm of pure opposition. They are accused by Jauss of valuing only one notion of art (he finds a similar one-sidedness in Russian Formalism). The exclusive attention to innovation assumes that literature is perceived and valued only against a normal or automatized literary background. Literature functions only out of its negative relationship to something else. But if Russian Formalism can be viewed as an early twentieth-century variety of the aesthetics of negativity, then the aesthetics of reception that Jauss had propagated only a few years earlier is merely a later variant of the same basic notions. Jauss recognizes the weakness in his earlier work when he admits the partial nature of his former depiction of aesthetic experience. By excluding a primary and positive aesthetic experience, the aesthetics of reception shared an artistic asceticism with other contemplative and self-reflexive modes of speculation, ignoring not only the important role of pre-autonomous art (pre-romantic), but also the great variety of functions that art has historically possessed and potentially still possesses.

Jauss's later work can be understood as an endeavour to counter the one-sidedness of the aesthetics of negativity by validating pleasure and by

examining the scope of literary response through the ages. Jauss reminds us of the simple fact that most contact with art has been occasioned by pleasure (*Genuß*). The word 'Genuß' has two senses in German. In the most common usage it refers simply to pleasure or enjoyment. But an older sense of the word brings it closer to the notion of use or utility. Jauss certainly has both in mind when he employs it, for his claim is that 'Genuß' has been the seminal inspiration for interest in art, even though it has been virtually ignored by the recent aesthetic tradition. In this twentieth century the cognitive and communicative function formerly associated with art has been flatly rejected. Those who would profess enjoyment or edification from literature are associated with a narrow-minded, pretentious middle class. This is true even for those theorists, like Roland Barthes (see chapter 6), who seem to focus on the libidinal function of art. Although Barthes is to be commended for recognizing the legitimacy of aesthetic pleasure, ultimately, according to Jauss, his adherence to an aesthetics of negativity only permits the ascetic pleasure of the connoisseur. His *jouissance* ends up being the rediscovered eros of the contemplative philologist enthralled by the verbal paradise of the text.

To avoid the deleterious consequences of the aesthetics of negativity, Jauss takes a somewhat different approach. Pleasure, understood as the opposite of work, but not necessarily in contradiction to action or cognition, must be separated from aesthetic pleasure phenomenologically. Drawing on the phenomenological tradition of Ludwig Giesz and Jean-Paul Sartre, Jauss delineates two moments in aesthetic pleasure. In the first, which is applicable to pleasure as a general phenomenon, there occurs an unmediated surrender of the ego to the object. The second moment, which is specifically aesthetic, consists of assuming a position that brackets the existence of the object. It entails a creative act of consciousness in that the observer produces an imaginary object during aesthetic contemplation. Here Jauss comes perhaps closest to Iser's model of reading, focusing on the participation of the recipient in the construction of the work of art. Like his colleague at Constance, Jauss conceives of an interaction between subject and object, but unlike Iser, he posits it as a hovering between two poles. The formula he employs for aesthetic pleasure, 'self-enjoyment in the enjoyment of something other' (*Selbstgenuß in Fremdgenuß*), emphasizes not only the back-and-forth movement between subject and object, but also the elementary unity of enjoyment and understanding. Pleasure should not be separated from its cognitive and praxis-oriented functions, and it is with this multi-functional aesthetic model in mind that Jauss proceeds to analyse the fundamental categories of aesthetic pleasure: *poiesis*, *aisthesis*, and *catharsis*.

In his magnum opus, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*

(1982; *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*), Jauss supplies detailed discussions of the development of *poiesis*, *aisthesis*, and *catharsis*, respectively, the productive, receptive, and communicative aspect of aesthetic experience. He traces these terms from their Greek origins to the present, showing the various transformations they have undergone in Western literature. Perhaps more illuminating for Jauss' abandonment of the principles of negativity, however, is his lengthy analysis of aesthetic identification. Specifically he concentrates on the various ways in which audiences have related to heroes in literary texts. He identifies five patterns of interaction that form a rough chronological sequence, but can be found in some form in all societies. Indeed, several may even occur in a single work. In some respects these parallel the fictional modes Northrop Frye outlines in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). The first, 'associative identification', involves an active participation of the spectator, such as one may have found in ancient times or in the modern living theatre. In 'admiring identification' we encounter a hero whose actions are exemplary for a given group. In the third modality, 'sympathetic identification', the audience places itself in the position of the hero and thus expresses a kind of solidarity with a usually suffering figure. Jauss distinguishes this from 'cathartic identification' because of the emancipatory function of the interaction for the spectator. While sympathetic identification entails an emotional bonding, cathartic identification suggests a distancing or detachment not achieved in the former. Finally, the ironic modality, associated in particular with modern literature and prototypical for the aesthetics of negativity, breaks, disappoints, or denies an expected identification.

In his later work, Jauss thus moves well beyond the initial premises of the aesthetics of reception. But Iser too transcends his theoretical position of the mid-seventies in *The Act of Reading*. His work in the 1980s concentrates on the notion of the 'imaginary', a diffuse and untranslatable realm in which the reader experiences the text in imaginary gestalt. In a sense, then, the more recent theories of the Constance School complete the shift instigated in the late sixties from a focus on production and textual analysis to reception and reading. Instead of theorizing about the possibility of an objective horizon or the textual structures which could evoke responses, Jauss and Iser appear to be concentrating much more on the primary experiencing of the text. Thus the reader has been even more firmly installed at the centre of their concerns. Jauss no longer relies exclusively on the Formalist evolutionary view of literary history with its one-sided emphasis on breaking or disappointing expectations, while Iser has refrained from trying to construct rules for literary history from his phenomenological model of reading. Later developments have brought an enrichment of reception theory, although there may have

been a slight reduction in provocative impact. Although a prolonged and detailed confrontation with the theoretical challenges of poststructuralist and deconstructive criticism from France and the United States is absent in the work of first-generation reception theorists, the modifications and extensions they have undertaken have produced a more cohesive and cogent theoretical position.

SPEECH ACT THEORY AND LITERARY STUDIES

The basic concepts of speech act theory

Speech act theory originated during the 1950s in the ordinary language philosophy of J. L. Austin and continued most notably in the work of John Searle. The following discussion surveys its impact on literary studies up until 1990. This impact was powerful and quickly achieved. Indeed, by 1975, Quentin Skinner was able to assert the centrality of speech act theory, pointing to the vital influence of Austin and Searle on the two new ‘orthodoxies’ that challenged formalism by stressing that both intention and context were necessary for understanding (‘Hermeneutics’, *passim*). Yet barely a decade later, Vincent Leitch could write a history of American literary criticism from the 1930s to the 1980s without reference to Austin, and with only two tangential mentions of Searle. Granted, Skinner and Leitch present extreme views on the value of speech act theory; but their respective claims reflect a real shift in critical perspective. Once a major theoretical position, speech act theory is remembered today primarily as what, following Richard Rorty, might be called the ‘straight person’ (‘Deconstruction and circumvention’, p. 2) for one of Jacques Derrida’s more famous deconstructive performances. What caused the initial enthusiasm, and why did the promise not materialize?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to move back from literature to examine the philosophical premises of speech act theory. In a way, this is easier with speech act theory than with most philosophical movements, since it has its origins in a single, specific text: Austin’s *How to do Things with Words*, originally delivered as the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955, and posthumously published in 1962.

For the literary theorist, at least, Austin’s key insight is that the meaning of an utterance does not inhere in the words themselves. He begins by assaulting the traditional philosophical assumption ‘that the business of a “statement” can only be to “describe” some state of affairs, or to “state some fact”, which it must do either truly or falsely’ (p. 1).¹ Using the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to Austin are to *How to Do Things with Words*.

term ‘constative’ for the kind of statement that can be true or false, he provisionally contrasts it to an entirely different kind of speech, the ‘performative’, ‘in which to *say* something is to *do* something’ (p. 12): for instance, the act of making a promise or saying ‘I do’ during a wedding ceremony. Such utterances cannot be judged as true or false; but they do have a parallel quality. For just as constatives can fail by being false, so actions such as promising or marrying can go wrong in one way or another, too. This occurs, for instance, when one says ‘I do’ even though already married. In Austin’s quirky terminology, such utterances are deemed not false but ‘unhappy’ or ‘infelicitous’.

Austin distinguishes six basic conditions required for felicitous utterance of a performative. There must be ‘an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect’; the ‘persons and circumstances . . . must be appropriate’; the procedure must be performed correctly; it must be performed completely; if ‘the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings’, the participants must in fact have them; and the parties must conduct themselves appropriately in the future (pp. 14–15). Different kinds of infelicity occur when any one of these conditions is not met.

But in probing infelicities, and in seeking vainly for distinctions of grammar or vocabulary that parallel the distinction between constative and performative utterances, Austin is obstructed by the interdependence of his categories (‘for a certain performative utterance to be happy, certain statements have *to be true*’ (p. 45)). It is not simply that a given sentence can on different occasions serve ‘in *both* ways, performative and constative’ (p. 67). More striking, his investigation ultimately leads, as Shoshana Felman puts it, to ‘the radical and total subversion of the constative as such’ (*Literary Speech Act*, p. 65).² This dissolution of his founding distinction forces him to broaden his inquiry to examine ‘the total situation in which the utterance is issued – the total speech-act’ (p. 52). Calling on a new distinction between meaning (‘what is being said’) and force (‘how . . . it is to be taken’) (p. 73), he then develops the crucial categories of his theory: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

(1) A *locutionary* act is an act of meaning, ‘the act of “saying” something’ in a ‘full normal sense’ (p. 94). It consists of three components: the phonetic (‘uttering certain noises’), the phatic (‘uttering certain vocables or words’) and the rhetic (doing so with ‘a certain more or less definite “sense” and a more or less definite “reference”’) (pp. 92–3).

(2) An *illocutionary* act is, in contrast, an act of force. Illocutionary

² ‘La subversion radicale et totale du constatif comme tel’ (*Scandale du corps parlant*, p. 91).

acts include such acts as 'asking or answering a question, giving some information or an assurance or a warning, announcing a verdict' (p. 98), and they always conform to a convention (p. 105). An illocutionary act is the 'performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something' (pp. 99–100). The distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts is both fundamental and far-reaching. As Richard Ohmann points out, to determine whether or not a locutionary act is well formed, we call upon the rules of grammar; in contrast, 'the rules for illocutionary acts concern relationships among people' (Ohmann, 'Speech, literature', p. 50).

(3) Finally, there is the *perlocutionary* act: the act of producing 'certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons' (Austin, p. 101). This is the performance of an act *by* saying something as opposed to the acts *of* saying or *in* saying something. Because the actual effects of speaking can never be pre-determined, perlocutionary acts are neither conventional nor fully controlled by the speaker.

Speaking the words 'The house is on fire' with a certain sense and reference is a locutionary act. The same words could be used to perform several illocutionary acts: for instance, warning someone to leave the premises or boasting about the excellence of my arson techniques. Persuading someone to jump from the window or to hire me to burn down a building would be perlocutionary acts, which – regardless of my intentions – might or might not result from the illocutionary acts of warning or boasting.

It is in his fastening on the illocutionary – and specifically on the relationship between illocutionary conventions and the circumstances of the particular speech act (p. 115) – that Austin sees his special contribution; for as he argues, most other philosophers elide the illocutionary in favour of the locutionary or perlocutionary (p. 103). Austin's focus leads him to conclude that stating is just as much an illocutionary act as warning or pronouncing (p. 134) and that statements, no less than performatives such as promising, are subject to infelicity. This leads to a relativized notion of truth – although not a subjective one, since it depends on objective contextual criteria. Noting that the statement 'France is hexagonal' is true 'up to a point . . . for certain intents and purposes . . . good enough for a top-ranking general, perhaps, but not for a geographer' (p. 143), Austin concludes that 'The truth or falsity of a statement depends not merely on the meanings of words but on what act you were performing in what circumstances' (p. 145).

Clarifications and expansions

How to Do Things with Words was never put into publishable form by its author, and much of it is not only provisional, but truly cryptic. It is therefore not surprising that his followers have felt compelled to revise and develop his theory.

The revisions have generally taken one of two directions.³ Some theorists, especially those in the Anglo-American tradition, have treated Austin as a classifier or cartographer, and have tried to fill in his gaps, clarify his distinctions, and in general refine his mapping of the speech act situation. Others, fewer in number and less influential, have seen the essence of Austin precisely in the blurrings that characterize his argument, and have tried to draw significance from his points of overlap and indecision.

The first type of response is best represented by the most visible of his heirs, John Searle. Much of Searle's most searching work has been the application of speech act theory to such perennial philosophical issues as reference, predication and the relation of 'ought' to 'is' statements, and has little immediate relevance to literature. But he also revised and expanded Austin in several important ways that *have* turned out to bear on literary questions.

First, Searle abandons the locutionary/illocutionary distinction as Austin originally conceived it because, he argues, Austin's description of the rhetic act (supposedly a part of the locutionary act) in fact sneaks across the border into illocution. He substitutes a distinction between two aspects of an illocutionary act: its proposition (or content) and its force (or type). 'The proposition that I will leave may be a common content of different utterances with different illocutionary forces, for I can threaten, warn, state, predict, or promise that I will leave' (Searle, 'Austin', p. 420). The ambiguity lurking in the term proposition has misled many of Searle's readers; in order to understand him, we need to distinguish the propositional *content* of an utterance – which, as Martin Steinmann points out, involves reference and predication but has no necessary illocutionary force (Steinmann, 'Perlocutionary acts,' p. 113) – from the illocutionary act of asserting a proposition.⁴ Searle thus ends up with phonetic, phatic, propositional, and illocutionary acts.

Furthermore, Searle, discontent with the loose taxonomy of speech acts

³ Altieri also sees the revisions moving in two directions, but his mapping, which hinges on the differences between Searle and Grice, differs from mine (*Act and Quality*, pp. 76–9).

⁴ Richard M. Gale's doubts regarding the propositional content of locutionary acts in Austin apply even more strongly to Searle's analysis ('Fictive use of language', pp. 326–27).

sketched out by Austin, specifies more rigorously the types of conditions necessary for the felicitous performance of an illocutionary act. In doing so, he distinguishes among the roles played by the propositional content (a request, for instance, must involve a future act of the hearer), the preparatory rules (for instance, the speaker must believe that the hearer can in fact carry out the act), the sincerity condition (it is not a felicitous request if the speaker does not in fact want the hearer to carry out the act), and the essential condition (to be a request, an utterance must ‘count’ as an attempt to get the hearer in fact to perform the act). The difference between a request and an order lies neither in the propositional content nor in the sincerity condition. Rather, an order requires the additional preparatory rule that the speaker have authority over the hearer, as well as the additional essential condition that the utterance count as the speaker’s attempt to get the act performed ‘*in virtue of [his or her] authority*’ (*Speech Acts*, 66).

Searle’s has been the most influential development of Austin’s system, but other critics, too, have proposed additions to or modifications of it. Marcia Eaton, for instance, in applying the theory to literature, postulates a fourth linguistic action in addition to Austin’s original three – translocation, whereby a writer ‘attributes or transfers illocutions to dramatic speakers’ (*Art, artifacts, and intentions*, p. 167). Paul Hernadi suggests the addition of ‘pre-locutionary input’ and ‘post-locutionary outcome’ (*Literary theory*, p. 375). And H. Paul Grice has attempted to work out the ways in which meaning is conveyed in conversational situations where conventions are *not* clearly involved.

Grice’s key term is implicature – which, as Altieri puts it, suggests an act of interpretation rather than rule-governed decoding (Altieri, *Act and Quality*, p. 82). Grice asserts that conversation is regulated by the cooperative principle and its four maxims of quantity (‘Make your contribution as informative as [but no more informative than] is required’), quality (‘Try to make your contribution one that is true’), relation (‘Be relevant’), and manner (‘Be perspicuous’) (*Logic and conversation*, pp. 45–6). According to Grice, we must often decode an utterance by implicature – by making those inferences necessary to maintain the assumption that the cooperative principle is still in effect. Suppose, for instance, that A asks B how C is doing at his new job, and B answers, ‘Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn’t been to prison yet’ (p. 43). A can determine, through implicature, that B thinks C a scoundrel – otherwise the remark would be a violation of the maxim of relation (p. 50).

In their different ways, these critics all attempt to reinforce Austin, to seal up the points of leakage in his system. In contrast lies the second group of critics mentioned above, best represented by Shoshana Felman,

who appreciate and stress precisely Austin's openness and indeterminacy. Her book on Austin and Molière begins with a speech act analysis of *Don Juan*. Although she introduces some slippage between the illocutionary and perlocutionary (particularly when she associates Don Juan's (perlocutionary) success as a seducer with (illocutionary) felicity), her dazzling reading illuminates the play as a text about promises (and threats as negative promises). Analyzing the play in terms of the distinction between those who view language as performatives (Don Juan) and those who view it as constatives (his victims), she shows how speech act theory can reveal (or perhaps dismantle) the structure of the discourse of seduction, and point to the relationship between the erotic and the linguistic.

But, more important for our purposes here, she then turns her observations about Molière back on Austin, using the play as a way to show Austin himself as a Don Juan: an iconoclast and a seductive transgressor of the categories he sets up. By highlighting the 'breach inherent within' the performative (that is, the essential possibility of misfire (*Literary Speech Act*, p. 45) – indeed, by insisting that the performative is 'defined, for Austin, as the capacity to *miss its goal*' (p. 82); by treating illocutionary force as the 'excess of utterance over the statement it makes', as 'a sort of energizing "residue"' (p. 78); by claiming that Austin's notion of felicity replaces truth with pleasure (pp. 61–2), and consequently accenting the Barthesian play (as opposed to his constative content) in Austin's own performances: in these ways, Felman recasts Austin in the mould of French poststructuralism, particularly of Lacanian psychology, which she sees as primarily concerned not with 'the *lack*, but rather with the *act of lacking or missing*' (p. 83).⁵

A similar perspective characterizes her recasting of Austin's position on misfires. Austin points out that when a performative misfires, it does not follow that we have done nothing, but only that we have not performed the purported act: we may not have married, but may have committed the act of bigamy. Felman translates this nimbly: 'The term "misfire" does not refer to an absence, but to the enactment of a difference' (p. 84). The implied linking of Austin and Derrida is strengthened by Felman's analysis of Austin's often self-subverting humour,⁶ and by her claim that he raises the normal/abnormal distinction only 'in order to analyze the

⁵ Where several short foreign-language citations from a single author occur together, the originals will be provided paragraph by paragraph. 'Cette coupure qui lui est inhérente' (*Scandale du corps parlant*, p. 61); 'se définit, pour Austin, par la capacité de *manquer son but*' (p. 112); 'cet excès de l'énonciation sur son propre énoncé' (*Scandale du corps parlant*, p. 105); 'une sorte de "reste" énergétique' (p. 106); 'de *manque*, mais plutôt de *l'acte de manquer*' (p. 113).

⁶ This image of Austin's humour and his stress on pleasure and 'satisfaction' is confirmed in an aside by Stanley Cavell on Austin as a teacher (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, p. 108).

abnormal insofar as it is *constitutive of the normal*, that is, in order to undo or to explode the very criterion of “normality” (p. 139).⁷

More striking still is Felman’s claim that Austin treats *all action as linguistic, that Austin, like Lacan, has discovered that ‘the act, [as] Mallarmé suggests . . . , is what leaves traces*. Now there are no traces without language: the act is legible as such . . . only within a context in which it is *inscribed* . . . There is no act without linguistic inscription’ (p. 93). Finally, she even brings the unconscious into Austin’s system: ‘The “unconscious” is the discovery, not only of the radical divorce or breach between act and knowledge, between constative and performative, but also (and in this lies the scandal of Austin’s ultimate discovery) of their undecidability and their constant interference’ (p. 96).⁸

Literary applications of speech act theory

As I have suggested, Felman’s version of Austin has had less impact than Searle’s, at least in the United States. Given this state of affairs, it is surprising that speech act theory has made any serious inroads into literature departments at all. Indeed, in a rich passage (one that has aroused a great deal of commentary), as well as more glancingly several times later in the book, Austin specifically excludes literature from his analysis.

A performative utterance will . . . be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy . . . Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiologies* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.

(p. 22)

This has been read by many critics as a broad claim about the inapplicability of speech act theory to literature altogether, and even, by Barbara Johnson, as an ‘argument against poetry, theater, and jokes’ (‘Poetry’, p. 59).

⁷ ‘Le ratage ne renvoie pas à une absence, mai à la mise en acte d’une différence’ (*Scandale du corps parlant*, p. 115); ‘pour analyser l’anormal en tant que *constitutif du normal*, c’est-à-dire pour défaire ou pour faire éclater le critère même du “normal”’ (p. 201).

⁸ ‘L’acte, suggere ici Mallarmé, est ce qui *laisse des traces*. Or, il n’y a pas de traces sans langage: l’acte n’est lisible comme tel . . . qu’a l’intérieur d’un contexte dans lequel il s’inscrit . . . Il n’y a pas d’acte sans inscription linguistique’ (*Scandale du corps parlant*, p. 128); ‘L’ “inconscient” est la découverte, non seulement du divorce radical ou de la rupture entre acte et savoir, entre le constatif et le performatif, mais aussi (et c’est là le scandale de la dernière découverte d’Austin) de leur indecidabilité et de leur constante interference’ (p. 132).

Furthermore, speech act theory has had only slight success when applied to particular literary texts. True, it has on occasion been usefully deployed to produce new interpretations, or to adjudicate among competing ones. We have Felman's analysis of Molière, as well as Stanley Fish's ingenious (even though now partially disowned) reading of *Coriolanus* (*Is There a Text*, pp. 200–20). With these rare exceptions, however, there is little evidence that speech act theory opens up interpretations that would not be accessible by other means. Mary Louise Pratt explicitly denies that her speech act approach (indeed, linguistics in general) can give critics 'new insights into works of literature' (*Toward a Speech Act Theory*, p. xv). E. D. Hirsch similarly doubts its value as an interpretive tool, since it is so general that when a choice has to be made between two interpretations, the theory will sanction both of them ('What's the Use?', p. 124).⁹

Eaton too questions whether the theoretical apparatus allows new interpretive insights. But even if it does not, she argues, it can still sharpen interpretations we already have by sensitizing us to certain linguistic devices and by making it easier to articulate our explanations of how they work. Thus, she brings in Austin's distinctions to explain why Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* puzzles readers. Starting with the observation that the same words can be used for different speech acts, she shows how James exploits this potential for ambiguity by using sentences that can be construed as different actions by different readers ('James' Turn', p. 338). And Pratt's book, especially the final chapter which deals with a number of specific texts, goes far toward explaining how readers make sense of the words on a page.

Even such clarifications of interpretive practice would probably not in themselves be sufficient to give speech act theory significant literary import. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, theories have been valued by literary critics not for their interpretive powers but for their ability to challenge or reformulate traditional assumptions. And even with Austin's exclusion of non-serious speech acts, his theory has contributed significantly to theoretical re-examinations. Even so, it is difficult to gauge the full impact of speech act theory, since many critics, not systematically committed to its premises and procedures, have nonetheless incorporated some of its elements into larger critical projects that are quite diverse in aim and scope. Thus, for instance, Hernadi uses speech act theory to help define one dimension of his broad mapping out of critical theory ('Literary theory'). Maria Minich Brewer finds the constative/performative distinction useful in clarifying what is at stake in French feminist theory. In her

⁹ Indeed, speech act theory has proven even more flexible than Hirsch fears. Monroe Beardsley even calls upon Austin against Hirsch himself in defence of his anti-authorial, anti-intentional view that poetry is autonomous (*Possibility*, esp. 58–9).

discussion of Leclerc's analysis of 'discourse on woman', she notes that an apparently constative (descriptive or cognitive) claim often 'conceals a performative utterance that limits woman's power to perform (speech) acts. For instance, when women hear "that is the way it is," what they understand is the injunction "don't do otherwise"' ('Loosening of tongues', p. 1157). And reception theorist Wolfgang Iser finds speech act theory's break through the limits of the printed page useful in two ways. First, by thinking of illocutionary force in terms of what it implies about the hearer, he can use Austin to defend his emphasis on the role of the implied reader. Second, he links the implicit dimension of speech act theory (in particular, the gap – filled in by convention – that Iser sees between what is said and what is meant) to his notion of indeterminacy, thus providing support for his own model of interpretation (see above, chapter 11) (*Act of Reading*, pp. 54–62).

Moving in a different direction, Altieri finds a modified version of speech act theory (stirred up with Wittgenstein's theory of language, Grice's pragmatics, Burke's dramatism, and Nelson Goodman's epistemology) a useful ingredient as he counters the relativism he finds, for instance, in deconstruction. In particular, his partially Austinian model provides criteria for judging interpretation and determining authorial intention, avoiding the indeterminacy of thematic interpretation by recovering 'traditional ideas of the nondiscursive properties of literary meaning' (*Act and Quality*, p. 11).

One might also see the light of speech act theory flickering in Fredric Jameson's observation that narrative modes need not be in the indicative, but can also be in 'the subjunctive, the optative, the imperative and the like' (*Political Unconscious*, p. 165). He calls on speech act theory more explicitly, albeit briefly and in a fairly simplified form, as an analogy in his discussion of genre. Genres, he notes, are 'essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact'. But unlike everyday speech acts, which are 'marked with indications and signals . . . which ensure their appropriate reception', in highly mediated situations like literature, 'perceptual signals must be replaced by conventions'. As literature develops further 'from an immediate performance situation', and as it becomes more commodified, it becomes increasingly difficult for artists to exclude 'undesirable responses' except by the transformation of traditional genres 'into a brand-name system against which any authentic artistic expression must necessarily struggle', leaving the 'older generic categories . . . [to] persist in the half-life of the subliterate genres of mass culture' (*Political Unconscious*, pp. 106–7). In the end, though, his claim that 'we need something like a speech act theory on the level of aesthetics itself' suggests a belief that speech act theory has

yet to make a substantial contribution to literary studies (*Ideologies of Theory*, p. 178).

Jean-François Lyotard's use of speech act theory in *The Postmodern Condition* and *Just Gaming* lies even further afield from our concerns, partly because it touches on literary matters only tangentially, but also because his reinterpretation of Austin and Searle is fairly extensive. For instance, 'performativity' figures as a key term in his critique of technology. But for Lyotard, performativity is a measure of the degree of efficiency of a system (the ratio of output to input); and although he insists that this usage is close to Austin's ('Austin's performative realizes the optimal performance') (*Postmodern Condition*, p. 88),¹⁰ in fact the connection is hazy.

The influence of Austin is clearer in Lyotard's treatment of language as performance rather than denotation, as a kind of 'agonistics' or 'joust' rather than as communication of content (*Postmodern Condition*, pp. 10, 88). These agonistics are played out on a field of what he calls, following Wittgenstein, language games: that is, different genres of discourse or 'illocutionary instances' (*Just Gaming*, p. 37). The current state of knowledge is analyzed partly in terms of the competition among 'the denotative game (in which what is relevant is the true/false distinction)', 'the prescriptive game (in which the just/unjust distinction pertains)', and 'the technical game (in which the criterion is the efficient/inefficient distinction)' (*Postmodern Condition*, p. 46). The characteristic of contemporary culture is, for Lyotard, the collapse of the traditional narrative models of legitimation, one based on philosophical speculation, one on political emancipation (*Postmodern Condition*, pp. 27–37). The result is the reformulation of the terms of legitimation and the development of a new science which 'emphasizes the invention of new "moves" and even new rules for language games' (*Postmodern Condition*, p. 53).¹¹ Lyotard's language games, however, are not individual utterances but something closer to systems of thought, in particular epistemologies. And their relation to the specific illocutionary utterances from which they often take their names (e.g., the prescription game) is at best metaphorical. As a result, there are substantial differences between language games and illocutionary acts.

In part, these are differences of definition. Lyotard, it is true, criticizes communication theory for its failure to recognize distinctions of

¹⁰ 'Le performatif d'Austin réalise la performance optimale' (*Condition postmoderne*, p. 21).

¹¹ 'une agonistique' (*Condition postmoderne*, p. 23); 'la joute' (p. 23); 'instances illocutionnaires' (*Au Juste*, p. 72); 'le jeu dénotatif ou la pertinence appartient au vrai/faux, le jeu prescriptif qui est du ressort du juste/injuste, le jeu technique où le critère est: efficient/inefficient' (*Condition postmoderne*, p. 76); 'portait au premier plan l'invention de "coups" nouveaux et même de nouvelles règles des jeux de langage' (*Condition postmoderne*, p. 88).

illocutionary force (although he does not use that term) (*Postmodern Condition*, p. 16), and he goes on to distinguish language games in part by criteria that are similar to those used by speech act theorists to sort out illocutionary acts, including the felicity conditions involved, although here too he avoids Austin's and Searle's vocabulary (*Postmodern Condition*, pp. 18–27). However, the apparent similarity is deceptive. He sorts out language games largely in terms of 'distribution of roles' (*Just Gaming*, p. 93) – for instance, according to which pole of the 'pragmatic triangle' is 'forgotten' or 'taken to be superfluous'. For example, in speculative discourse one does not in general know who is being addressed; in prescriptive games, 'it is not known who obligates' (*Just Gaming*, p. 71).¹² In such a scheme, many of the felicity conditions (especially sincerity conditions) are ignored. Furthermore, as Seyla Benhabib argues, his analysis obscures the line between illocution and perlocution ('Epistemologies', pp. 114–15).

Language games differ from illocutionary acts in the ways they interact as well. Austin's arguments lead him to collapse the constative/performative distinction and accept the blurred lines between his categories; Searle finds speech act theory useful as a way of deriving 'ought' from 'is' statements (*Speech Acts*, pp. 175–98). Lyotard, in contrast, stresses incompatibility and incommensurability: one cannot place different language games 'on the same plane': 'there is no common measure . . . between a prescription and a scientific proposition or a poetic descriptive proposition' (*Just Gaming*, pp. 50–1). Indeed, he goes so far as to argue that justice 'intervenes' in other language games because they have become 'impure': 'Here the Idea of justice will consist in preserving the purity of each game, that is, for example, in insuring that the discourse of truth be considered as a "specific" language game, that narration be played by its "specific" rules' (*Just Gaming*, p. 96).¹³

Theoretical implications: literary speech acts and intentionality

Because critics like Hernadi, Brewer, Iser, and Lyotard all use speech act theory as one weapon in a larger critical arsenal, it is hard to determine the consequences of speech act theory *per se* on the basis of their work.

¹² 'Chacun de ces Jeux de langage distribue, si l'on peut dire, des rôles' (*Au Juste*, p. 178); 'triangle pragmatique', 'oublié', 'considere comme inessential', 'on ne sait pas qui oblige' (*Au Juste*, pp. 136–7).

¹³ 'Sur le même plan', 'Il n'y a pas non plus de commune mesure entre une prescription et une proposition descriptive scientifique ou une proposition descriptive poétique' (*Au Juste*, pp. 97–98); 'intervient', 'impurs', 'L'Idée de justice ici consistera effectivement à maintenir la pureté de chaque jeu, c'est-à-dire à faire considérer le discours de verité comme un jeu de langage "propre", ou la narration comme un jeu de langage "propre"' (*Au Juste*, pp. 182–3).

There have been, however, other critics who have used speech act theory in a less diluted form to deal with specific theoretical problems. Their investigations have, in general, focused on and helped raise important questions about two overlapping areas: the nature of literary (or fictional) speech acts and the role of intention.

First, the notion of illocutionary force has opened up questions about the nature of literary discourse. Although Austin excluded non-serious speech acts from his discussion, the exclusion was, according to Searle, dictated by 'research strategy' rather than metaphysics. Fictional discourse, in other words, does not lie in any essential way outside the reach of speech act theory, but was simply too complex an issue for an initial mapping out of the territory ('Reiterating the differences', p. 205).¹⁴

Other theorists, while accepting this basic point, have none the less disagreed with Searle's particular analysis of literary speech acts – and especially with his claim that the questions raised by literature have been 'answered' by his further development of Austin's principles ('Reiterating the differences', p. 205). They have proposed instead several alternative solutions to the problem of incorporating fiction, or literature more broadly, within the theory. In all of the solutions, one point does seem to remain constant: as Pratt has demonstrated, speech act theory undermines the traditional formalist notion, shared by New Critics and structuralists alike, that literature is a special kind of language that can be differentiated on the basis of concrete internal properties. As she argues, with particular attention to the Prague School, this description of poetry has traditionally been offered with scarcely a glance at the other side of the presumed dichotomy. When non-literary language comes under study, it turns out that it shares the formal properties that are claimed as the defining characteristics of literature. As Pratt puts it, 'literary discourse must be viewed as a *use* rather than a *kind* of language' (*Toward a Speech Act Theory*, p. xiii). But what kind of use is it? Part of the controversy among speech act theorists arises from the blurring of two related issues. One is the logical question of the status of fiction (which may or may not be literary); the other is the aesthetic question of the nature of

¹⁴ As one might guess, Felman interprets Austin's exclusions quite differently from most other commentators. She argues that his stress on 'seriousness' should not be taken seriously. 'Critics who reproach Austin for excluding jokes, on the basis of the Austinian *statement*, are failing to take into account the Austinian *act*, failing to take into account the close and infinitely complex relationship maintained, throughout Austin's work, between the theory and jokes' (*Literary Speech Act*, p. 130). 'La critique qui reproche à Austin l'exclusion de la plaisanterie, en enregistrant l'*énoncé* austinien, ne tient pas compte de l'*acte* austinien; ne tient pas compte du rapport étroit et infiniment complexe que la théorie, tout au long, chez Austin, entretient avec la plaisanterie' (*Scandale du corps parlant*, p. 189).

literature (which may or may not be fictional). The unrigorous use of terms sometimes makes it difficult to be sure which question is being addressed. But there are other, more substantive disputes.

To be sure, most speech act theorists, when they deal with fictionality, start out from Austin's claim that the actor's speech is '*in a peculiar way hollow or void*', and take fiction to be some kind of parasitic speech act. Yet even from this general position, one can move in several directions. Its more extreme partisans argue that the poet is not engaging in an illocutionary act at all. For instance, Monroe Beardsley claims that while a poem can incidentally be used to perform an illocutionary act (as when it accompanies a box of candy), more usually 'the writing of the poem, as such, is not an illocutionary act'. This leads him to elide the author's role: poetry becomes 'the creation of a fictional character performing a fictional illocutionary act' (*Possibility*, p. 59; see also 'Concept', p. 34). One reason it cannot be an illocutionary act is that no uptake is secured: indeed, 'when a poem is addressed to a skylark . . . no uptake is conceivable' ('Concept', p. 33). This bracketing of the author, of course, allows Beardsley to bracket authorial intention as well.¹⁵

Richard Ohmann takes a different tack. He starts with the assumption that writing literature, by which he means 'imaginative literature', roughly equated with fiction ('Speech acts', p. 1), *is* in fact an illocutionary act. He thus looks at the author's, rather than the character's, action, and defines a literary work as '*a discourse whose sentences lack the illocutionary forces that would normally attach to them. Its illocutionary force is mimetic . . . A literary work purportedly imitates (or reports) a series of speech acts, which in fact have no other existence*' ('Speech acts', p. 14). (It follows that a given work may change its status depending on its use: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How do I love thee?' was not a literary work when delivered to Robert as a declaration of love, but became one upon publication.) Barbara Herrnstein Smith, although she does not use speech act theory explicitly, argues similarly when she claims that fictive language is the '*representation*' of a 'natural utterance' – that poetry imitates not action but discourse, and that poets are not 'understood to be lying, but . . . understood not to be *saying* at all'. In contrast to natural utterances which always take place at a specifiable time and place, poetry is '*historically indeterminate*' (*Margins*, pp. 25, 111, 140).

Searle straddles these two positions. He agrees with Beardsley that writing a novel is not a separate kind of illocutionary act. But, like

¹⁵ It is worth noting that, as John Reichert argues, Beardsley here 'assimilates poetry to fiction', even though, for instance, in Frost's 'Nothing Gold Can Stay', 'none of the references is to fiction or make-believe things. Frost was referring to the world we live in' (*Making Sense of Literature*, p. 129). Beardsley's argument, however, can still stand as a definition of fiction.

Ohmann, he defines fiction in terms of the act engaged in by the writer rather than the character. He sets up fiction in opposition to serious nonfiction typified by journalism, concluding that authors of fiction engage in the pretence of performing 'serious' illocutionary acts such as asserting. But this pretence is distinguished from, say, 'pretend[ing] to be Nixon in order to fool the Secret Service into letting me into the White House' on the basis of its purpose (that is, it is not aimed at deceiving the reader). Thus, his consequent description of fiction ('a nondeceptive pseudo-performance') contrasts sharply with Beardsley's. Since '*pretend* is an intentional verb . . . the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author' (*Expression and Meaning*, p. 65).

Curiously, although Austin emphatically stresses speech as action, many of the critics who have applied his work to literature – including Beardsley, Searle, and sometimes even Ohmann – use speech act theory in a way that reduces (in some cases eliminates) the power of literary discourse. The theory thus paradoxically serves to support what Martha Woodmansee, in her trenchant critique of this tendency, calls 'the dogma of literary autonomy' ('Speech act', *passim*). In particular, speech act theory is often called upon in arguments that deny literature's power to alter the world through assertion. Ohmann's speech-act definition of literature, for instance, confirms the autonomy of literary texts, although in a special way: 'Literature has an exemption from the normal connections between discourse and the world outside discourse' ('Speech acts', p. 18).¹⁶ Richard Gale argues similarly that in fiction the speaker performs an illocutionary act the special quality of which is that he or she 'desist[s] from performing any other illocutionary acts'. Fictive language therefore involves 'illocutionary disengagement' and its effect 'is to drain of illocutionary force every verb that occurs within its scope' ('Fictive use of language', p. 335–6).

There is a corollary to this muting of the power of literature: although most speech act theorists deal with internal context (that is, the context of a given sentence within the literary work), many of them skew Austin's insights by playing down the importance of external context for the understanding of literature. Smith argues, for instance, that knowledge of Shakespeare and the circumstances under which he wrote *Hamlet* may help us explain why the historical event of his writing the play took place, but cannot help us understand why Hamlet abuses Ophelia (*Margins*, p. 34). Even apparent acts of alluding to

¹⁶ Given Ohmann's radical politics, it is a sign of the power of the dogma that he falls into the trap. He uses speech act theory to support a more politically engaged position in 'Speech, literature'.

real people and events (for instance, in *War and Peace*) are unreal (*Margins*, p. 11).

Such anti-contextualist tendencies are vigorously attacked by Thomas M. Leitch, who takes up Searle's observation that we can determine an author's commitment by asking what counts as a mistake in a text. But he uses this technique to unmask Searle's own de-contextualization of speech acts, in particular his assumption that journalism can be treated as an 'unmarked case or null context'. Rather, Leitch argues, journalism is a social practice, 'committed, not to propositional truth, but to the accurate reporting (accurate within certain limits established by custom, courtesy, and law) of certain particular kinds of information' ('To what?', p. 161). And instead of arguing by contrast, he asks the same question of fiction: what is *it* committed to? He points out that the question cannot be answered at all so long as one looks primarily at individual sentences or propositions. Rather, fiction's commitment is at a different level. What counts as a mistake in fiction depends on reader expectation, and hence on the conventions invoked by the work as a whole; the commitment of fiction must therefore be seen 'at the level of what those propositions implicate through the conventions of particular fictional genres' (p. 167).

In this argument, Leitch follows lines of inquiry proposed by Pratt, whose contextualized definition of literature is probably the most complete developed by any speech act theorist – and as a consequence, the most helpful for explaining the act of interpretation. Rather than tangle herself in the fiction/nonfiction distinction, Pratt turns to the category of literature more generally. As suggested above, she sees literature as a particular kind of utterance. Specifically, she sees it as a display text: a text that invites the addressee to contemplate, evaluate, or interpret a state of affairs that is tellable (unusual, contrary to expectations, or otherwise problematic, but – in contrast to informing assertions – not necessarily new). These texts, however, are not 'autonomous, self-contained, self-motivating, context-free objects which exist independently from the "pragmatic" concerns of "everyday" discourse'. Rather, she argues, 'literary works take place in a context, and like any other utterance they cannot be described apart from that context' (*Toward a Speech Act Theory*, p. 115).

That context is, for Pratt, institutional, and one of its attributes is our knowledge that a given work of literature before us in fact got published. This knowledge permits readers to make a number of assumptions: for instance, that the work is definitive (the author was able to plan it, and it is therefore free of serious flaws), and that it was pre-selected by some socially sanctioned institution (for example, an editorial board). She then invokes Grice's cooperative principle and its maxims.

Grice points out that in actual conversation, the maxims do not always hold. However, a particular kind of violation that he calls *flouting* – violating a maxim in an obvious and blatant way (as by irony or metaphor) allows the hearer to assume that the cooperative principle is not seriously jeopardized and consequently to determine, through implicature, what is really meant. A fundamental characteristic of literature, Pratt argues, is that ‘intentionally failing to observe a maxim always counts as flouting’ (p. 160). Knowledge of this contextual and institutional rule (that is, ‘our tacit knowledge of the literary speech situation . . ., not the intrinsic features of the utterances themselves’) allows readers to figure out the meanings of literary texts (p. 171).

Austin’s insistence on speech as action led him to stress the importance of the speaker. ‘Actions can only be performed by persons’ he points out, so ‘The “I” who is doing the action does thus come essentially into the picture’ (pp. 60–1). In a critical world increasingly marked by the disappearance of the author, speech act theory consequently provided an impetus for reexamination and reevaluation of the authorial role. In particular, it gave renewed prestige to the battered notion of authorial intention, for as P. F. Strawson puts it, we cannot understand the illocutionary force of an utterance without recognizing what may be called broadly an audience-directed intention and recognizing it as wholly overt, as intended to be recognized’ (‘Intention and convention’, p. 459).

It is thus not surprising that intention became the second major focus of literary speech act theory. Granted, as we have seen, Beardsley’s claim that a poem is not a real illocutionary act allows him to displace the locus of intention implied in any illocutionary act from the author to the dramatic persona (*Possibility*, p. 59) and thus to defend the principle that poems are autonomous and that their textual meaning is quite separate from what the author intended to mean.¹⁷ But Beardsley’s is a minority position: most speech act theorists reject his claim that the intentions of the author can be dismissed in favour of the intentions of the dramatic persona. As Steven Mailloux argues, literary speech acts are always nested in one another in complex ways – a character’s speech act can be embedded in a narrator’s, which can in turn be embedded in ‘the *literary act* of the implied and actual author’ (*Interpretive Conventions*, p. 102).

The acceptance of authorial intention as a literary category, however, does not solve the problem of how it is to be treated. Eaton, for instance, recognizing that one can engage in a valuable kind of textual analysis

¹⁷ See also ‘Concept’, p. 31. In this essay, he distinguishes the ‘art concept’ of literature (which involves the notion of intention) from the ‘language concept’ (which is objective) (pp. 24–7).

without recourse to intention, argues that some disputes over critical practice dissolve if we distinguish two often-equated operations. Explication, she claims, deals with linguistic objects (that is, with meaning on the locutionary level) and is hence independent of intention. Interpretation, in contrast, deals with linguistic actions (that is, with illocutionary force) and is intimately bound up in the author's intentions ('Art, artifacts, and intentions', p. 167).

Hancher draws the lines differently, and sorts out three kinds of intention, roughly (but not precisely) parallel to the distinction among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. (The neatness of the parallel breaks down because Hancher, like Searle, accuses Austin of blurring the border between locutions and illocutions with his definition of rhetic acts.) By programmatic intention Hancher means 'the author's intention to make something or other' – for instance, a *sestina*. Active intentions 'characterize the actions that the author, at the time he finishes his text, understands himself to be performing in that text' (for instance, 'celebrating the metaphorical presence of the Passion of Christ as it is recognized in the flight of a windhover'). The final intention is 'an intention to cause something or other to happen' ('Three kinds of intention', pp. 829–30). (In order to deal with failures or changes in authorial intention, Hancher also postulates a 'projected active intention' (pp. 836–7), which is sharply distinguished from the active intention of the completed text). The relation between evaluation, interpretation, and intention varies with the type of intention involved, according to Hancher, and confusion has been caused, especially in Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'The intentional fallacy' (1946), by fusing these categories. Interpretation and evaluation, in particular, are closely bound up with active intention but do not rely on programmatic or final intention.

Limitations of speech act theory

Despite these insights into the nature of literary discourse and the role of intention, it is hard not to sense that speech act theory has failed, in the literary field at least, to live up to its initial promise. One need not subscribe to Margolis' extreme claim that 'the speech-act model appears to yield no special advantage to the theory of literature or to the analysis of particular literary passages' ('Literature and speech acts', p. 50) to think that something is amiss. There are, in fact, three sets of difficulties: some stemming from problems within speech act theory itself, some arising from the way it has been applied (both as a linguistic model and, more important, as a mode of literary analysis), some produced by an external academic climate that made speech act theory decreasingly attractive to young scholars. These three categories,

of course, overlap; still, they serve as a useful way of organizing our thinking.

First, the internal problems. While most speech act theorists have rightly insisted that the category of intention is essential to literary interpretation, even with such clarifications as Hancher's no adequate way of talking about it has emerged. Part of the problem arises from the limitations in the examples chosen for analysis: rather than deal with literary wholes, much speech act theorizing still preys on single sentences. Furthermore, instead of taking those sentences from preexisting literary texts, many critics invent their examples. In so doing, they act as novelists themselves: that is, they invent a speaker and a context. Because we conventionally grant authors the right to 'know' the intention of the 'speakers' they invent, such examples skirt the nagging question of how we can ever know the intentions of real people; and while they may be adequate for analyzing certain kinds of very simple one-on-one social situations – 'lovmaking, psychiatry, private tennis instruction, and dental hygiene', as Pratt wryly puts it ('Ideology of speech-act theory', p. 7)¹⁸ they become decreasingly useful as we move toward more complicated situations, including both the situation *of* literature and, for the most part, the situations described *in* literature.

But the problem lies deeper than that, for speech act theory – which as Pratt argues, postulates a unified subject ('Ideology of speech-act theory', pp. 9–10) – seems unable to cope with unconscious or unacknowledged intentions. True, some theorists, like John Reichert, simply deny unconscious intentions altogether (although some of his examples cut two ways; see *Making Sense*, pp. 75–6). Furthermore, even without denying the *existence* of unconscious intentions, it is possible to base a model of reading and editing, as Mailloux has shown, on their exclusion. But as Mailloux recognizes, other interpretive models work differently (*Interpretive Conventions*, p. 103); and speech act theory, as a general theory rather than a simple mode of reading, has not adequately come to terms with them.

Derrida makes the case provocatively. Pointing out that Searle's definition of promises – as opposed to warnings or threats – rests on the fact that the hearer wants the act done and that the speaker knows it, he muses on whether he can promise to be critical of 'Sar!' (the playful name he gives to what he deems the corporate, implied authorship of 'Reiterating the differences'):

¹⁸ Pratt became increasingly critical of the whole speech act project in the years following the appearance of *Toward a Speech Act Theory*; this essay, on the ideology of speech act theory, explains many of her reservations.

What would happen if in promising to be critical I would then provide everything that Sarl's Unconscious desires, for reasons which remain to be analyzed, and that it does its best to provoke? Would my 'promise,' in such a case, be a promise, a warning or even a threat? Searle might respond that it would constitute a threat to Sarl's consciousness, and a promise for the unconscious. There would thus be two speech acts in a single utterance. How is this possible? And what if Sarl *desired* to be threatened?

(Derrida, 'Limited Inc', p. 215).¹⁹

The embarrassment caused by unconscious intentions sometimes leads to ambiguity about the very nature of intention. Margolis argues, for instance, that Grice 'oscillates between a personal or biographical sense of speakers' intentions and a social or conventional sense' ('Literature and speech acts', p. 41) – an oscillation that skirts the issue of the unconscious in other speech act theorists as well. As an alternative strategy, some theorists, especially when dealing with literary works (where unconscious intentions are especially apt to be pivotal), try to surmount the problem by limiting themselves to the intentions that are realized in the text. This, however, reverts to the formalist circularity that speech act theory should be used to circumvent: context becomes merely an internal literary characteristic.

On the whole, though, the weaknesses of literary speech act theory stem more from misapplication (or partial application) than from essential theoretical weaknesses. For Austin, analysis of an utterance involves analysis of *all* of the conditions of its performance – including the conventions governing it, the circumstances in which it is uttered, the intention behind it, and the 'uptake' it secures from its addressee. But Austin's followers, for the most part, have stressed only one or another of these conditions. Thus, for instance, Fish (not surprisingly for a reader-response critic) privileges uptake, silently rewriting Austin so that illocutionary force is reduced to 'the way an utterance is taken' (*Is There a Text*, pp. 221–2, 284), while Dorothy Walsh, in contrast, uses a partial view of speech act theory to demonstrate that the reader is not a 'part of the literary situation' ('Literary art', p. 327). Christopher Norris equates intention and illocutionary force (*Deconstruction*, p. 109),

¹⁹ Que se passerait-il si en promettant à Sarl de le critiquer, j'allais au-devant de ce que son Inconscient désire, pour des raisons à analyser, et fait tout pour provoquer? Ma "promesse" sera-t-elle une promesse ou une menace? Ce sera, répondrait peut-être Searle, une menace pour Sarl en tant que conscient, une promesse pour l'inconscient. Il y aura donc deux speech acts en un seul énoncé. Comment est-ce possible? Et si le désir était d'être menace?

(*Limited Inc* [French version], p. 47).

'Signature event context' and 'Limited Inc' have circulated in two different translations. Since it is, in part, the historical event of Derrida's debate with Searle with which we are concerned here, further references in the text are to the initial English versions.

while Monroe Beardsley, by distinguishing ‘constitutive’ and ‘purported’ conditions, nearly erases the role of intention entirely (‘Concept’, p. 31). More generally, many theorists – Searle, in particular – evoke context only to scrap it as soon as it threatens to complicate their arguments.

I do not wish to endorse the position of Derrida in ‘Signature event context’ (hereafter, following Derrida himself, referred to as ‘Sec’) that ‘a context is never absolutely determinable’ (‘Sec’, p. 174)²⁰ and that *all* attempts to specify context are reductive and misleading. As Stanley Cavell argues, even the context in which one mixes a vodka martini is ‘infinitely complex’ – but this does not prevent one from giving directions on how to do it (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, p. 17). Still, much speech act theorizing has marginalized context to the point where Austin’s initial insights are watered down. For instance, Searle asserts that ‘in general the illocutionary act (or acts) performed in the utterance of the sentence is a function of the meaning of the sentence’, and goes on to distinguish questions from statements on the basis of their grammatical structure, rather than their context (*Expression and Meaning*, p. 64).

Furthermore, even where context is explicitly considered, it is often limited by leaving out of account such important factors as ‘affective relations, power relations, and the question of shared goals’ (Pratt, ‘Ideology of speech-act theory’, p. 13). For instance, a partial view of speech act theory can exaggerate the scope of the purely ‘linguistic’ side of the institutions within which we live. Stanley Fish (who, as we shall see, has an ambivalent attitude toward speech act theory) once went so far as to insist that ‘institutions are no more than the (temporary) effects of speech-act agreements, and they are therefore as fragile as the decision, always capable of being revoked, to abide by them’ (*Is There a Text*, p. 215).²¹

Another problem lies in the ethnocentric bias that arises from speech act theory’s traditional reliance on conventional English usage. Michelle Z. Rosaldo, for instance, argues that despite its theoretical potential, speech act theory in practice tends to treat ‘action independent of its reflexive status both as consequence and cause of human social forms’. She defends this claim by showing its failure to deal adequately ‘with speech among a people who think about and use their words in ways that differ from our own’ (‘The things we do with words’, p. 204). In particular, she criticizes Searle’s use of the promise as a paradigmatic speech act, and

²⁰ ‘Un contexte n’est jamais absolument déterminable’ (‘Sec’ [French version], p. 369).

²¹ See, in contrast, Lyotard’s recognition that when ‘force operates by means of terror [it] . . . lies outside the realm of language games’ (*Postmodern Condition*, p. 46); ‘On excepte le cas où [la force] opère au moyen de la terreur. Ce cas se trouve hors jeu de langage’ (*Condition postmoderne*, p. 76).

his forgetting 'that the good intentions that a promise brings are things we only offer certain kinds of people, and at certain times' and in a certain kind of community (p. 211). 'The centrality of promising supports a theory where conditions on [sic] the happiness of a speech act look primarily not to context, but to beliefs and attitudes pertaining to the speaker's private self' (p. 212).

But if speech act theorists often overlook context, context has not overlooked speech act theory: undoubtedly, the most important reason for the theory's decline was the changed critical climate in the 1980s – in particular, the deconstruction of speech act theory by two of the most influential voices of the period, Fish and Derrida. Of course, even being attacked by these men gave speech act theory a certain cachet, especially since both claimed, at least on some level, respect for Austin's project. But their embrace of Austin was almost as crushing as their critique; and Searle, who took centre stage as the theory's defender against Derridean deconstruction, was temperamentally unsuited to the challenge. (The history of theory might have been different had Felman been cast for that role.) In the end, the resolution of the debate was determined less by quality of argument than by exercise of academic power.

Fish's primary objections are to literary theory's incorporation of speech act theory rather than to the theory itself. That is, he argues less against Austin than against what he calls 'cheating' by his literary followers (*Is There a Text*, p. 221): the stretching of Austin's terms so far that their content is drained and the fundamental distinctions lost, leaving empty terms which are treated loosely or metaphorically. This, Fish insists, enables a critic like Iser to 'say anything he likes' (p. 223) and to produce notions 'out of thin air' (p. 222). In particular, Fish accuses Iser of 'allegorizing the term "performative"' (p. 221) and of 'equivocat[ing] between two senses of "convention": the stricter sense by which illocutionary acts are constitutive rather than regulative, and the looser sense (roughly equivalent to "accepted practice") employed by literary critics when they talk, for example, of the conventions of narrative' (pp. 222–3). He accuses Ohmann of parallel slippages: failing to keep illocutionary acts separate from perlocutionary effects (p. 225); expanding his study of context too far into the social realm ('felicity isn't social but conventional') (p. 225); confusing the question of the hearer's confidence in an illocutionary act with the question of whether or not the act has actually been performed.

Fish's rhetoric is always powerful. But his insistence that critics as diverse as Iser and Ohmann are committing the same sin should give us pause. At the very least, we should be wary of accusations of dissolving distinctions and producing notions out of thin air when they emanate

from a critic who is himself often criticized for precisely those practices. (For further discussion, see below, chapter 13). His famous ‘How to do things with Austin and Searle: speech-act theory and literary criticism,’ first appeared in 1977; and both in the essay and in the introduction he added when it reappeared as chapter 9 of *Is There a Text in this Class?* (1980), he exhibits the same kind of ‘slippage’ he finds so offensive in Iser and Ohmann. In particular, Fish steadfastly shuns differences in degree, refusing to draw even provisional lines if absolute distinctions cannot be established. (In this, he is entirely at odds with the more practical Austin, who never allows the impossibility of a complete divorce between categories ‘to prevent the drawing of a line for our present purposes where we want one’ (Austin, p. 114).

As we have already seen, Fish slides from the conditions of utterance to the conditions of reception when he defines illocutionary force as the way an utterance is taken. Similarly, he transforms Austin’s dismantling of the constative/performative distinction and his claim that the truth of a supposedly constative statement will always be relative to context. He does this by rephrasing Austin’s insight as ‘all facts are institutional’ (already an imprecise reformulation) and then sliding smoothly to a far more radical claim that he introduces as if he were still simply rephrasing Austin: ‘This means not only that statements about an object will be assessed (as right, wrong, relevant, or irrelevant) according to the conditions of their utterance, but that the object itself, insofar as it is available for reference and description, will be a *product* of those conditions’ (p. 198). Whatever the philosophical validity of Fish’s position, it is certainly no paraphrase of Austin, who did ‘not for a minute believe . . . that “facts” are pseudo-entities’ (*Philosophical Papers*, p. 155) and who was quite insistent that he was not looking ‘*merely* at words (or “meanings”, whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use words to talk about’. Study of language may ‘sharpen our perception of’, but cannot serve as the ‘final arbiter of, the phenomena’ (p. 182). More succinctly, he declares: ‘Fact is richer than diction’ (*Philosophical Papers*, p. 195).

In a similar way, Fish bridges the distinction between literary and ‘serious’ discourse (and, with it, the distinction between what Searle calls institutional and brute facts) by converting the claim that all discourse involves some kind of construction to the claim that all discourse involves the same kind of construction. ‘The world given by the standard story [a term he introduces to refer to the supposed truths accepted by a society] is *no less* a constructed one than the world of a novel or play’ (p. 199, italics added); ‘the power of the law to declare a man and woman husband and wife is *on a par with* the (institutional)

power of the standard story to declare that Richard Nixon exists' (p. 240, italics added). In this way, Fish collapses the distinctions between fiction and 'discourse in general' (p. 242) and even between fiction and falsehood. Since not all people believe the same thing, he argues, what is obvious and commonsensical to some will be fiction for others (p. 199) – as if Christian fundamentalists viewed the theory of evolution as a 'fiction' (on the same level as the story of Cinderella), rather than as a falsehood.

Likewise, as Reichert points out, Fish blurs Austin's crucial distinction between meaning and force ('Reply to Stanley Fish', p. 168). This kind of blurring ties in well with Fish's attempts to collapse the distinctions between literal and non-literal meaning, and between direct and indirect speech acts (*Is There a Text*, pp. 268–92), and to reduce social power to linguistic convention. In the end, Fish tosses out the locutionary/illocutionary (or propositional/illocutionary) distinction altogether: sentences do not have 'a basic or primary meaning which is then put to various illocutionary uses' (p. 284). In other words, Fish's arguments incorporate precisely the logical failures they claim to be combatting, and their wide appeal has as much to do with Fish's style (few living theorists write as smoothly as he does) and his status in the academic world as with their intellectual rigour.

Derrida on speech acts

A more stringent critique comes from Derrida, most notably in 'Sec' and a more detailed exposition ('Limited Inc a b c . . .') which served as a reply to Searle's reply to 'Sec'. Derrida insists that he is not 'simply critical' of Austin, whose work is 'new, necessary, and fecund' ('Limited Inc', p. 227) but is in fact 'in many respects quite close' to him (p. 172).²² Derrida none the less finds Austin's arguments problematical. His argument in this exchange, needless to say, is part of a larger critique of Western metaphysics that is too vast even to sketch out here (for a fuller account, see chapter 6). His essays are, in addition, complex, self-reflexive, playful, and impossible to summarize without reiterating the errors that they warn against. None the less, if a hexagonal France is 'true' enough for a general, a summarized Derrida can be true enough for our present, limited supply of ink.

Derrida sees a 'common root' to all of Austin's difficulties ('Sec', p. 187), and he explores it in part by teasing out the ramifications of

²² 'simplement critique'; 'neuve, nécessaire et féconde' ('Limited Inc' [French version], p. 57); 'a beaucoup d'égards très proche d'Austin' (p. 10).

Austin's exclusion of such 'parasitical' speech acts as promises made in a play. Derrida sees this parasite/host structure as a variation of the one he examines 'everywhere, under the names of writing, mark, step [*marche*], margin, *différance*, graft, undecidable, supplement, *pharmakon*, hymen, *parergon*, etc.' ('Limited Inc', p. 247). Since a promise could not exist at all unless it could be 'mimed, reproduced on the stage or . . . in a citation' ('Limited Inc', p. 231), the possibility of such cases is not accidental and is consequently not excludable from discussion. Rather, the risk of parasitism is a speech act's 'internal and positive condition of possibility' ('Sec', p. 190), 'an essential, internal and permanent part' of the 'so-called "standard case"' ('Limited Inc', p. 231). This claim is closely intertwined with Derrida's argument that there can be no language without iterability. No performative could be successful 'if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting . . . were not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model' ('Sec', p. 191). Furthermore, 'by virtue of its essential iterability a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning' ('Sec', p. 182). In other words, the very structure of language itself requires 'the possibility of disengagement and citational graft' ('Sec', p. 185) – that is, the possibility of insertion into a new context.²³

The ability of language to 'remain readable despite the absolute disappearance' ('Sec', p. 179) of receiver and sender problematizes Austin's notions of intention and context. The 'written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context' ('Sec', p. 182); and 'given that structure of iteration, the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content' ('Sec', p. 192). This clouding of intention in turn

²³ 'une racine commune' ('Sec' [French version], p. 383); 'partout sous les noms d'écriture, de marque, de marche, de marge, de différence, de greffe, d'indécidable, de supplément, de pharmakon, d'hymen, de parergon, etc.' ('Limited Inc' [French version], p. 75); 'de la mimer, de la reproduire sur la scène ou . . . dans une citation' ('Limited Inc', [French version], p. 61); 'sa condition de possibilité interne et positive' ('Sec' [French version], p. 387); 'Cette *possibilité* fait partie du prétendu "standard case". Elle en fait partie de manière essentielle, intérieure, permanente' ('Limited Inc' [French version], p. 61); 'si sa formulation ne répétait pas un énoncé "codé" ou itérable, autrement dit si la formule que je prononce pour ouvrir une séance . . . n'était pas identifiable comme *conforme* à un modèle itérable' ('Sec' [French version], pp. 388–389); 'en raison de son itérabilité, on peut toujours prélever un syntagma écrit hors de l'enchaînement dans lequel il est pris ou donné, sans lui faire perdre toute possibilité de fonctionnement' ('Sec' [French version], p. 377); 'possibilité de prélevement et de greffe citationnelle qui appartient à la structure de toute marque' ('Sec' [French version], p. 381).

prohibits any saturation of the context. In order for a context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense required by Austin, conscious intention would at the very least have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and to others, since it is a determining center [*foyer*] of context

(‘Sec’, p. 192).

What is limited by iterability is not intentionality in general, but its character of being conscious or present to itself (actualized, fulfilled, and adequate), the simplicity of its features, its *undividedness*

(‘Limited Inc’, p. 249).²⁴

Searle’s reply has been subject to a variety of judgements: Culler calls it dogmatic (*On Deconstruction*, p. 118); Altieri calls it ‘especially useful’ (*Act and Quality*, p. 226). In any case, Lyotard would be able to use their debate as evidence for the incompatibility of language games – for Searle never quite gets a firm grip on Derrida’s essay. In part, Searle stumbles because he seems to blur crucial Austinian distinctions. In particular, as he does elsewhere, he dilutes the notion of context and thus Austin’s essential observations about the two sorts of meaning: ‘in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no *gulf* at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression. The sentences are, so to speak, fungible intentions’ (‘Reiterating the differences’, p. 202). Such a claim is easily shredded by Derrida.

More important, Searle is not especially nimble in the kind of playful philosophical discourse with which Derrida taunts him. Thus, whether or not Derrida is right that Searle completely misunderstands his argument, it is surely the case that Searle’s sober tone is no match for Derrida’s malicious wit, and that his sometimes literal-minded argument gives his opponent (who has the distinct rhetorical advantage of going last, with a derisory re-response ten times as long as the Searle essay it comments on)²⁵ plenty of scope for asserting that Searle has missed the point.

However, it is hard to fault Searle, since Derrida’s will-o’-the-wisp

²⁴ ‘qu’elle soit répétable – itérable – en l’absence absolue’ (‘Sec’ [French version], p. 375); ‘un signe écrit comporte une force de rupture avec son contexte’ (‘Sec’ [French version], p. 377); ‘étant donné cette structure d’itération, l’intention qui anime l’énonciation ne sera jamais de part en part présente à elle-même et à son contenu’ (‘Sec’ [French version], p. 389); ‘interdit toute saturation du contexte. Pour qu’un contexte soit exhaustivement déterminable, au sens requis par Austin, il faudrait au moins que l’intention consciente soit totalement présente et actuellement transparente à elle-même et aux autres, puisqu’elle est un foyer déterminant du contexte’ (‘Sec’ [French version], p. 389); ‘Ce qui est limité par l’itérabilité, ce n’est pas l’intentionnalité en general mais son caractère de conscience ou sa présence à soi (actuelle, pleine et adéquate), la simplicité de son trait, son *indivision*’ (‘Limited Inc’ [French version], p. 77).

²⁵ Searle did have a chance for an encore in his review of Culler’s *On Deconstruction* (‘The Word Turned Upside Down’), but that was in a different forum for a different audience, and did not address ‘Limited Inc’ directly.

rhetoric is designed precisely to undercut the very notion of getting the point. Indeed, in a dizzying *mise-en-abyme*, he uses (especially in 'Limited Inc', to which Searle's reply was of course not directed) just those practices he is deconstructing. For instance, he continually argues by exclusion. More significant, he insists that his work must be read in context, and that he has given enough signals to his reader for his intended meaning to be inescapable (see, for instance, 'Limited Inc', p. 188). This is not just a momentary slip, but a characteristic turn in Derrida's debating repertoire. Indeed, in his reply to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon's critique of his essay on *apartheid*, Derrida uses a traditional, undeconstructed Austinian defence: 'If you had paid attention to the context and the mode of my text, you would not have fallen into the enormous blunder that led you to take a *prescriptive* utterance for a *descriptive* (theoretical and constative) one' ('But, beyond', p. 158).²⁶

It is important to realize that this miming of the supposed antagonist does not have the same significance in Derrida that it has in Fish. Fish appears to contradict himself unawares. Derrida, in contrast, is quite conscious of this tactic, and if pressed, could turn the screw of the argument once more so that his own entrapment became another confirmation of his position, a proof of the difficulties in escaping from the web of Western metaphysics.

In this tangle, it is easy to lose sight of one of Searle's major charges: that Derrida has equated iteration, parasitism, and citation. It is true that he makes the accusation in such a way that Derrida can derail it, claiming it to be the result of faulty reading. However, even after reading 'Limited, Inc', it is hard not to think that Searle was on to something, for the meanings of the terms and the relations among them remain confused.

Indeed, there are at least three major difficulties with Derrida's central and interconnected notions of iteration and saturation of context. First, Derrida's argument implicitly assumes that because the possibility of iteration is *essential* to speech acts, it must consequently be important to an analysis of them. But as Austin might well retort, that possibility, while essential, is not at all distinctive of them. In his whimsical analysis of a person who pretends to be a hyena by reclining and appearing to sleep, Austin notes that 'a pretence must be not merely like but *distinctively* like the genuine article simulated' (*Philosophical Papers*, p. 266). Likewise, the characterization and analysis of an action or entity must latch on to what is distinctive about that action or entity. Iterability, however, is not at all distinctive of speech acts, since all acts – indeed, all existent (and most nonexistent) things – can be imitated in a play.

²⁶ For further discussion of this essay and of Derrida's tendency to mirror the flaws he finds in his opponents, see Scholes, 'Deconstruction and communication'.

Secondly, Austin's theory never either assumes or requires that context be completely determined; on the contrary, he is well aware that situations (even imagined situations) can never be fully described (*Philosophical Papers*, p. 184). This does not bother him, in part because of his contextual notion of truth. What matters for him is not the absolute truth, but whatever approximate fit is appropriate to the situation at hand – in this case, whatever rough pragmatic account will explain how human beings operate on a day-to-day basis. It is curious (and perhaps suggestive of his longings for a purity not available either in life or philosophy) that Derrida ignores Austin's deconstruction of the notion of truth and bases much of his critique on Austin's inability to reach an absolute that he neither aimed for nor deemed possible. As Robert Scholes puts it, in a somewhat different context, 'Calling in the purity-police, as Derrida does regularly, is not only a dubious action for someone who claims the status of outlaw, it is also an absurd form of argument' ('Deconstruction and communication', p. 285).

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, the same curious reconstruction of an argument already dismantled by Austin is found in Derrida's frequent preference for the words 'mark' and 'sign' rather than the term 'utterance'. As we have seen, Austin accused philosophers in general of a tendency to slip from discussion of illocutions into a discussion of locutions or perlocutions – and it is precisely this tendency that silently resurfaces in Derrida. When Derrida writes about iteration, he really writes about iteration of a *locution*. Locutions, of course, can be grafted without limit, without consideration of intention or context, and still function. But *utterances*, in Austin's terms, cannot, precisely because Austin's notion of utterance *includes* specifications of the intentions and context of the speaker. When you remove a mark from context, you may well be iterating the locution (the mark), but you are not iterating the illocution, and hence not the utterance. (Indeed, Benveniste has gone so far as to argue that the essential quality of a performative utterance is its uniqueness, its nonrepeatability (*Problems*, p. 236; French version, p. 272).)

Derrida's arguments about convention only intensify the difficulty. The fact that an utterance is governed by conventional rules does not mean that an utterance is 'identifiable in some way as a "citation"' ('Sec', p. 192)²⁷, any more than their conformity to the rules of baseball means that all baseball games are citations. Granted, that 'in some way' leaves a great deal of room for debate; but like many of Derrida's rhetorical ploys, it leaves so much room that one appreciates anew Austin's decision to draw a provisional line somewhere.

²⁷ 'si donc elle n'était pas identifiable en quelque sorte comme "citation"' ('Sec' [French version], p. 389).

Ultimately, as is the case with Fish, the real power of Derrida's attack comes as much from context as from content. He himself notes that the argument takes place

on a terrain whose neutrality is far from certain, in a publication and at the initiative of professors who for the most part are Americans (more or less), but who, in their 'work and their projects are second to none in the knowledge of migrations and wanderings [*deplacements*]. Their position, in terms of the political significance of the university, is highly original and their role in this debate, whether it takes place or not, decisive

(*'Limited Inc,'* p. 173).²⁸

This has turned out to be correct. That is, interest in the debate between Derrida and Searle lies less in the inherent value of speech act theory itself than in its role as a football in one of a series of professional games through which deconstruction took up a central position in American universities. This centrality, of course, is itself fraught with irony. Derrida, for all his dismantling of the very notions of law, authority, and centre is (ironically but not accidentally) the closest thing that theory in the 1980s had to a patriarchal figure. In the end, the success of his attack upon Searle was but an affirmation of the bourgeois convention that father knows best.

²⁸ sur en terrain d'une neutralité bien incertaine, dans une revue et à l'initiative d'enseignants dont la plupart sont (plus ou moins) américains mais s'y connaissent mieux que quiconque, dans leur travail et dans leurs [sic] production, en migrations et déplacements. Leur situation politico-universitaire est très originale et leur rôle dans ce débat, qu'il ait lieu ou non, décisif.

(*'Limited Inc'* [French version], p. 10).

OTHER READER-ORIENTED THEORIES

Introduction

It is by now commonplace to point out that unlike such tightly organized schools as structuralism or Marxism, reader-oriented criticism, taking its major forms up until around 1990, is neither united by a common methodology nor directed toward a common goal. As Susan Suleiman notes, it 'is not one field but many, not a single widely trodden path but a multiplicity of crisscrossing, often divergent tracks' ('Varieties of audience-oriented criticism', p. 6).

Jane Tompkins, it is true, argues, in the introduction to her influential anthology, that there has been a 'coherent progression' from formalism to the belief that 'reading and writing . . . [are] two names for the same activity' ('Introduction', p. ix). But while this description accurately charts the trajectory of Stanley Fish, reader-oriented criticism as a whole exhibits little historical progression and offers little sense of ultimate arrival. Indeed, there does not even seem to be a common point of origin for the divergent tracks. Even Steven Mailloux's general claim that reader-response critics 'all share the phenomenological assumption that it is impossible to separate perceiver from perceived, subject from object' would seem to exclude such important figures as Wayne Booth (*Interpretive Conventions*, p. 20).

Reader-oriented critics seem at one in their opposition to certain traditional formalist practices – especially, in the United States, to the decontextualization demanded by New Criticism. This hostility to New Criticism, however, is common to most other contemporary theorists as well. Moreover, even if there seems to be a single subject of inquiry ('the reader'), the term, as we shall see, takes on so many different meanings in current discourse that it serves less as a unifying banner than as a trophy to be wrested from the opposition. Once we exclude such relatively coherent groups as the hermeneuticists (see chapter 9), the phenomenologists (see chapter 10), the Constance reception theorists, (see

chapter 11), and the speech-act theorists (see chapter 12), reader-oriented theorists are more striking for their disagreements than for their points of accord.

It therefore seems more profitable to discuss this motley band not in terms of shared assumptions and practices, but rather in terms of the issues about which they disagree. In particular, three (obviously overlapping) unanswered questions recur insistently: what is reading? who is reading? Where is the source of authority for interpretation?

Of these, the third is the most pressing. It seems likely that, at least in the United States, the turn to the reader, which had been proposed on and off for decades by such critics as Louise Rosenblatt and Kenneth Burke, was revived during the 1970s partly because of the widespread questioning of structures of authority encouraged by the civil rights and anti-war movements (even though, as we shall see, these anti-authoritarian roots were often cut off in the process of formulating theories). But since the terms for the debate about authority are set by the answers to the first two questions, it seems best to begin with them.

What is reading?

The word 'reading' is plagued by fundamental ambiguities. Most important, it can refer either to a product or to a process. 'A reading' in the first sense is a finished interpretation, a completed, retrospective understanding of the text, or what Mailloux calls 'a final holistic synthesis' of the sort 'that a reader might construct *after* his temporal reading experience' (*Interpretive Conventions*, p. 68). 'Reading' in the second sense is a temporal activity. Kenneth Burke's distinction between 'information' and 'form' is roughly analogous to this distinction between product and process ('Psychology'); so is Louise Rosenblatt's distinction between what she calls 'efferent reading' (where attention is focused on the facts of information that remain with the reader after the process is finished) and what she calls 'aesthetic reading' (where attention is focused on the reading event itself) (*Reader, Text, Poem*, pp. 23–5).

Stanley Fish's early espousal of what he called 'affective stylistics' was an attack on the academic tendency to stress the finished reading, an attempt to reconceptualize reading as a process, to substitute a temporal account of reading for the spatial view he saw implied by formalism. And his frequently reprinted essay 'Literature in the reader: affective stylistics' became for many the exemplary version of American reader-response criticism. Fish's method is an account of what sentences *do*, rather than what propositions they propose. That is, he thinks of a sentence as 'an action made upon a reader rather than as a container from which a

reader extracts a message' (*Is There a Text*, p. 23),¹ and his 'analysis in terms of doing and happenings' (p. 34) is parallel to (although apparently not influenced by) Burke's notion that form is best understood as the creation and satisfaction of appetites in the reader ('Psychology and form'). The resulting analyses are often extremely detailed, for in order to examine 'all of the activities provoked by a string of words' (p. 27), Fish slows down the word-by-word process of apprehension. But unlike traditional close readings, Fish's treat the text as an event rather than an object. Indeed, he insists that the flow of experience, rather than any information transmitted by the sentence itself, constitutes 'the meaning of the sentence' (p. 25).

In his early writings, especially *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, Fish presented his account of the reading process as the correct one: it was descriptive rather than interpretive, descriptive of a dynamic experience that was textually enforced. If the reader did not recognize the 'events' that Fish pointed out, that was not because he or she did not experience them, but rather because in the usual act of reading, they happened too quickly to be recognized for what they were (*Is There a Text*, p. 28). As for the apparent diversity in response among different readers, Fish argued that it stemmed not from differences in the ways they processed the text, but from differences in the ways they subsequently talked about them. 'Most literary quarrels are not disagreements about response, but about a response to a response. What happens to one informed reader of a work will happen, within a range of nonessential variation, to another' (p. 52).

Fish later backed off from his claims for affective stylistics' priority because they conflicted with his new belief (discussed in more detail below) that interpretation actually precedes (rather than follows from) the reader's confrontation with a given text, and that readers consequently make the texts they read. The retreat came in two stages. First he set up quarters in the claim that, although his supposed descriptions were in fact interpretations (and that his 'assumptions dictate[d] the shape of [his] analyses and . . . [were] inevitably confirmed by them'), his procedures were nonetheless superior to those of such critics as Ralph Rader because they were more self-conscious and more broadly inclusive (pp. 145–6

¹ 'Literature in the Reader' first appeared as an article in *New Literary History* (1970), then as the appendix to *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, then as the first chapter of *Is There a Text in This Class?*. It has also been frequently anthologized. *Is There a Text?* remains the most convenient source for this and for many of Fish's other most important theoretical essays of the 1970s, originally published in a number of different journals, but collected in this book where they are framed by Fish's retrospective commentary. For convenience, I have given references to that readily available book rather than to the scattered originals; but since Fish's position changed radically between 1970 and 1980 I have included in brackets the date of original publication in order to clarify the stage at which a particular argument appeared.

(1975)). He later moved a step further back to the even milder claim that affective stylistics was but one technique among many.

Even though Fish currently offers no theoretical defence of the priority of affective stylistics, that analytical technique remains closely associated with him, and is still what comes to mind when many people think of his position. It is therefore worth examining the three fundamental questions that have been raised about the method. Two can be answered with a slight adjustment in the way his method is applied, but the third is more threatening to the enterprise.

First, there is controversy about the degree to which the microscopic examination proposed by affective stylistics reveals the dynamics of normal reading. Fish initially insisted that his technique makes visible events that 'one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur' (p. 28 (1970)). But that position is contested, for instance, by David Bleich's suggestion that self-consciousness can distort the normal act of reading. Indeed, Bleich teaches his students how to record responses by encouraging 'the relaxation of cultivated analytical habits' (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 147). Furthermore, in his initial formulation, Fish maps out the reader's experience word by word, on the assumption that 'everything counts' and that 'there is a point at which the reader has taken in only the first word, and then the second, and then the third, and so on' (*Is There a Text*, pp. 65, 27). It is highly unlikely, however, that any reader actually chops up texts in such a relentless fashion. As Umberto Eco puts it, 'the condition of a neurotic reader compelled to ask Whom? What? at every occurrence of a transitive verb . . . is usually neutralized by the normal reading speed' (*Role*, p. 31). Indeed, Fish himself later recognized that the nature of the basic units of perception depend on the reader's interpretive scheme (see, for instance, p. 165 (1976)). Nonetheless, affective stylistics could easily be modified to deal more accurately with the tempo and phrasing of actual readers.

Secondly, whatever the units involved, Fish's descriptions of response often seem arbitrary and ungrounded. It is not simply, as Fish later came to see, that the reader's interpretive screen influences what he or she will find in the text, and that a Marxist, even if reading word by word, will consequently respond differently from a feminist. Beyond that, even given the general parameters of Fish's own preferred perspective, it is hard to understand why any reader would respond in the specific way that he does, a way that seems especially bizarre coming from a critic who scornfully dismisses traditional stylistics for making arbitrary connections between formal features and reader response (pp. 69–96 (1973)).

Fish postulates a reader who develops, word by word, expectations that are confounded by the text. But, in part because Fish so often analyzes individual sentences wrenched out of context, the reader is described as if

he or she were starting each sentence fresh, without any history of reading. The reader never seems to develop the *expectation* of such dislocations. As Jonathan Culler puts it, 'he never learns anything from his reading' (*Pursuit*, p. 130). Here too, one can salvage the principle, by inserting a more supple interpretive procedure within Fish's general temporal scheme. Thus, James Phelan's discussions of the ethical significance of the interaction of character and narrative progression in Ring Lardner's 'Haircut' treats the story as a temporal event – but calls on a more intricate range of tools to describe the reader's developing response (*Reading People*, pp. 15–20). In its very different way, Eco's analysis of how the reader transforms the step-by-step unfolding of the text is also consistent with Fish's temporal imperative. But Eco's procedures for this transformation are far richer than Fish's; they include the application of a large number of codes and conventional frames evoked by the text, through which the reader can perform 'inferential walks' beyond the text 'in order to gather intertextual support' (*Role*, p. 32).

But there is a third, more damaging flaw in affective stylistics: Fish, a relentless dissolver of distinctions, steadfastly denies any hierarchy *within* the temporal reading experience itself. Rightly decrying those critics who so privilege the end product (traditional textual 'meaning') that they ignore the flow of the reading experience, he reverses the error by denying the relevance of traditional meaning entirely. Other critical systems, he argues, consider interpretation only after the reader 'steps back from' the text being treated; his method does not simply put that stepping-back in its proper place, but actually refuses to 'allow' it at all (p. 34 (1970)). Thus, analyzing the reversals experienced by the reader of Milton's line 'Nor did they not perceive the evil plight', he argues that the proposition one gets by applying the rule of the double negative has '*nothing to do*' with either 'the logic of the reading experience' or even with its 'meaning' (p. 26 (1970); italics added). Retrospective reflection on a text's overall meaning and coherence is simply banished from the realm of reading.

Fish's refusal to step back erases crucial distinctions between levels of interpretation, including what Eco calls 'textual levels' (*Role*, *passim*). Fish, for instance, lumps all responses together as 'interpretation', but as Mailloux and others point out, the total activity of reading consists of several separable activities. 'Intended reading responses – cognitive, attitudinal, and emotive – depend on the reader's *prior* interpretation. For example, a reader cannot react to a character's bigotry or foolishness until he has interpreted the text as portraying the character as bigoted or foolish' (Mailloux, *Interpretive Conventions*, p. 105). Nor does Fish perceive the simultaneous roles that fictional texts, at least, invite the reader to play. As I argue in 'Truth in Fiction', fiction asks us to be members of the 'authorial audience' (the audience addressed by the author and

which understands that the work being read is fictional); at the same time, we are asked to pretend to take on the role of 'narrative audience' (the audience addressed by the narrator, either implicit or explicit, an audience that believes that the events portrayed are real). Many literary effects are created by the interaction of these two audiences: for instance, by the interplay between what James Phelan calls instabilities (on the narrative level) and what he calls tensions (which engage us as authorial audience) (*Reading People*, p. 15). Such complex effects cannot be explained with Fish's unified reader.

It should be pointed out, too, that reading can be conceived as an entirely different kind of event – not as the abstracted act of engaging in interpretation, but rather as an activity, like washing the clothes or going to work, that takes place in a particular social context with its own pressures and rewards. Janice Radway, for instance, studies the way that reading popular romances, viewed as the activity of picking up a book, serves as a literal escape (parallel to the figurative escape of the story itself) for certain women, allowing them 'to diversify the pace and character of their habitual existence.' This activity 'so engages their attention that it enables them to deny their physical presence in an environment associated with responsibilities that are acutely felt and occasionally experienced as too onerous to bear' (*Reading the Romance*, pp. 89, 93).

Despite the influence of Fish's temporal arguments, other reader-response critics remain concerned with the end product of reading. Thus, for instance, while David Bleich is not unconcerned with the immediate responses of readers, he stresses even more the step that follows, what he calls 'resymbolization.' 'Symbolization occurs in the perception and identification of experiences; resymbolization, when the first acts of perception and identification produce in us a need, desire, or demand for explanation' (Bleich, *Subjective Criticism*, p. 39). Resymbolization is an 'explanatory act', but unlike the kinds of explanation demanded by the 'objective paradigm', it 'is governed by subjective factors only.' That is, what constitutes explanatory adequacy for acts of resymbolization is determined not by objective criteria of truth, but rather by the needs of the community (pp. 38–9). Interpretation, in this scheme, is the resymbolization of reader response (p. 125), and it is a temporally separate act. (In this regard, he is close to Rosenblatt, for whom interpretation is a description of the reader's experience, one that 'involves an effort to indicate the sensed, felt, thought, nature of the evocation while at the same time applying some frame of reference or method of abstracting in order to characterize it' (*Reader, Text, Poem*, p. 135).) For Bleich, the critic's claim to authority comes from what happens after the reading is over; that is, it comes not from superior response, but from 'the forthright

but systematic presentation of his own responsive capacities and tastes' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 63).

If some reader-oriented critics follow Fish by highlighting the process of reading, while others still focus on the product, still another concern is the origin of reading – the specification of the grounds of possibility that makes the act of interpretation possible in the first place. Fish's later work on what he calls 'interpretive communities' – discussed in more detail below – deals very broadly with the question of how initial assumptions determine what you perceive; but he does not examine such starting points in depth. The critics who engage in more detailed scrutiny of the grounds of reading fall, for the most part, into one of two rough categories.

First, there are those who see the origins of reading in psychological terms. Bleich, for instance, insists that it is impossible to discuss interpretation apart from motivation: 'Interpretation is a resymbolization motivated by the demand that the knowledge thus symbolized be explained, or converted into a more subjectively satisfying form' (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 213). Norman Holland argues the case in more traditional Freudian terms. At first (in *The Dynamics of Literary Response*), he examined the psychological processes by which a generalized reader transforms the underlying fantasies of a literary text so that they take on an adaptive coherence. Although he continued to believe that 'writers create by transforming unconscious wishes from childhood' (*5 Readers*, p. 16), he later modified his belief that a reader experiences 'transformations . . . embodied in the literary work' (p. 19), arguing instead that the transformations actually occur in the reader. This, in *5 Readers Reading*, he matches a text to specific readers. He starts with the premise that readers *need* to make sense of texts, that what has often been called organic unity is not a textual feature at all, but rather 'a unity people create for the work in their own minds' as a 'defense against some source of anxiety' (p. 14). He goes on to argue that readers use texts to recreate their own identity themes. He uses the term for the 'continuity we see in ourselves and others', for the 'constancy that colors every phase of an individual's life' (pp. 55–6). 'If a reader has responded positively to a literary work, he has been able to put elements of the work together so they act out his own lifestyle' (pp. 113–14). Holland charts out four major principles of reading: 'style seeks itself', 'defenses must be mastered', 'fantasies project fantasies', and 'character transforms characteristically' (pp. 113–23). The first is the 'overarching idea' that sums them up (p. 113). '*Style re-creates itself*. Each reader builds up an experience from a literary work that is characteristic for him, that is, a variation upon his identity theme' (p. 286) – a theme that he discusses in aesthetic terms, comparing it to themes in music or in Shakespeare's plays ('Ellen', p. 348).

Other critics, more semiotic than psychological, centre on the shared

procedures – in particular, the conventions of interpretation – that allow reading to take place: identifying ‘the conventions and operations by which any signifying practice (such as literature) produces its observable effects of meaning’ (Culler, *Pursuit*, p. 48). Thus, a goal for Eco would be ‘to represent an “ideal” text as a system of nodes or joints and to establish at which of them the cooperation of the Model Reader is expected and solicited’ (*Role*, p. 11) On a more concrete level, my own *Before Reading* charts out some of the specific rules – rules in place before the reader approaches any particular work – that readers apply to texts in order to transform them into something manageable. Although the specific rules vary according to genre and history (which is one reason for interpretive dispute), they generally fall into one of four categories: rules of notice (which create a hierarchy of importance by highlighting particular details in a text), rules of signification (which tell us how to draw the significance out of those details, for instance by treating them ironically or metaphorically), rules of configuration (which enable us to predict the future course of a narrative – predictions that can be either fulfilled or reversed, but that in either case influence the reader’s reaction), and rules of coherence (which help us re-form the entire work into a convenient package).

Who is reading?

Even when we have decided what kind of activity reading is, we have still to confront the question of who is doing the reading. Frederick Crews has argued, with some irritation, that “‘the reader’ is simply the critic’s marionette’ (‘Criticism without constraint’, p. 68). But even if this is so, the marionettes come in a dizzying variety of brands: implied reader, informed reader, mock reader, model reader, narratee, eighteenth-century reader, woman reader, lesbian reader, composite reader. And crucial issues of critical ideology hinge on the choice of one or another, for the kinds of questions theorists ask, and the kind of prescriptions they make, are closely tied to the concept of reader with which they are operating. The task of sorting out this inventory can be simplified by recognizing a broad dividing line: the distinction between hypothetical readers and empirical readers.

Literary criticism has traditionally been resistant, if not hostile, to sociological impulses. It is thus not surprising that even when theorists began to break free from New Criticism and take notice of the reader’s role, they still often shied away from actual readers. Instead, their initial tendency was to develop a series of hypothetical, often idealized, readers.

Sometimes, especially among the earliest reader-oriented critics, the reader was an abstraction of an assumed universal ‘common sense’. Kenneth Burke’s pioneering (and iconoclastic) ‘Psychology and form’

demonstrated that form could be conceived, not in terms of static textual features, but rather in terms of a temporal process – a process of creating, teasing, and ultimately satisfying the appetites of the audience. However, Burke did not situate his reader in history or culture; and while his essay offers a useful vantage point from which to spy on authors' rhetorical manoeuvres, it is of little help in differentiating among the various readers that are apparently addressed by different texts.

Burke's method can be refined by treating the reader not as an unchanging universal abstraction, but as variable, dependent on the work in question. Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, one of the primary crowbars that pried criticism in the 1960s away from its reliance on universals, follows Burke's lead, but posits an implied reader rather than a generalized one. Booth's reader is more or less equivalent to what Walker Gibson had earlier called a 'mock reader', and it is a logical development of his views about authors. Although recognizing the importance of reviving close study of the author (in particular, the author's rhetorical manipulation), Booth is strongly influenced by the formalist heritage that resists biographical explanations of literary texts. He solves this dilemma by distinguishing the actual flesh-and-blood author from the 'second self' he or she chooses to present to us. Since this image can be inferred from the particular choices manifested in the text, this move allows Booth to talk meaningfully about authors without depending on biographical data. But it virtually requires him to invent a parallel notion of a reader, as well: 'The author creates . . . an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self' (*Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 138).

Similarly, my own notion of the 'authorial audience,' the imagined reader for whom an author designs his or her text, is (like Walter J. Ong's 'fictionalized' audience, Walker Gibson's 'mock reader', and the 'intended reader' invoked by Mailloux (*Interpretive Conventions*, p. 113)) really a reflection of authorial choices made manifest by the text – as, in radically different ways, are the 'narrative audience' and various 'inscribed readers' who actually appear in the text. So is Umberto Eco's 'Model Reader'. The Model Reader cooperates with the author in the generation of a text; that is, 'every text is made of two components: the information provided by the author and that added by the Model Reader' (*Role*, p. 206). But the Model Reader is not an equal partner, but rather, like Prince's 'narratee' (see chapter 4), an addressee – that is, a reader foreseen by the author, with whom he or she shares 'the ensemble of codes' relied upon by the author (p. 7). This addressee is not simply *assumed* by the author, but is actually (even more than Booth's implied reader) created by the text (p. 7). Indeed, Eco goes so far as to define the Model Reader (with some borrowing from

J. L. Austin) as a ‘textually established set of felicity conditions’ (Eco, *Role*, p. 11).

Inhabiting the ground between Burke’s universalized reader and the more text-specific readers mentioned above are implied readers who are extrapolated not from a single work, but from a broader set of texts – for instance, the texts of a particular author or period or tradition. Thus, for instance, the literary competence outlined in Jonathan Culler’s *Structuralist Poetics* centres less on the demands of particular works than on more generally agreed-upon cultural practices that are nonetheless historically situated. Similarly, in his early reader-oriented essays, Fish posits the ‘informed reader’ – the reader who ‘is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up,’ who has mature semantic knowledge, and who possesses literary competence (*Is There a Text*, p. 48 (1970)).

What exactly is the status of such hypothetical readers? Critics disagree on this issue – indeed, they are often inconsistent themselves. Thus, for instance, Eco (like the early Fish) at times seems to treat his construct as an actual stand-in for real readers. His lengthy essay ‘Lector in Fabula’ (*Role*, pp. 200–60), which tells ‘the story of the adventures of [the] Model Readers’ of Alphonse Allais’ ‘Un Drame bien parisien’ (p. 205), claims to ‘present in a more rigorous form what every reader unconsciously knows very well’ (p. 254) – a claim defended by an empirical test of actual readers. But elsewhere he recognizes that, especially in mass culture, actual readers often call upon codes quite different from those of the ‘educated elite’, and that field research is necessary if we want to know the implications of the reception of a given work (p. 141).

Still, while he recognizes its limitations as an analysis of actual reception, Eco argues that semiotic analysis can reveal the meaning of a text at ‘the moment of emission’ (p. 141). This, juxtaposed with his comments that incorporating the reader’s cooperation need not ‘pollute the structural analysis with extratextual elements’ (p. 4), reminds us that reader criticism does not have to break from traditional practice. With such hypothetical readers, as Mary Pratt has persuasively argued, the resulting criticism can easily turn out to be but ‘a notational variant of that very formalism so roundly rejected’ (‘Interpretive Strategies’, p. 201). Or, in Fredric Jameson’s terms, it can encourage us to dehistoricize by making us think that reader reception is one of ‘constants of narrative analysis’.² Rather than redressing the problems of traditional practice, this approach often simply redresses them in a new terminological clothing, distinguishing rather than baring the underlying interpretive procedures.

But there is more at stake than obfuscation – for in the process

² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 152.

of translating textual features and authorial intention into statements supposedly about readers, traditional formalist arguments often gain an unsupported (because unarticulated) moral force. One is not merely describing the reader, but also, as Robert Crosman has argued (*Reading Paradise Lost*, pp. 8–14), setting up a prescriptive standard which readers *ought* to follow.

Sometimes, critics speak less of what the reader ought to do than of what he or she is forced to do. Michael Riffaterre, for instance, argues that the text's 'control' over the reader's perception of ungrammaticalities is 'absolute', and that the reader simply 'is not free to bypass them' (*Semiotics*, p. 5). But more usually, critics couch their prescriptions in milder terms: Eco tells us that 'even the more "open" among experimental texts direct their own free interpretation and preestablish the movement of their Model Reader' (*Role*, p. 24). Booth is less apparently directive still, arguing that 'the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement' (*Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 138). But these critics all suggest an imperative to read correctly: their readers are models not only in the sense of analytical descriptions but also in the sense of exemplary instances.

The same offer you cannot refuse is underscored by critical vocabulary. The phrase 'literary competence', for instance, reinforces the notion of an interpretive guild or even a hierarchy, where deference is offered to literary critics simply because of their supposed expertise – an anti-democratic situation that New Criticism, ironically, worked hard to eliminate. By coining such loaded terms as 'Model Reader' or 'informed reader' (which, as Rosenblatt argues, suggest the critic's 'condescension') (*Reader*, p. 138), a theorist offers a real reader the same non-choice. You may not be compelled to read as an 'informed reader'; but who would willingly don the robes of an uninformed one, especially when Fish piously suggests that, even though his method is purely descriptive and non-evaluative, an informed reading is none the less more responsible and even 'better' than an uninformed one (*Is There a Text*, p. 49 (1970), p. 379 (1973))? Of course, were the Model Reader really a model, were the competent reader really competent, were the informed reader really informed, such requests for deference might not gall. But in fact, the issue of who determines competence is a disputed one; and when prestigious critics insist that Fish's informed reader is in fact a 'dunce', 'a kind of moron', or even 'mentally retarded' (Crews, 'Criticism without constraint', p. 66; Graff, 'Culture and anarchy', p. 37; Bush, 'Professor Fish', p. 182), then Fish's title to informed-ness is certainly not undisputed.

There are several ways to skirt such formalist absolutism. One is to highlight the gap between the reading offered to the implied reader and the interpretive alternatives, explicitly reminding the reader that he or she

need not accept the position held out by the text – even that there might be good reasons for not doing so. Booth, for instance, modifies the imperative implied by his use of the phrase ‘most successful reading’. Certain books ‘postulate readers we refuse to become’ because they ‘depend on “beliefs” or “attitudes” . . . which we cannot adopt even hypothetically as our own’ (*Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 138). Indeed, the demands of some texts are so noxious that they ought to be denied: we cannot excuse an author ‘for writing a book which, if taken seriously by the reader, must corrupt him’ (p. 383).

Such textual antagonism becomes a central strategy for Judith Fetterley. In *The Resisting Reader*, she accepts that novels are rhetorical structures that exert a force on their readers; specifically, the implied reader of most American canonical fiction is forced to identify with men and against women. When the reader is a woman, she is placed in a position of what Fetterley calls ‘immascultation’ (as opposed to ‘emascultation’), trained into a posture of thinking and feeling as a male. Since Fetterley sees this male identification as psychologically debilitating, she calls on readers to resist the appeal of the text.

Although Fetterley’s work stems from classroom experience, and although she writes primarily about a gendered reader, that reader is still for the most part hypothetical, and in *The Resisting Reader*, her interpretations of the texts (although not her analyses of their submerged messages, nor her judgements of and proposed responses to them) are for the most part fairly traditional. A more radical way of breaking from the formalist implications of hypothetical readers is to turn to the activities of our second major class, real readers.

One of the more dramatic attempts to do this is Norman Holland’s *5 Readers Reading*. Holland was at first interested in ‘how literature and readers interact’ – specifically, in ‘that ineffable effect of personality on perception’ (*5 Readers*, p. 4); and he believed that he could do so by combining the familiar techniques of close reading with the analytic techniques of psychologists (in particular, psychoanalytic ego psychologists). In the course of working out these ideas, he came to realize, as we have seen, that one could not follow the literary tradition of ‘assuming a uniform response on the part of readers and audiences that the critic somehow knows and understands’ (p. 5). Instead, he chose five individuals – undergraduates from a nearby college who had taken standardized personality tests – and ran extended interviews with them about Faulkner’s story ‘A Rose for Emily’. What he discovered was that each reader read in precisely the way that the tests suggested he or she would.

David Bleich starts from a similar position. Like Holland, he insists on the individual nature of reading: ‘Reading is a wholly subjective process and . . . the nature of what is perceived is determined by the rules of the

personality of the perceiver' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 3). Like Holland, he also believes that there is a systematic way in which that individuality shows up: 'While responses themselves will always vary, the mechanisms of emotional response will follow patterns similar to those' uncovered in the individuals he studies (p. 6). But although Holland is not a traditional Freudian (for instance, he considers Freudian symbolism 'passé' ('Ellen', p. 364)), Bleich is even less mechanistic and less committed to orthodox psychoanalytic thought. Furthermore, Bleich is less comfortable than Holland with the idea that readers are responding to objective texts (see, for instance, *Subjective Criticism*, pp. 111ff.). More important, though, Bleich is oriented toward the group rather than the individual. His major interest is subjective *knowledge*, and 'the degree to which knowledge is not part of a community is the degree to which it is not knowledge at all' (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 296). He is therefore less interested either in the initial responses of individual students or in their resymbolizations than in their negotiation and validation by a community.

There are at least two areas of debate with respect to Holland's and Bleich's work. First, while Holland does end up with general interpretive principles, and while Bleich does focus on the negotiation among competing interpretations that takes place within a specific (classroom) community, neither offers a theoretically satisfactory way to talk about readers as a group except on the most abstract level. That is, both critics remain more persuasive when they explain differences in response than when they try to explain convergences. In Bleich's case, as Steven Mailloux has aptly pointed out, this is partly because he gives us the motives for negotiation, but never provides an explanation of how it is possible. In this regard, Bleich's dependence on Kuhn's model of paradigms is misleading, Mailloux argues, because 'Kuhn's sociological theory directly contradicts Bleich's psychological model . . . For Kuhn, initial perceptions are communal, not individual' (*Interpretive*, p. 35).³ Secondly, and more vexingly, there is a series of interlocking feedback loops whereby the subjects echo the investigator or the academic context in which the study is taking place.⁴ We can distinguish two basic causes: theoretical and pragmatic.

Theoretical feedback is built into the underlying premises themselves.

³ In his most recent work, Bleich gives greater stress to the communal nature of initial perceptions; see, for instance, 'Intersubjective Reading'.

⁴ Holland himself uses the term feedback, although in a fundamentally different sense ('a transaction in which someone or something tests some aspect of its environment and modifies itself as a result of what it finds' (*I*, p. 112)). Perhaps because of my years as a music critic, the notion of feedback I am calling upon as a metaphor is less an external testing than an internal self-amplification: for instance, the screech you get when a microphone is placed too close to a speaker.

On the most general level, of course, one can argue (and Fish does, as we shall see) that *any* theory creates the ‘facts’ that support it. And there is certainly evidence that Bleich and Holland, like everyone else, have their perspectives limited by the assumptions they begin with. Holland, for example, rejects one form of circularity only to embrace another. He explicitly denies unity to texts, but, as Culler suggests, his belief that all behaviour is unified by an identity theme can be seen as ‘a vulgarized and sentimentalized version of the New Criticism, with organic unity transferred from the work of art to the entire “text” of a person’s life’ (*Pursuit*, p. 52). This belief in unity skews his observations, and blinds him to other implications of his evidence. For instance, as Culler argues, the free associations of his subjects

revealed above all the clichés of the various subcultures and cultural discourses that work to constitute the consciousness of American college students. *Five Readers Reading* might be interpreted as confirmation of the axiom . . . that the individuality of the individual cannot function as a principle of explanation, for it is itself a complex cultural construct, a heterogeneous product rather than a unified cause

(p. 53).

In Bleich’s case, fascination with negotiation blinds him to other kinds of influence. He claims, for instance that Ms. M’s analysis of her response statement is of special interest in part because she developed it ‘independently’ and ‘without coaching or training’ (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 191). However, in her essay, she refers explicitly both to what she has learned from *Readings and Feelings* and to what she has learned from Bleich’s lectures (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 196). Bleich later admits that ‘her cordial relationship with me and her cooperative attitude toward the ideas I proposed obviously contributed to the kind of knowledge she formulated’. Apparently, he believes her essays are none the less independent because her statements and judgements were not negotiated (p. 198).

In these respects, Bleich and Holland are no different from any other theorists, but there is a deeper level on which their theories are subject to another layer of feedback. New-Critical theory appears to ‘create’ the objects it studies only if one is standing *outside* that theory; from inside the theory’s perspective, there is a clear distinction between the procedures and the facts they are applied to. With Bleich and Holland, the theory creates the objects of analysis even from *inside* the theory. Thus, although they make claims about actual readers, their own premises remind us that they are really talking only about their own interpretations of those readers’ responses. For if the nature of a literary text is determined by the subjectivity of the reader, or if it is always read in such a way as to

become a variation on the reader's identity theme, the same holds true for the texts produced by those readers in turn, whether written essays or interviews.

Mailloux puts it crisply: 'The mistake here is to assume that ideal readers are interpretive constructs while actual readers are not critical constructions at all' (*Interpretive*, p. 204). But even if one sees the trap, it is not easy to escape. Holland, for instance, recognizes that he has in fact created what he claims to study. A subject's identity, he says, is 'the history I write of that [his or her identity] theme and all the variations on it'; understanding the identity of another is itself an 'interpretation' that is a function of the interpreter's own identity theme ('Ellen', pp. 348, 365). But neither his theoretical model nor Bleich's provides a way to deal with the implications of such a recognition.

It is not simply through the back door of theory, however, that feedback invades the system. It enters in more mundane ways through the front door of practice as well. At its most evident, we see pragmatic feedback when Holland misreads (if one can use that loaded term in this context) what his subjects say in their interviews (which are severely edited and full of explicit interpretive commentary). Thus, 'Sandra' refers to the 'heroic terms' (my emphasis) of Faulkner's phrase 'He who fathered the edict'. Holland (perhaps no surprise given his Freudian bent) concludes that 'Sandra thought "fathered" a "heroic" word' – although Sandra uses the plural 'terms,' and could just as much have been thinking of the combination father and edict (*5 Readers*, p. 193; see also p. 207).

Further, neither Bleich nor Holland is sufficiently scrupulous about teacher–student power relationships. There is always a problem when using students as subjects in a study, since they are already in an environment that encourages, even enforces, particular kinds of readings, and, even more, particular strategies for pleasing. As Crews notes, Holland's students often seem to be 'doing what comes naturally in their predicament, i.e., humouring the teacher ('Reductionism,' p. 554). Holland, to be sure, addresses his influence as a teacher directly, but begs the question by assuming what he needs to prove. Admitting inequities in status and power ('they were undergraduates in their early twenties and I am a full professor in what one might call the prime of life'), and recognizing that students 'tried at times to give [him] what they thought [he] wanted', he insists that it is mistaken to ask how these factors affected student response, for that 'is to proceed from the same cause-and-effect, stimulus–response model that we have already found inadequate.' All of these factors 'entered into what they said about these stories'; but 'what "caused" what they said was their own inner style of creation and synthesis of everything they were experiencing at that moment' (*5 Readers*, pp. 62–3).

In Bleich's case, the predicament is, if anything, sharper, for unlike Holland, he is working with his own students who are dependent upon pleasing him in order to receive good grades. Is it surprising that they so eagerly confirm his belief that 'sexuality is the cardinal concern of adolescents' (*Readings*, p. 17), and, particularly, that so many of them focus so intently on the lack of explicit sexuality when they discuss *Vanity Fair* (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 89)?

Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, in part because it is based in sociology rather than individual psychology, comes to terms with obvious overlap in the responses of individual readers. If her work does not quite avoid theoretical feedback (which may well be inescapable in any study of empirical readers that accepts the reader's role in the construction of the text), it does at least avoid its pragmatic cousin. Radway's study is grounded in a particular historical and cultural enquiry. She starts with a group of traditional literary critics who attempt to explain the causes and significance of the popularity of paperback romances. Whatever their differences, Radway observes, these critics all adopt the same traditional formalist notion: 'a literary text is a complex but fixed object' with a 'core of significance' that the reader is more or less coerced to accept. Once the critic has explicated that core, he or she is thus free 'to present it formally as the full cultural meaning of the text and to suggest that a need to have the meaning asserted is an adequate explanation of the book's popularity' (*Reading the Romance*, p. 5).

But since the issue at stake is not the theoretical question of how readers ought to read, but the empirical question of the cultural significance of a particular historical phenomenon, it seems appropriate to ask whether those traditional analyses in fact correspond to social reality. Asking this question not only leads Radway to undertake a study of the social and economic forces that underlie the popularity of romance, but also encourages her to interview actual readers. To make her task manageable, she focuses on a selected group of women who are compulsive romance readers, and (following Clifford Geertz) she develops a 'thick description' of their behaviour.

These interviews prove decisive, for Radway finds that her subjects' interpretive procedures – and hence the meanings of the texts for them, and their motivations for reading – are radically different from those postulated by the formalists who try to explain their actions. While she is forced by the evidence to abandon the model of an implied reader (at least, for this kind of cultural assessment) and to analyze instead 'from within the belief system actually brought to bear upon a text by its readers' (p. 78), she is not, however, ready to fall back on individual subjectivity. Instead, finding significant overlap among her subjects, Radway develops the notion of a composite reader – a hypothetical abstraction, but one that

emerges out of interviews with actual readers. And although she does not extrapolate from her sample to readership of romances at large, she is able to generalize about their activities as a group.

In particular, Radway comes to see the activity of reading as a compensatory action resulting from women's psychological needs. Working in part through the perspective offered by psychologist Nancy Chodorow, Radway argues that the source of these needs lies in specific cultural and social gender asymmetries. The women in her sample have 'the psychologically demanding and emotionally draining task of attending to the physical and affective needs of their families, a task that is solely and peculiarly theirs' (p. 92). Romances offer them 'a utopian vision in which female individuality and a sense of self are shown to be compatible with nurturance and care by another' (*Reading the Romance*, p. 55). For women who find themselves in intolerable circumstances, that is, the novels provide a way to 'read one's way out of a bad situation' (p. 71). Even though, in the end, her interpretation remains – as she is aware – only 'a critic's construction of the reader's construction of the import of her reading behavior' (p. 9), her greater sensitivity to the problems of empirical research results in analyses that I find more persuasive than those of Bleich and Holland.

The authority of interpretation

Many of the disputes about what constitutes reading and what is meant by 'the reader' can be explained, if not resolved, by observing that different critics are asking different kinds of questions. While the competing positions discussed above may lead to disagreement about where to direct our critical efforts, many of them are none the less logically compatible: one can believe in Booth's implied reader and in Radway's composite reader without falling into self-contradiction. What makes debates over these issues explosive is less their inherent differences of definition than their connection to the third main controversy among reader-oriented critics: the question of correct interpretation.

Behind much of the most heated debate about reading lies a question: will what M. H. Abrams calls 'the Age of Reading' result, as he fears, in the 'systematic dehumanizing of all aspects of the traditional view about how a work of literature comes into being, what it is, how it is read, and what it means' ('How to do things,' p. 566)? Does the move away from study of the text lead to a reign of what Booth calls 'free-wheeling mis-readers' (*Critical Understanding*, p. 230)?

The question is often cast in terms of the *locus* of meaning. But posing it in that way obscures crucial areas of disagreement, for even critics of profoundly different orientations can subscribe to a formulation like

Riffaterre's that 'readers make the literary event' (*Semiotics* p. 116). Even Booth agrees that an interpreted text exists 'at least as much *in* the reader and the reader's culture as *in* the author and the author's culture' (*Critical Understanding*, p. 237). A pianist, however, can produce the sounds of the Liszt Sonata without having the power to determine the course of the music; the fact that readers *make* meaning does not necessarily mean that they *control* it. The question is therefore more profitably posed differently: what are the constraints on legitimate interpretation? On what standards and on what grounds does one grade a student essay or accept a professional article? Where does the authority for judgement reside?

Much reader criticism parades (or is accused of parading) under a banner of liberation. In fact, however, the promise of freedom is in many cases illusory, and in some even replaced by a series of controls compared to which New Criticism seems liberal. To be sure, there are a few critics like Robert Crosman, whose views, at least in their most radical versions, come close to unleashing the reader in a way that would, for some, justify Abrams' fears. Crosman accepts E. D. Hirsch's argument that since meaning is a matter of consciousness, it cannot lie in texts themselves, but he rejects Hirsch's alternative, that authors determine meaning, which he insists is based on the faulty assumption that a text can have only one meaning. He grants that readers generally believe that whatever interpretation they come up with is in fact 'the author's intended meaning'; but for Crosman, this is only 'a convention of reading', and has no epistemological status ('Do readers make meaning?', p. 161). From this perspective, Hirsch's position is political, rather than aesthetic, an attempt to maintain 'hierarchy and order' (p. 158), and to stave off subjectivism, relativism, and political anarchy. Crosman, in contrast, embraces subjectivism and relativism ('A poem really means whatever any reader seriously believes it to mean' (p. 154)), but insists that such freedom need not lead to acrimony. On the contrary, 'The more firmly . . . people believe in "the one right reading," the less civil they are apt to be to one another' (p. 160).

Few other critics give the reader this much room to range: most reintroduce fences around interpretation in the form of texts, authors, psychology, or social context. The most traditional in this regard tend to be those who deal with implied readers. Some, especially those influenced by semiotics, regard the reader's activities as bounded by concrete textual features. For example, Riffaterre, as we have seen, would agree that the *locus* of meaning lies in the reader. This does not mean for him, however, what it means for Crosman. Rather, for Riffaterre 'the reader [is] the only one who makes the connections between text, interpretant, and intertext, the one in whose mind the semiotic transfer from sign to sign takes place' (p. 164). This is entirely consistent with his view that the origin and

authority of meaning lie in the text: 'Far from freeing the imagination, far from giving the reader greater leeway as it invites him to greater participation, reading is actually restrictive . . . [The reader is] under strict guidance and control as he fills the gaps and solves the puzzle' (p. 165).

Gerald Prince similarly describes reading as an interaction between a text ('visually presented linguistic symbols from which meaning can be extracted') and a reader ('capable of extracting meaning from that text') in which the reader 'is able to answer correctly at least some questions about the meaning of the former' ('Notes,' p. 225). Likewise, although Eco agrees that the reader cooperates in textual production, he insists that Valéry is wrong to claim that texts have no true meaning ('vrai sens') (*Role*, p. 24): even 'inferential walks' outside the text 'are not mere whimsical initiatives on the part of the reader, but are elicited by discursive structures' (*Role*, p. 32). While some texts offer greater freedom to readers, 'every text, however open it is, is constituted, not as the place of all possibilities, but rather as the field of oriented possibilities' (p. 76). Indeed, paradoxically, since open texts are more restricted in the Model Readers they propose (*Ulysses'* Model Reader is more narrowly defined than *Superman's*), they offer *less* opportunity for engaging in an interpretation that is not pre-meditated by the text.

It is not only semioticians, however, who see constraint in the text. Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, which downplays the author ('in any actual reading act, the author has dropped out') (*Reader, Text, Poem*, p. 20), starts with a distinction between a text ('signs interpretable as linguistic symbols') and a poem ('the experience shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text') (p. 12). Although she sees reading as more open and imaginative than Riffaterre does, and although she embraces a plurality of criteria for evaluating interpretations, she nonetheless insists on textual constraints (which she distinguishes from the 'fixed standard' implied by the phrase 'system of norms' (p. 129)). To be valid, an interpretation must 'not be contradicted by any element of the text', and must not project anything 'for which there is no verbal basis' (p. 115).

In contrast to theorists of the constraining text are the rhetorical critics who see the implied reader's activities held in check by an author's desire to communicate. For example, Booth's conception of reading, like Burke's, leaves the notion of a guiding author intact. Indeed, although *The Rhetoric of Fiction* is often faulted for its moralism, the fundamental value that motivates Booth's judgements is communication *per se*, and he is consequently less liable to condemn authors whose intentions are morally suspect (an issue into which the theoretical apparatus of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* provides no *entrée*) than those whose guidance is obscured by technical failings.

As we have seen, Booth does not argue that readers ought (much less do) submit unquestioningly to authorial demands; he recognizes the importance of going beyond that to what he calls ‘overstanding’, which might include ‘judging a work by political, moral, psychoanalytical, or metaphysical standards’ (*Critical Understanding*, p. 284). But he believes that readers ought to *begin* by understanding – by recognizing authorial intention – and he urges reader humility in the reader–author exchange. A basic maxim, ironically dubbed the ‘Law of Nonisotropic Psychopoetic Powers’ (‘the law of disparate giftedness’) maintains that

In any act of interpretation, there is a strong probability that the speaker has more gifts to offer in the exchange than the listener . . . On the whole, speakers know more about what they mean, care more about it and take more pains with it, than listeners, and profit in the exchange will depend on a listener’s acknowledging this probability before he offers to become an authority.

(*Critical Understanding*, p. 273)

Although *Before Reading* stresses the politics of interpretive strategies, and more frequently questions traditional literary values, my own procedures incorporate a similar principle: certain kinds of ideological analysis are strengthened if they begin in the reader’s attempt to uncover authorial intent. Thus, for instance, it is possible to describe Natasha’s victimization in *War and Peace* without any reference to authorial norms. But, only if we recognize that for Tolstoy and his intended readers that victimization is ‘worse than invisible’ because it is ‘construed as a reward’, can we come to terms with the full magnitude of what the novel does to women. Unless the actual reader recognizes what role Tolstoy intended for his implied reader, his ‘misogynist text is indistinguishable from feminist irony’ (*Before Reading*, p. 32).

Constraints imposed by authorial intent also figure in the work of Michael Steig, although in a radically different way. Steig, like Bleich and Holland, works with actual readers, whom he believes ‘to a considerable extent do “make meaning”’ – as is evident from the wide variety of their responses. But at the same time, he recognizes that many readers are motivated by a ‘need to understand literary works as other than ourselves’ (*Stories*, p. xi), and the desire to understand what kind of person could create the text at hand often ‘becomes part of the motivation to understand’ (p. 104). Furthermore, readers have a need to ‘stabilize response’, and one way many readers do so is to set ‘boundaries around the range of referentiality the author could have *intended*’. These boundaries are, for Steig ‘necessarily conceptualizations, not hard facts’ (p. 144) – but they become, even so, a central part of his model of reading.

In his explicit grappling with the roles of boundaries and limits, and

especially of authorial intention, Steig is an anomaly; for the most part, critics who deal with real readers are apt to play down the constraints on interpretation. But constraints often enter their systems none the less. Holland's position, for example, at first seems similar to Crosman's: he too rejects texts and authors as controlling factors, and denies the existence of correct interpretation. On closer examination, however, his reader turns out to be less free than Crosman's. In part, the constraints grow out of Holland's commitment to the psychoanalytic principle that the fantasies, defences, and adaptations a reader uses 'to achieve pleasure, unity, and meaning *depend* on his pre-existing personality.' Indeed, at times Holland sounds grimly deterministic: the reader's procedures, he tells us, are grounded in 'the *fatality* of defense and adaptation he brought to the literary experience' (*5 Readers*, p. 40; italics added).

But it is not only psychology that constrains Holland's readers. The objective text may be repressed, but as we will have occasion to witness again, it always returns. For example, while Holland argues against traditional formalism ('a literary work is not a fixed stimulus' (p. 43)), he none the less insists that reading is not 'wholly subjective' because 'every reader has available to him what the writer created – the words-on-the-page, that is, the promptuary (a store of structured language) from which he can build an experience' (p. 286). In Holland's more recent work, the text seems, in fact, to be gaining importance, even to the point of taking an active role in the transactive process of reading: 'In short, a person – an identity – *uses* hypotheses with which to sense the poem. The poem responds to those hypotheses, and the individual *feels* whether it is a favorable or unfavorable response and so closes the loop, preparatory to sending another hypothesis out around it' ('Miller's Wife', p. 442).

The textual constraints built into this promptuary 'do not coerce anyone' (*5 Readers*, p. 286) – at least, not by themselves. But, at least in *5 Readers Reading*, the text itself provides the justification for social coercion. We can see this 'objectivist' threat emerging clearly from Holland's oft-quoted remark about the sentence in 'A Rose for Emily' that describes Emily and her father as a tableau: 'One would not say . . . that a reader . . . who thought the "tableau" described an Eskimo was really responding to the story at all – only pursuing some mysterious inner exploration' (p. 12). That is because Emily cannot be an Eskimo 'without doing violence to the text' (p. 219). The implied warning behind the word 'violence' is expressed even more strongly in his description of what happens to those who take their subjectivity too far: 'One is always free to go to the extreme of total delusion: perceptions dictated entirely by one's inner impulses, wholly unaffected by the world outside. Such a *mode of perception* would provide an idiosyncratic, solipsistic, or

psychotic experience of a literary work' (pp. 286–7). The moral is clear: we all know what can happen to psychotics.

Bleich's approach also bears a superficial resemblance to Crosman's. His subjective vision covers all human knowledge, which he claims 'comes through synthesized interpretations' (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 33). From this general principle follows his specifically literary assumption that 'a work of art or literature must be *rendered so* by a perceiver' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 3). As we have seen, he argues, in contrast to Riffaterre, that this rendering is not controlled by the text, but is a 'wholly subjective process . . . determined by the rules of the personality of the perceiver' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 3). Like Crosman, he denies that subjectivity leads to anarchy – although for somewhat different reasons.

In part, Bleich avoids solipsism because, as we have seen, he posits a level of analysis on which responses are in fact uniform. (At times, Crosman takes this position as well, arguing that there is a "universal man" in each of us'. As a result, different readers who approach *Paradise Lost* in 'relative independence of authority' but who rely on 'the text itself as illuminated by the "inner light" of common human understanding' will perform in substantially similar ways (*Reading Paradise Lost*, pp. 15–16).) In addition, according to Bleich, the 'universal wish to validate at least some of our own feelings by discovering them in others' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 81) leads to community negotiation of individual responses. (Or is it community control? Certainly, there is a hint of coercion in his claims that 'a community of thinkers' serves as 'the final authority' (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 39), and that in his model classroom, it is the 'seriousness of purpose' and sincerity of the reader that serve as the grounding principle of his grading procedures (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 107).) Despite everything, however, the objective text worms its way back into Bleich's system as a control.

On the surface he proclaims the death of objective truth entirely: 'New truth is created by new use of language and a new structure of thought' (*Subjective Criticism*, p. 18). 'No existing standards are necessarily right or wrong' (p. 159). Subsuming the notion of correctness to the notion of 'explanatory adequacy' ('determined solely by the person who asked for the explanation, in negotiation with the explainer' (p. 41)), he comes close to a notion of knowledge as mental hygiene: 'a group opinion is created primarily for the well-being of the group and not for the "truth" of the object of that opinion' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 95). It is from this position that Bleich strikes out at Holland. Since the 'epistemological role' of the constraints of the words on the page is 'trivial', an interpretation of Emily as an Eskimo would, if 'seriously-given', not necessarily lack 'truth value'. 'To moralistically claim violations of the text is only an attempt to say that one's own objectification is more authoritative than someone else's'

(*Subjective Criticism*, p. 112). It is such positions that led Mark Shechner to castigate *Subjective Criticism* as 'a manifesto for the liberation of man from hard data' ('Review', p. 154).

Bleich, however, paradoxically shores up his position with precisely the hard data it is intended to eliminate. It is not only that he uses his psychological generalizations as unassailable facts. More important, his analysis of student responses rests squarely on his assumption of objective agreement about the true nature of the text.

Bleich's literary project is to reveal how the reader's personality emerges in his or her responses. But for some reason, he chooses to do so in terms of deviation from a norm, a neutral background against which what is personal can stand out. For example, he describes the key characteristics of his students' responses in terms of 'the mistakes and distortions' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 24) found in their restatements of the texts they read. To be sure, he is quick to insist that these are not 'errors' (p. 29), but even the notion of a distortion depends on the existence of some verifiable norm that transcends subjective perception; and although it is never clearly articulated, Bleich's norm seems to be a straight, literal reading of the text in question. Indeed, despite his quarrel with Holland, he insists on 'maintenance of the text' (*Readings and Feelings*, p. 21).

Stanley Fish's position on interpretive authority moved from a strongly text-centred theory to what at first looks like yet another position close to Crosman's. In his early 'affective stylistics' stage, he had a clear kinship to Riffaterre: while he disagreed with Riffaterre's interpretive procedures and his privileging of literary language, he agreed both that meaning was an event that happened to the reader (in that sense, readers made meanings), and that the reading was controlled by the text. In the mid-1970s, however, he shifted to a more apparently subjective position: there is no objective text, he insisted, since 'formal units are always a function of the interpretative model one brings to bear' (*Is There a Text*, p. 164 (1976)). Indeed, he proclaims the impossibility of determining objectively whether two texts are different: *Lycidas* and *The Waste Land* are different poems only 'because I have decided that they will be' (p. 170 (1976)).

Fish's revised position collapses numerous traditional distinctions. There is, for instance, no difference left between author and reader, since interpretive strategies are strategies 'not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions' (p. 171 (1976)). Nor is there anything left of the distinctions between response and interpretation (for instance, Bleich's reader response and resymbolization), or between direct and indirect speech acts, or between reading and criticism (see Mailloux, 'Advance'), or between literal and figurative meaning (*Is There a Text*, *passim*, esp. pp. 158–80), or between text and context ('Pragmatism', p. 446). All of these

discarded dualities are, for Fish, variations on a single false claim, that 'it is possible to specify a level at which language correlates with the objective world and from which one can build up to contexts, situations, emotions, biases, and finally, at the outermost and dangerous limits, to literature ...' In 1980 he declared: 'It is not too much to say that everything I write is written against that claim' (p. 97 (1980)).

However, Fish's arguments lead no closer to solipsism or to the indeterminacy of meaning than do Holland's or Bleich's – they do not even lead to a change in practice. He avoids these consequences through his concept of 'interpretive community'. Although there are no facts prior to interpretations, he insists, we do not create *ex nihilo* interpretive strategies for constituting the world. Rather, we all start out situated somewhere, and that situation always brings constraints with it. In particular, we all belong to a community of people who *share* interpretive strategies. Within that context and that community, rational debate is always possible, and a text therefore always has a stable and determinate meaning.

Obviously, context and community can change, bringing new interpretive strategies and hence new textual meanings; but from each new perspective, Fish insists, the text's new meaning appears just as stable and determinate. In the end, the 'practical consequences' of his position are 'none whatever' (p. 370 (1978)). 'Whatever seems to you to be obvious and inescapable is only so within some institution or conventional structure' (p. 370 (1978)); but since you can never get outside such structures, there is always something that *will* appear obvious and inescapable. No matter how much you theorize about beliefs, in other words, you must always inhabit some of them, and you will therefore always have a critical practice available.

Thus, far from liberating the reader, Fish's attacks on textual and authorial constraint serve to illuminate the different kind of imprisonment announced in his book's subtitle: 'The Authority of Interpretive Communities'. A 'new explanation' of the origins of our beliefs does not release us from the hold those beliefs have on us ('Pragmatism', p. 441). In this respect, despite certain superficial similarities, Fish's conception of interpretive communities is quite different from Culler's notion of literary competence and even further from my own notion of interpretive strategies, both of which assume a distinction between the initial perception of the facts of the text and the interpretation made of them. Even though I argue that decisions about interpretive procedure are made before reading, and therefore influence how the text is perceived, I maintain that the facts of the text can nonetheless resist certain interpretations. Fish, in contrast, insists that interpretive strategies actually *produce* the 'facts' in question.

In its strongest form, Fish's theory has generated considerable controversy. Most of the debate has focused on the logic and consistency of his arguments. Many opponents have pointed out that crucial terms remain vague. For instance, although his claims are centred on notions of belief, he never discusses differing kinds and degrees of belief, preferring the reductive (and, according to Walter Davis, 'totally unwarranted' ('Fisher King', p. 679)) assumption that all beliefs are held with the same degree of conviction: 'One believes what one believes, and one does so without reservation' (*Is There a Text*, p. 361 (1976)).

More surprisingly, his grounding principle, the interpretive community, is barely formulated, if not 'wholly undefined' (as Crews suggests ('Criticism without constraint', p. 67)). Fish never even outlines its topography. He therefore never has to confront the possibility that interpretive communities can have internal rifts. That is, as Samuel Weber points out, Fish seems to assume that interpretive communities are unproblematically 'undivided', even though the major crisis confronting literary studies, the professional fears that Fish claims to be assuaging, come precisely from the lack of generally agreed-upon assumptions ('Debt of criticism', p. 35). Nor does Fish seriously consider whether interpretive communities overlap and even include one another. Gerald Graff, for instance, readily agrees with Fish that there is no non-interpretive perception; but he suggests that there is 'a *master*-institution to which different interpretive institutions converge', and that 'there are institutions to which we cannot imagine ourselves not belonging' ('Culture and anarchy', p. 38). To put it another way, certain codes (like grammar) are, as James Sosnoski argues, 'independent of any particular interpretive community. . . . With this distinction in place, one can functionally (though not philosophically) recover the distinction between description and interpretation or between form and content' ('Review', p. 758).

Fish similarly fails to distinguish between the different levels of analysis on which interpretive communities operate. For example, Wollheim accuses Fish of equating two claims: that interpretation determines what *kinds* of facts we recognize; and that interpretive procedures determine the *particular* facts we see. But the two are not the same. Even if an interpretive scheme tells us what sorts of things (biographical information, mythic patterns) are or are not admissible, it does not follow that it can tell us 'what, within the broads limits of admissibility, is actually the case' ('Professor', p. 65).

The logic of Fish's argument has been assailed not only for its vagueness; it has also been widely accused of failing to explain even those 'facts' that he himself sees – in particular, the ability of people to change their minds and move from one interpretive community to another. Since facts are the products of interpretations, Fish argues,

change occurs via persuasion rather than demonstration, and it occurs in discrete steps: there is always only one interpretation in force at a time. Thus, as Weber points out, Fish glosses over the '*intrinsically disruptive . . . agonistic process of interpretation itself*' ('Debt of criticism', p. 37). In addition, deep theoretical feedback infects Fish just as it does Bleich and Holland: since any given listener or reader will always interpret (that is, produce) the argument of the critic from the perspective of his or her *own* interpretive community, it is not clear how a different perspective could persuade the listener to change – or even how it could be recognized.

Finally, his arguments inevitably resurrect precisely that distinction they are intended to kill off – the distinction between objective fact and interpretation. For example, in discussing the 'classic instance of a Kuhnian paradigm shift' that took place within Chomskian linguistics, he points out that Chomsky's students were able to challenge the model 'by pointing to data that could not be accommodated within those assumptions' – thus asserting the existence of facts independent of assumptions (p. 362 (1978)). Graff makes an even more damaging charge: that 'his own account seems to require' that texts be objective entities ('Culture and anarchy', p. 37). We can witness this return of the repressed text in his famous anecdote about his class in seventeenth-century religious poetry. Starting with a bibliographical list left on the board from a previous class, Fish had drawn a frame around it and told his students that it was a religious poem. Because facts follow from assumptions, he insists, the list in fact *became* such a poem, which his students were easily able to interpret. Curiously, however, their interpretations skipped over one name ('Hayes'), because, Fish remarks, 'of all the words in the poem it proved the most recalcitrant to interpretation' (p. 325 (1978)). But a detail can be recalcitrant to interpretation only if it *precedes* it, and this is precisely what his scheme does not allow for.

Fish has been criticized not only for his logic, but for his politics as well. The authority of interpretive communities, in Wollheim's words, serves 'to re-mystify the institutions of learning' that had been under attack by student radicals in the 1960s ('Professor', p. 60). Walter Davis argues similarly: Fish's theories result in 'permanent suppression' of self-critical inquiry ('Offending the profession', p. 710); and Fish is the 'functionary' of 'a lovely ideological superstructure' the purpose of which is 'to conceal what goes on in the back rooms, and [to enforce] conditions of discourse that confine critique to conceptual problems', thereby eliminating any opportunity 'for the public display of dirty laundry – or hands' ('Offending the profession,' p. 712). In this context, it may be significant that Fish uses his theories of interpretive communities to advocate a conservative position on 'professionalism' ('Profession despise thyself')

and to oppose such institution-reforming practices as blind submissions to literary journals ('No Bias').

The turn to the reader and its consequences for literary studies

In general, then, the various reader-oriented theorists discussed here have produced neither the interpretive anarchy feared by Abrams, nor a unified body of work that can readily be labelled an 'advance' in knowledge according to traditional paradigms. Furthermore, Fish, as we have seen, insists that his theory – indeed, theory in general – 'has no consequences' ('Pragmatism', p. 442) (although as his argument progresses, that strong claim is diluted considerably). None the less, the theoretical turn toward readers has had an important impact on literary studies, although its full extent may not be known for some time.

Holland claims, in *5 Readers Reading*, that 'Nothing in this study will support the idea or suggest that superficial resemblances of gender, age, culture, or class . . . have any important role in and of themselves in response' (p. 205). Because his presumption of individual unity, as we have seen, limits his ability to see how readers are socially constructed, his claim is empirically suspect. In any case, it remains a minority position. Indeed, the focus on differences of interpretive strategies among different readers – regardless of how they are explained or how they are resolved – has encouraged more serious examination of the context of reading, and of how such factors as history, class, race, and gender intersect with the process of reading. For instance, in *Telling the Truth*, Barbara Foley, a Marxist scholar who would not consider herself a reader-critic as such, has found the notion of the reader–author contract valuable as a way into problems of literary history. Janice Radway, as we have seen, has been able to look at the readings performed by lower middle-class women whose activities are not traditionally considered by literary scholars. Just as Judith Fetterley has proposed productive strategies for reading as a women, Jean Kennard has proposed others for lesbian reading – in particular, what she calls 'polar reading' in which 'we redefine aspects of ourself through contrast with the opposite aspects in a fictional other which we have temporarily experienced' ('Ourself behind ourself', p. 70).

In addition, at least in the United States, the debates about the grounding of interpretive authority have encouraged parallel debates about the grounding of evaluative criteria as well, and have thus contributed significantly to ongoing discussion of the canon. Once you entertain the belief that readers participate in the construction of meaning (even if that participation is partial or constrained), then the canon can no longer be viewed entirely as a consequence of the inherent qualities of texts. Thus, for instance, Annette Kolodny – again not a reader-critic as

such – has used aspects of reader theory to help explain the dominance of male texts in the canon, arguing that the inexperience of male readers in the traditions of female writing makes them incapable of reading many women's texts. A similar argument is developed in *Before Reading*, where I point out the gender bias in reading strategies that have, before now, been invisible or viewed as neutral. Similarly, Jane Tompkins, using Fish's notions of reading in a more politically and historically charged way than his, is able to show how the reputation of Hawthorne's work is 'a function of the circumstances in which it was read' (*Sensational Designs*, p. 5) and to defend the novels of such writers as Harriet Beecher Stowe, demonstrating both the historical conditions that allowed their initial popularity, and the circumstances that made readers dismiss them later on.

Finally, reader-oriented theory has helped reformulate the self-conception of literary criticism itself. While Mary Louise Pratt, writing in 1980, faulted Anglo-American reader-critics for blindly accepting questionable notions of literary competence, more recent critics have started to examine the politics of those institutions (including, of course, academic institutions) by which such competence is transmitted and judged. Although Radway herself (in part because of her commitment to the Fishian principle that there is no way to create a hierarchy of value among competing interpretive communities) would not agree to this formulation, her study of the romance does have the subversive effect of suggesting that the reading strategies taught in school can actually distort the process of reading. Steven Mailloux has begun to develop what he calls 'rhetorical hermeneutics' – a study of 'acts of persuasion' in the context of the 'shared and disputed assumptions, questions, assertions, and so forth' against which they take place (*Rhetorical Power*, p. 17). Mailloux has moved from what he calls the 'idealist' position developed at the end of *Interpretive Conventions* (the position that 'meaning is made, not found') (*Rhetorical Power*, p. 5) to a neo-pragmatist anti-foundationalist belief that theory (whether based in the reader or based in the text) can never ground correct interpretation. Despite Mailloux's debt to many of Fish's insights, however, this does not lead him to follow Fish, Knapp, and Michaels in their abandonment of theory. Although theory cannot provide general laws of interpretation, it *can* offer historical narratives. Mailloux demonstrates the value of such narratives with a detailed discussion of *Huckleberry Finn*. He is not interested in interpreting the novel or even placing it in the historical context in which it was written. Rather, he demonstrates how the multiple social and cultural contexts in which the novel was read impinged on what sorts of issues could or could not be raised about it. His book ends with a strong defence of the anti-professionalism of the Left, a plea to reform the institution of literary studies so that it becomes 'cultural studies, with culture being

conceptualized as the network of rhetorical practices that are extensions and manipulations of other practices – social, political, and economic’ (*Rhetorical Power*, p. 165).

Reader criticism may not be a movement, and it may not have a consistent program, but it has certainly altered the terms in which critical conversations are framed. Indeed, given its impact among theorists of all persuasions – semioticians, Marxists, feminists, deconstructionists, rhetoricians – the turn toward the reader may well be the single most profound shift in critical perspective of the post-war years.

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Roland Barthes

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