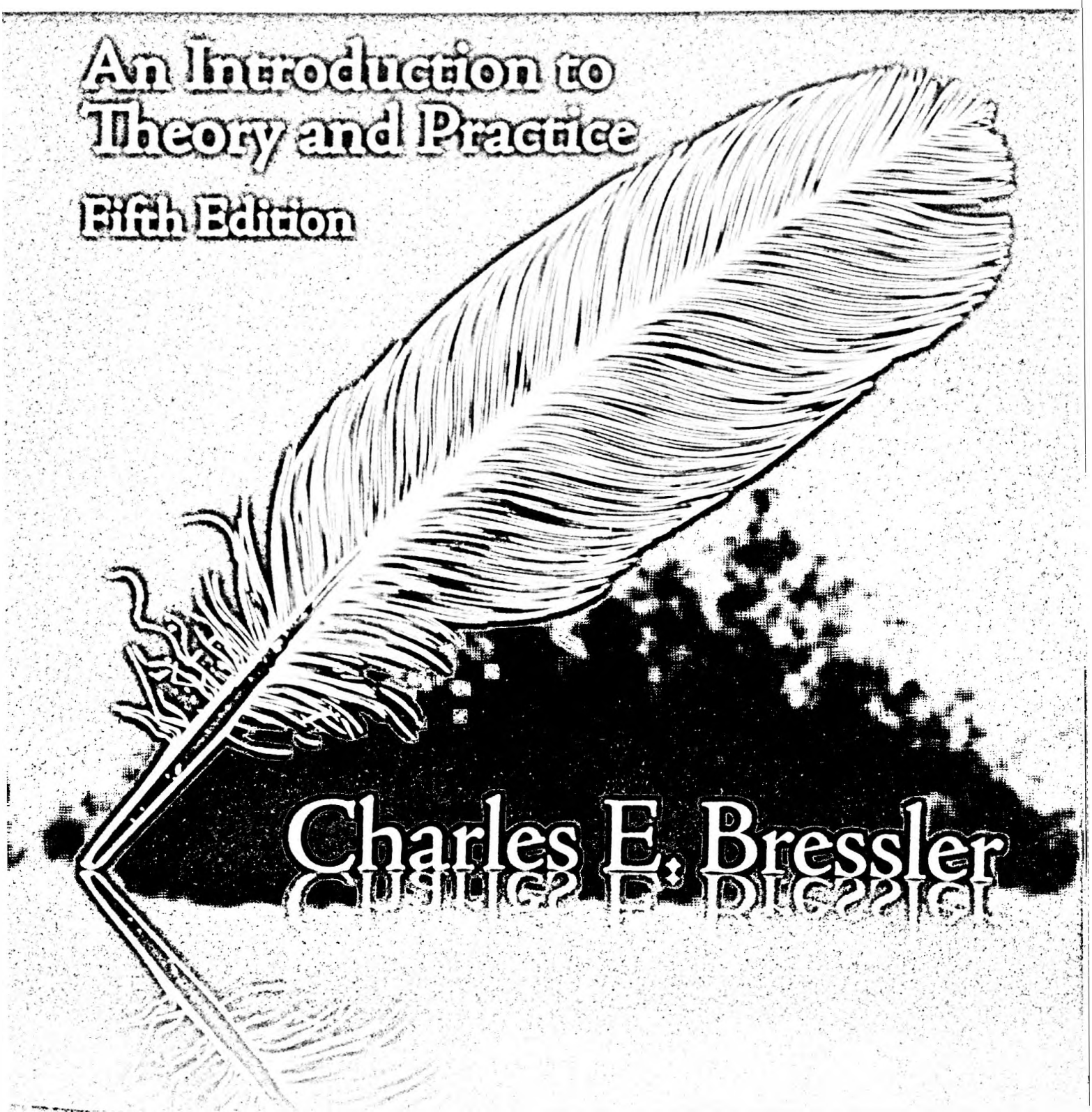
LITERARY CRITICISM

SECOND PRINTING

An Introduction to Theory and Practice

Fifth Edition



Charles E. Bressler



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LITERARY CRITICISM

An Introduction to Theory and Practice

FIFTH EDITION

Charles E. Bressler
Indiana Wesleyan University

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FOREWORD

The dramatist, poet, novelist, and critic Oscar Wilde declared that the artist is the creator of beautiful things and that "The critic is [one] who can translate into another manner or a new material [one's] impression of beautiful things . . . When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with him[her]self." Accordingly, it is the literary critic who transacts with the text, explores historical contexts, actively reads, and joyously participates in numerous other modes of "translating" the beautiful thing of literature.

For example, the French poet, novelist, and playwright Victor Hugo, wrote, "To learn to read is to kindle a fire; every syllable spelled sparkles." Upon reading this line, a Structuralist critic analyzes the metaphors of fire and sparkles; a Marxist critic contemplates the class structures that may be influencing the heightened value of literacy, while a Deconstructionist asks if the syllables actually spelled the word *sparkles.*

Literary theory consists of questions: What does class conflict have to do with the text? Does the Lacanian mirror stage of development really play a role in the text? How much do the reader and the type of reader influence the interpretation of the text? Is the text an entity in itself? Do the author's intentions matter when attempting to extract the meaning of a text? Each of these questions and still others appropriate to textual interpretation represent diverse perspectives for approaching a text. But which questions can work together? And from where do such questions come?

Unavoidably and necessarily, the art of literature has incurred numerous schools of criticism that continue to grow and multiply where more and more questions are asked by still more theorists. Charles Bressler's fifth edition of *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* offers an in-depth understanding of these major schools of criticism in this ever-evolving field. For a person having no experience in the literary field, *Literary Criticism* presents the ubiquitous and sometimes difficult terminology of the various schools of criticism and explains the use of terms, concepts, and philosophies in ways that the beginning critic is able to understand and appreciate.

For the experienced critic, on the other hand, Bressler's *Literary Criticism* recognizes new theorists and critical terminology for each theoretical approach and discusses each of the schools in ways that will better a scholar's previous comprehension. Of particular interest to the veteran scholar, Bressler's text now includes four new chapters and up-to-date, detailed revisions of all chapters devoted to individual schools of criticism.

Bressler begins his text with a chapter defining *literature*, *theory*, and *criticism*, followed by a chapter that surveys critical history from Plato in the fourth century BCE to Mikhail Bakhtin in the twentieth century CE. After forming a foundation for literary theory, Bressler then focuses each subsequent chapter on a major school of criticism, arranging them in order of their chronological births. Accordingly, each chapter is subdivided into the major theorists, their philosophies, and terminology derived from the primary and secondary texts.

This fifth edition of *Literary Criticism* also contains revised and updated chapters on Russian Formalism and New Criticism, Reader-oriented Criticism, Modernity and Postmodernism (Structuralism and Deconstruction), Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminism, Marxism, and Cultural Poetics and New Historicism.

Some of the most exciting additions to this new edition are the separate chapters on Postcolonialism, African-American Criticism, Queer Theory, and Ecocriticism. To date, this is the only introductory text to literary criticism that contains a separate chapter devoted to Ecocriticism, presenting quintessential background information to the rising theory as well as key questions posited by many ecocritics.

In addition to the theoretical material, Bressler uses Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" to illustrate how to use literary theory to interpret a text. To apply each theoretical stance to other texts, Bressler also provides a list of questions from that chapter's theoretical perspective to highlight the theory's concepts on a practical level.

Also new to this fifth edition are five scholarly essays on literary theory and criticism that appear in the **Readings** section at the back of the text. Included in this section are foundational essays by such critics as Cleanth Brooks and Jacques Derrida.

Over the past fifteen years, Bressler's text has risen to one of the best-selling introductory texts for literary criticism in the United States. Students and teachers alike have discovered Bressler's deep yet understandable approach to the many abstract and difficult theoretical concepts of literary theory and criticism. I believe this new fifth edition offers not only an understandable, critical perspective of the complex realm of literary theory, but also an approachable source for applying theory to text and classroom.

Z. A. Rhone
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TO THE READER

Like the first four editions, this new edition of *Literary Criticism* is designed as a supplemental text for introductory courses in literature, literary criticism, and other courses in the humanities, be they undergraduate or graduate. In all five editions, the purpose of this text has remained the same: to enable students to approach literature from a variety of practical and theoretical perspectives and to equip them with a theoretical and a practical understanding of how critics develop their interpretations. The book's overall aim is to take the mystery out of working with and interpreting texts. My hope is that this particular text will allow students to join in the conversations taking place at the various literary tables around the world.

As in the four previous editions, this fifth edition holds to several key premises. First, I assume that there is no such thing as an "innocent" reading of a text. Whether our responses to texts are emotional and spontaneous or well reasoned and highly structured, all our interpretations are rooted in underlying factors that cause us to respond in a particular way to a particular text. What elicits these responses and how a reader makes sense of a text are what really matters. Knowing literary theory allows us to analyze both our initial and all further responses to any text and to question our beliefs, our values, our feelings, and eventually our overall interpretation of a text at hand. To understand why we respond to texts in certain ways, we must first understand literary theory and its practical application, literary criticism.

Second, because our responses to texts have theoretical bases, I believe that all readers have a literary theory. Consciously or unconsciously, we, as readers, have developed a mindset that provides us with certain expectations when reading various kinds of texts. Somehow we usually make sense of any text we are reading. The methods we use to frame both our private (personal) and our public interpretations involve us directly in literary theory and criticism, automatically making us practicing literary critics, whether we know it or not.

My third premise rests on the observation that each reader's literary theory and accompanying methodology (i.e., literary criticism) is either conscious or unconscious, most nearly complete or incomplete, informed or ill-informed, unified or eclectic. Because an unconscious, incomplete, ill-informed, and eclectic literary theory more frequently than not leads to illogical, unsound, and haphazard interpretations, I believe that a well-defined, logical, and clearly articulated literary theory will enable readers to develop their own methods of interpreting texts—their personal hermeneutics—and

help them as readers to order, clarify, and justify their appraisals of any text in a consistent manner.

Unfortunately many readers cannot articulate their own literary theory and have little or no knowledge of the history and development of the ever-evolving principles of literary criticism. The goal of this text is to introduce such students and readers to literary theory and criticism, to its historical development, and to the various theoretical positions or schools of criticism that will enable them as readers to make conscious, informed, and well-thought-out choices about their own methods of interpretation.

But why a new edition? Like many other academic studies, literary criticism is an ever-developing discipline. Since the fourth edition of this text, much creative scholarship in literary theory and criticism has been written, published, and debated. This new edition highlights many of these concerns developed by literary theorists and allows you, the reader, to participate in the cutting-edge discussions taking place in such areas as cultural poetics, cultural studies, postcolonialism, African-American criticism, queer theory, and ecocriticism. In addition, this fifth edition includes new critical terms that will help readers understand more fully the various concepts being discussed by the advocates of the different schools of literary criticism.

Like its predecessors, this new edition introduces students to the basic concerns of literary theory in Chapter 1, which now includes a more detailed discussion of the nature and concerns of theory and criticism. Chapter 2 places literary theory and criticism in historical perspective, beginning with the writings of Plato and ending with one of the giants of literary criticism of the twentieth century, Mikhail Bakhtin. Chapters 3 through 9 have been revised, adding new terminology where appropriate. Each of these chapters presents the major schools of criticism that have been developed and continue to develop in the twenty-first century: Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Reader-oriented Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminism, Marxism, New Historicism or Cultural Poetics, and Cultural Studies. In the fourth edition, Chapter 10 covered three schools of criticism. In this new edition, each of these schools has its own chapter: Chapter 10 details Postcolonialism; Chapter 11, African-American Criticism; and Chapter 12, Queer Theory. In addition, a new chapter has been added that highlights one of the most recent and ever-developing theories, Ecocriticism, found in Chapter 13.

To maintain consistency and for ease of study, each of the chapters is identically organized. We begin with a brief Introductory Section that is followed by the Historical Development of each school of criticism. The Assumptions Section, which sets forth the philosophical principles on which each school of criticism is based, then follows. Next comes the Methodology Section, which serves as a how-to manual for explaining the techniques used by the various schools of criticism to formulate their interpretations of texts based on their philosophical assumptions.

After the Methodology Section, a newly revised Questions for Analysis Section appears in Chapters 3 through 13. This feature provides students with key questions to ask of a text in order to view that text from the perspective of the school of criticism under discussion. Some of the questions also ask students to apply their newfound knowledge to Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," a copy of which can be found at the back of the book. Following this section in Chapters 3 through 13, I have included a Critiques and Responses passage that explains the key concepts of each school of criticism. Included in this section are concerns raised by other schools of criticism that do not necessarily agree with the assumptions of the school under discussion. By adding and updating this section to each chapter, you, the reader, will be better able to join in the discussions and debates concerning which theories and practices you will ultimately use in your interpretive methodology.

All chapters in this new edition have undergone careful revision and editing. In every chapter key terms appear in boldface type and are included in the updated glossary that appears at the back of the book. Because *Literary Criticism* is an introductory text, the explanations of the various schools of criticism should be viewed not as exhaustive, but as a first step toward developing an understanding of some rather difficult and at times provocative concepts, principles, and methodologies for textual analysis.

Toward the end of the text, readers will discover a new section: **Readings on Literary Criticism.** Included in this section are five primary scholarly essays that highlight different schools of criticism. For example, readers will find Jacques Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" that launched deconstruction theory in America. By including these essays, readers will now have direct access to scholarly works that have helped shape literary theory and criticism, both historically and at the present time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Because I believe in the intertextuality of texts, I readily acknowledge that the creation of this text and its previous editions involves an intricate web of relationships with many people. First, to those students who enrolled in my literary criticism classes, I say a huge thank you. Your thoughtful questions, class presentations and discussions, and seemingly countless essays have all helped me clarify my thinking about many complex theoretical issues. Without you, this book could not have been written.

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Without the help and encouragement of my thoughtful and gifted students of the John Wesley Honors College, my colleagues, my friends, and my family, this book could not have been written. Any errors in this edition, however, are solely mine.

Charles E. Bressler
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1

DEFINING CRITICISM, THEORY, AND LITERATURE

Criticism should be a casual conversation.

W. H. Auden, *The Table Talk of W. H. Auden*

LISTENING TO A CONVERSATION

Imagine for a moment that you are sitting at the food court of a local shopping mall. Your seat is front and center, the chair located closest to the mall's walkway where all the shoppers have to pass you by as they continue seeking out those bargains while chatting with their friends. Sipping on your energy-boosting fruit drink, you begin reading your copy of the local newspaper. As you read, you cannot help but overhear a conversation between a middle-aged woman and her teenage son as they stop in front of you:

"Mom, can I have five dollars to go to the arcade while you shop for shoes for your dinner party next week?"

"No! I want you to come with me to the store to help me pick out my new shoes. I want to buy something a little daring, and I need your support."

"But, Mom, what do I know about shoes for you? I promised to meet some of my friends at the arcade around noon, and it is already 12:49!"

"Tim, I really want you to come, but if you want to go to the arcade, just go. Here's the money."

As you look up, the smiling teen grabs the bills from his mother's hand and saunters cockily to the arcade. As his mom is walking away with a somewhat saddened look on her face, you wonder how she is feeling. Is she disappointed? Angry? Hurt? Did she really expect her son to join her as she tried on pair after pair of shoes? Should she even have asked him to go with her in the first place? And what about Tim? Is he a spoiled brat? Does he hold a part-time job after school? Is he an only child, or is he the first or the

last born of many? These and similar questions keep popping into your head as you watch both mother and son separate and travel in opposite directions.

By listening to this parent-child conversation, you became, in a real sense, a part of it. For a moment the concerns of the two participants became part of your world. You looked at them, evaluated their social positions, thought about their feelings, and conjectured about the social structure of their family. And even your personal feelings were temporarily affected, for you observed that as Tim walked away, a saddened look appeared on his mother's face. The conversation being over, you then returned to your reading of the newspaper. Briefly, however, you became an observer of this mother and son's story. As if they were in a story, you "read" not only what was said, but what was left unsaid, for you imagined their feelings, their desires, and the results of their interaction. You filled in the gaps about their characters while simultaneously developing them not as they really were, but as you personally imagined them to be. Being an outsider, you quickly became a participant in the actions of their tale, asking questions about the nature of the characters, the events of their story, and their and your emotional responses to the story line. Although you were not literally reading a text, you asked the same kinds of questions that a literary critic asks when reading a work of fiction. Like a literary critic, you became an evaluator; an interpreter; and for a moment, a participant in the story itself.

As you overheard the voices of the two characters—the mother and son—in their story, similarly literary critics eavesdrop on the multiple conversations in literary works. To help them articulate and analyze their eavesdropping, critics assign names to the various elements of the multiple conversations of which they become a part: author, reader, narrator, narratee, and so forth. One such critic, the Russian writer, essayist, and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) coined the term **dialogic heteroglossia** ("many voices in multiple conversations") to explain the various conversations occurring in one such literary genre, the novel. All genres, however, have developed such technical vocabulary to explain not only their constituent elements but also avenues to discovering their meanings.

Let us now eavesdrop on another conversation taking place about a short story.

EAVESDROPPING ON A LITERATURE CLASSROOM

Having assigned her literature class Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and knowing O'Connor's canon and her long list of curious protagonists, Dr. Lisa Toland could not anticipate whether her students would greet her with excitement, silence, bewilderment, or frustration when asked to discuss this short story. Her curiosity would soon be

satisfied, for as she stood before the class, she asked a seemingly simple, direct question: "What do you believe O'Connor is trying to tell us in this story? In other words, how do you, as readers, interpret this text?"

Although some students stared out the window while others suddenly found the covers of their anthologies fascinating, a few raised their hands. Given a nod from Dr. Toland, Alice was the first to respond. "I believe O'Connor is trying to tell us the state of the family in rural Georgia during the 1950s. Just look at how the children, June Star and John Wesley, behave. They don't respect their grandmother. In fact, they mock her."

"But she deserves to be mocked," interrupted Peter. "Her life is one big act. She wants to act like a lady—to wear white cotton gloves and carry a purse—but she really cares only for herself. She is selfish, self-centered, and arrogant."

"That may be," responded Karen, "but I think the real message of O'Connor's story is not about family or one particular character, but about a philosophy of life. O'Connor uses the Misfit to articulate her personal view of life. When the Misfit says Jesus has thrown 'everything off balance,' O'Connor is really asking each of her readers either to choose his or her own way of life or to follow the teachings of Jesus. In effect, O'Connor is saying we all have a choice: to live for ourselves or to live for and through others."

"I don't think we should bring Christianity or any other religion into the story," said George. "By analyzing O'Connor's individual words—words like *tall, dark,* and *deep*—and noting how often she repeats them and in what context, we can deduce that O'Connor's text, not O'Connor herself or her view of life, is melancholy and a bit dark. But to equate O'Connor's personal philosophy about life with the meaning of this particular story is somewhat silly."

"But we can't forget that O'Connor is a woman," said Betty, "and an educated one at that! Her story has little to do with an academic or pie-in-the-sky, meaningless philosophical discussion, but a lot to do with being a woman. Being raised in the South, O'Connor would know and would have experienced prejudice because she is female. And as we all know, the Southern male's opinion of women is that they are to be kept 'barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen,' and to be as nondescript as Bailey's wife is in this story. Unlike all the other characters, we don't even know this woman's name. How much more nondescriptive could O'Connor be? O'Connor's message is simple: Women are oppressed and suppressed. If they open their mouths, if they have an opinion, and if they voice that opinion, they will end up like the grandmother, with a bullet in their head."

"I don't think that's her point at all," said Barb. "I do agree that she is writing from personal experience about the South, but her main point is about prejudice itself—prejudice against African Americans. Through the voice of the grandmother, we see the Southern lady's opinion of African Americans: They are inferior to whites, uneducated, poor, and basically ignorant. O'Connor's main point is that we are all equal."

"Yes, I agree," said Mike. "But if we look at this story in the context of all the other stories we have read this semester, I see a theme we have often discussed: appearance versus reality. This is O'Connor's main point. The grandmother acts like a lady—someone who cares about others—but inwardly she cares only for herself. Basically, she's a hypocrite."

"I disagree. In fact, I disagree with everybody," shouted Daniel. "I like the grandmother. She reminds me of my grandmother. O'Connor's grandmother is a bit self-centered, but whose old grandmother isn't? Like my grandma, O'Connor's grandmother likes to be around her grandchildren, to read and to play with them. She's funny and she has spunk. And she even likes cats."

"But, Dr. Toland, can we ever know what Flannery O'Connor really thinks about this story?" asked Jessica. "After all, she's dead, and she didn't write an essay telling us what the story actually means. And since she never tells us its meaning, can't the story have more than one meaning?"

Dr. Toland instantly realized that Jessica's query—Can a story have multiple meanings?—is a pivotal question not only for English professors and their students but also for anyone who reads any text.

CAN A TEXT HAVE MORE THAN ONE INTERPRETATION?

A quick glance at the discussion of O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" in Dr. Toland's classroom reveals that not all readers interpret texts in the same way. In fact, all of the eight students who voiced their understandings of the story gave fundamentally different interpretations. Was only one of these eight interpretations correct and the remaining seven wrong? If so, how can one arrive at the correct interpretation? Put another way, if there is only one correct interpretation of a text, what are the **hermeneutical principles** (the rules of interpretation) readers must use to discover this interpretation? Should each of the eight students attempt to reconstruct the intentions O'Connor held while writing her story or the meaning her story had for her readers in the 1950s (**hermeneutics of recovery**)? Or should each student attempt to examine O'Connor's unspoken but implied assumptions concerning politics, sexuality, religion, linguistics, and a host of other topics (**hermeneutics of suspicion**)? By so doing, O'Connor's work can then have multiple interpretations. Are all of these various and often contradictory interpretations valid? Can and should each interpretation be considered a satisfactory and legitimate analysis of the text? In other words, can a text mean anything a reader declares it to mean, or are there guiding principles for interpreting a text that must be followed if a reader is to arrive at a valid interpretation? And who can declare that one's interpretation is valid or legitimate? English professors? Professional critics? Published scholars? Any reader?

Need a reader, however, be thinking of any of these particulars when reading a text? Can't one simply enjoy a novel without considering its interpretation? Need one be able to state the work's theme, discuss its structure, or analyze its tone to enjoy the actual act of reading the work itself?

These and similar questions are the domain of **literary criticism:** the act of studying, analyzing, interpreting, evaluating, and enjoying a work of art. At first glance, the study of literary criticism may appear daunting and formidable. Jargon such as **hermeneutics, Aristotelian poetics, metaphysics of presence, deconstruction,** and many other intimidating terms confront the would-be **literary critic.** Nevertheless, the actual process or act of literary criticism is not as ominous as it may first appear.

HOW TO BECOME A LITERARY CRITIC

When the students in Dr. Toland's class were discussing O'Connor's short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," each of them was directly responding to the instructor's initial question: What do you believe O'Connor is trying to tell us in and through this story? Although not all responses were radically different, each student viewed the story from a unique perspective. For example, some students expressed a liking for the grandmother, but others thought her a selfish, arrogant woman. Still others believed O'Connor was voicing a variety of philosophical, social, and cultural concerns, such as the place of women and African Americans in Southern society, or adherence to tenets of Christianity as the foundation for one's view of life, or the structure of the family in rural Georgia in the 1950s. All had an opinion about and, therefore, an interpretation of O'Connor's short story.

When Dr. Toland's students stated their personal interpretations of O'Connor's text, they had become practicing literary critics. All of them had already interacted with the story, thinking about their likes and dislikes of the various characters; their impressions of the setting, plot, and structure; and their overall assessment of the story itself, whether that assessment was a full-fledged interpretation that seeks to explain every facet of the text or simply bewilderment as to the story's overall meaning. None of the students, however, had had formal training in literary criticism. None knew the somewhat complicated jargon (**discourse**) of literary theory. And none were acquainted with any of the formal and informal schools of literary criticism.

What each student had done was to have read the story. The reading process itself produced within the students an array of responses, taking the form of questions, statements, opinions, and feelings evoked by the text. It is these responses coupled with the text itself that are the concerns of literary criticism and theory.

Although these students may need to master the terminology, the many philosophical approaches, and the diverse methodologies of formal literary criticism to become trained literary critics, they automatically became literary critics as they read and thought about O'Connor's text. They needed no formal training in literary criticism or working understanding of literary theory. By mastering the concepts of formal literary criticism and theory, however, these students, like all readers, can become critical readers who are better able to understand and articulate their own reactions and analyze those of others to any given text.

WHAT IS LITERARY CRITICISM?

Matthew Arnold, a nineteenth-century literary critic, describes literary criticism as "A disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." Implicit in this definition is that literary criticism is a disciplined activity that attempts to describe, study, analyze, justify, interpret, and evaluate a work of art. By necessity, Arnold would argue, this discipline attempts to formulate aesthetic and methodological principles on which the critic can evaluate a text. Anyone who attempts to evaluate texts in this fashion is a literary critic, a term derived from two Greek words, *krino,* meaning "to judge" and *krites,* meaning "a judge or jury person." A literary critic, or *kritikos,* is, therefore, a "judge of literature." The first recorded such judge is the fourth century BCE teacher Philitas, who arrived in Alexandria in 305 BCE to tutor a child who would become King Ptolemy II. When judging literature, Philitas was actively engaged in the disciplined activities of literary criticism.

When we consider its function and its relationship to texts, literary criticism is not usually considered a discipline in and of itself, for it must be related to something else—that is, a work of art. Without the work of art, the activity of criticism cannot exist. And it is through this discerning activity of criticism that we can knowingly and deliberately explore the questions that help define our humanity, critique our culture, evaluate our actions and feelings, or simply increase our appreciation and enjoyment of both a literary work and our fellow human beings.

When analyzing a text, literary critics ask basic questions such as these about the philosophical, psychological, functional, and descriptive nature of the text itself:

- Does a text have only one correct meaning?
- Is a text always didactic; that is, must a reader learn something from every text?
- Can a text be read only for enjoyment?
- Does a text affect each reader in the same way?

- How is a text influenced by the culture of its author and the culture in which it is written?
- What part or function does gender play in the writing or the reading of a text?
- How do our personal feelings affect our interpretation of a text?
- Can a text become a catalyst for change in a given culture?

Since the time of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle and continuing to the present day, critics and readers have been hotly debating the answers to these and similar questions. By asking questions of O'Connor's or any other text and by contemplating answers, we, too, can participate in this ongoing conversation. We can question, for example, the grandmother's motives in O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" for wanting to take her cat on the family's vacation. Or we can ask if the presence of the Misfit and his companions is the primary reason the grandmother experiences her **epiphany.** No matter what question we may ask concerning O'Connor's text, we are participating in the ongoing debate of the value and enjoyment of O'Connor's short story while simultaneously engaging in literary criticism and functioning as practical literary critics.

Traditionally, literary critics involve themselves in either theoretical or practical criticism. **Theoretical criticism** formulates the theories, principles, and tenets of the nature and value of art. By citing general aesthetic and moral principles of art, theoretical criticism provides the necessary framework for practical criticism. **Practical criticism** (also known as **applied criticism**) applies the theories and tenets of theoretical criticism to a particular work. Using the theories and principles of theoretical criticism, the **practical critic** defines the standards of taste and explains, evaluates, or justifies a particular piece of literature. A further distinction is made between the practical critic who posits that there is only one theory or set of principles a critic may use when evaluating a literary work—the **absolutist critic**—and the **relativistic critic,** one who uses various and even contradictory theories in critiquing a text. The basis for either kind of critic, or any form of criticism, is literary theory. Without theory, practical criticism could not exist.

WHAT IS LITERARY THEORY?

When reading O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," we necessarily interact with the text, asking many specific, text-related questions and, oftentimes, rather personal ones as well. For example, such questions as these may concern us, the readers:

- What kind of person is the grandmother? Is she like my grandmother or any grandmother I know?

- What is the function or role of June Star? John Wesley? Bailey? The children's mother?
- Why was the grandmother taking Pitty Sing, the cat, on the family vacation?
- What is the significance of the restaurant scene at The Tower?
- Right before she is shot, what does the grandmother recognize about the Misfit? What is the significance of this recognition?

Such questions immediately involve us in practical criticism. What we tend to forget during the reading of O'Connor's short story or any other text is that we have already read other literary works (**intertextuality**). Our response to any text—or the principles of practical criticism we apply to it—is largely a conditioned or socially constructed one; that is, how we arrive at meaning in fiction is, in part, determined by our experiences. Consciously or unconsciously, we have developed a mind-set or framework that accommodates our expectations when reading a novel, short story, poem, or any other type of literature. In addition, what we choose to value or uphold as good or bad, moral or immoral, beautiful or ugly within a given text actually depends on this ever-evolving framework. When we can clearly articulate our personal philosophical framework when reading a text and explain how this mind-set directly influences our values and aesthetic judgments about a text, we are well on our way to developing a coherent, unified **literary theory**—the assumptions (conscious or unconscious) that undergird our understanding and interpretation of **language**, the ways we construct meaning, and our understanding of art, culture, aesthetics, and ideologies. Whereas literary criticism involves our analysis of a text, literary theory concerns itself with our understanding of the ideas, concepts, and intellectual assumptions upon which rests our actual literary critique.

Because anyone who responds to a text is already a practicing literary critic and because practical criticism is rooted in the reader's preconditioned expectations (his or her mind-set) when actually reading a text, every reader espouses some kind of literary theory. Each reader's theory may be conscious or unconscious, whole or partial, informed or ill informed, eclectic or unified. An incomplete, unconscious, and therefore, unclear literary theory more frequently than not leads to illogical, unsound, and haphazard interpretations. On the other hand, a well-defined, logical, and clearly articulated theory enables readers to develop a method by which to establish principles that enable them to justify, order, and clarify their own appraisals of a text in a consistent manner.

A better understanding of literary theory can be gained by investigating the etymology of the word *theory* itself. Derived from the Greek word *theoria*, the word *theory* means a "view or perspective of the Greek stage." Literary theory, then, offers to us a view of life, an understanding of why we interpret texts the way we do. Consider the various places in the theater that we, the audience, may sit. Depending on our seats—whether close to the

stage, far back, to the far left, to the far right, or in the middle row—our view and, therefore, our interpretation of the events taking place on the stage will alter. Literary theory figuratively and literally asks where we are "sitting" when we are reading a text. What exactly is influencing us during the reading process? Is it our culture? Is it our understanding of the nature of literature itself? Is it our political, religious, or social views? Is it our family background? These and similar questions (and their answers) will directly and indirectly and consciously and unconsciously be affecting our interpretation and our enjoyment, or lack thereof, of a text. To be able to articulate such underlying assumptions about how we read texts will enable us, the readers, to establish for ourselves a lucid and logical practical criticism.

A well-articulated literary theory also assumes that an innocent reading of a text or a sheerly emotional or spontaneous reaction to a work does not exist because literary theory questions the assumptions, beliefs, and feelings of readers, asking *why* they respond to a text in a certain way. In a very real sense, literary theory causes us to question our commonsense interpretation of a text, asking us to probe beneath our initial responses. According to a consistent literary theory, a simple emotional or intuitive response to a text does not explain the underlying factors that caused such a reaction. What elicits that response, or how the reader constructs meaning through or with the text, is what matters.

MAKING MEANING FROM TEXT

How we as readers construct meaning through or with a text depends on the mental framework each of us has developed and continues to develop concerning the nature of reality. This framework or **worldview** consists of the assumptions or presuppositions that we all hold (either consciously or unconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world. For example, we all struggle to find answers to such questions as these:

- What is the basis of morality or ethics?
- What is the meaning of human history?
- What happens at the moment of death?
- Is there an overarching purpose for humanity's existence?
- What is beauty? Truth? Goodness?
- Is there an ultimate reality?

Interestingly our answers to these and other questions do not remain static, for as we interact with other people, our environment, our culture, and our own inner selves, we are continually shaping and developing our personal philosophies, rejecting former ideas and replacing them with newly discovered

ones. It is our dynamic answers—including our doubts and fears about these answers—that largely determine our response to a literary text.

Upon such a conceptual framework rests literary theory. Whether that framework is well reasoned or simply a matter of habit and past teachings, readers respond to works of art via their worldview. From this philosophical core of beliefs spring their evaluations of the goodness, worthiness, and value of art itself. Using their worldviews either consciously or unconsciously as a yardstick by which to measure and value their experiences, readers respond to individual works of literature, ordering and valuing each separate or collective experience in each text based on the system of beliefs housed in their worldviews.

THE READING PROCESS AND LITERARY THEORY

The relationship between literary theory and a reader's personal worldview is best illustrated in the act of reading itself. When reading, we are constantly interacting with the text. According to Louise M. Rosenblatt's text *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), during the act or event of reading,

> A reader brings to the text his or her past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, the reader marshals his or her resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he/she sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of the reader's life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him or her as a human being.

Rosenblatt declares that the relationship between the reader and the text is not linear, but **transactional;** that is, it is a process or event that takes place at a particular time and place in which the text and the reader condition each other. The reader and the text **transact**—not simply interact—creating meaning, for meaning does not exist solely within the reader's mind or within the text, Rosenblatt maintains, but in the transaction between them. To arrive at an interpretation of a text (what Rosenblatt calls the **poem**), readers bring their own "temperament and fund of past transactions to the text [what some critics call **forestructure**] and live through a process of handling new situations, new attitudes, new personalities, [and] new conflicts in value. They can reject, revise, or assimilate into the resource with which they engage their world." Through this transactional experience, readers consciously and unconsciously amend their worldviews.

Because no literary theory can account for all the various factors included in everyone's conceptual framework, and because we as readers all have different literary experiences, there can exist no **metatheory**—no single overarching literary theory that encompasses all possible interpretations of a

text suggested by its readers. And there can be no single correct literary theory, for in and of itself, each literary theory asks valid questions of and about a text, and no one theory is capable of exhausting all legitimate questions to be asked about any text.

The valid and legitimate questions asked about a text by the various literary theories differ, often widely. Espousing separate critical orientations, each theory focuses primarily on one element of the interpretative process, although in practice different theories may address several areas of concern in interpreting a text. For example, one theory may stress the work itself, believing that the text alone contains all the necessary information to arrive at an interpretation. This theory isolates the text from its historical or sociological setting and concentrates on the literary forms found in the text, such as figures of speech (**tropes**), word choice (**diction**), and style. Another theory may attempt to place a text in its historical, political, sociological, religious, and economic settings. By placing the text in historical perspective, this theory asserts that its adherents can arrive at an interpretation that both the text's author and its original audience would support. Still another theory may direct its chief concern toward the text's audience. It asks how readers' emotions and personal backgrounds affect each reader's interpretation of a particular text. Whether the primary focus is psychological, linguistic, mythical, historical, or from any other critical orientation, each literary theory establishes its own theoretical basis, then proceeds to develop its own methodology whereby readers can apply the particular theory to an actual text. In effect, each literary theory or perspective is like taking a different seat in the theater and thereby obtaining a different view of the stage. Different literary theories and theorists may all study the same text, but being in different seats, the various literary theorists will all respond differently to the text—or the performance on the stage—because of their unique perspectives.

Although each reader's theory and methodology for arriving at a text's interpretation may differ, sooner or later groups of readers and critics declare allegiance to a similar core of beliefs and band together, founding **schools of criticism.** For example, critics who believe that social and historical concerns must be highlighted in a text are known as Marxist critics, whereas reader-oriented critics (sometimes referred to as reader-response critics) concentrate on readers' personal reactions to the text. Because new points of view concerning literary works are continually evolving, new schools of criticism—and, therefore, new literary theories—will continue to develop. One of the more recent schools to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s, New Historicism or Cultural Poetics, declares that a text must be analyzed through historical research that assumes that history and fiction are inseparable. The members of this school, known as New Historicists, hope to shift the boundaries between history and literature and thereby produce criticism that reflects what they believe to be the proper relationship between the text and its historical context. Still other newly evolving schools of criticism, such

as postcolonialism, African American studies, gender studies, queer theory, and ecocriticism, continue to emerge and challenge previous ways of thinking about and critiquing texts.

Because the various schools of criticism (and the theories on which they are based) ask different questions about the same work of literature, these theoretical schools provide an abundance of options from which readers can choose to broaden their understanding not only of texts but also of their society, their culture, and their own humanity. By embracing literary theory, we learn about literature, but more important, we are also taught tolerance for other people's beliefs. By rejecting or ignoring theory, we are in danger of canonizing ourselves as literary saints who possess divine knowledge and who can, therefore, supply the one and only correct interpretation for a given text. When we oppose, disregard, or ignore literary theory, we are in danger of blindly accepting our more frequently than not unquestioned prejudices and assumptions. By embracing literary theory and literary criticism (its practical application), we can willingly participate in that seemingly endless historical conversation about the nature of humanity and of humanity's concerns as expressed in literature. And in the process, we can begin to question our concepts of ourselves, our society, and our culture and how texts themselves help define and continually redefine these concepts.

WHAT IS LITERATURE?

Because literary criticism presupposes that there exists a work of literature to be interpreted, we could assume that formulating a definition of literature would be simple. This is, however, not the case. For centuries, writers, literary historians, and others have debated about but have failed to agree on a definition for this term. Some assume that literature is simply anything that is written, thereby declaring a city telephone directory, a cookbook, and a road atlas to be literary works along with *Pride and Prejudice* and the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Derived from the Latin *littera*, meaning "letter," the root meaning of the word *literature* refers primarily to the written word and seems to support this broad definition. Yet such a definition eliminates the important oral traditions upon which much of our literature is based, including Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the English epic *Beowulf*, and many Native American legends, among many other examples.

To solve this difficulty, others choose to define *literature* as an art, thereby leaving open the question of its being written or oral. This definition further narrows its meaning, equating literature to works of the imagination or creative writing. To emphasize the imaginative qualities of literature, some critics choose to use the German word for literature, ***Wortkunst***, instead of its English equivalent, because *Wortkunst* automatically implies that the

imaginative and creative aspects of literature are essential components of the word *literature* itself. By this definition, written works such as a telephone directory or a cookbook can no longer be considered literature; these kinds of works are superseded by poetry, drama, fiction, and other imaginative writing. Some scholars believe that the imaginative qualities of a work of literature were first articulated for Western literature in a work written by the French Baroness Madame de Staël, a German Romantic theorist, who in 1800 authored *On Literature Considered in Its Relations with Social Institutions.*

Although the narrowing of the definition of literature accomplished by equating it to the defining terms of art seemingly simplifies what can and cannot be considered a literary work, such is not the case. That the J. Crew and Victoria's Secret clothes catalogues are imaginative (and colorful) writing is unquestioned, but should they then be considered works of literature? Who declares whether a written document is a work of art? Many readers assume that if an imaginative work of fiction is published—be it singly or in an anthology—such a work is worthy to be read. It has, after all, been judged acceptable as a literary work and has been published and presumably approved by an editorial board. This belief that published works are deemed worthy to be dubbed literature is called the **hyperprotected cooperative principle,** that is, published works have been evaluated and declared literary texts by a group of well-informed people who are protecting the overall **canon** of literature. But even this principle does not stop many from arguing that some published works are unworthy to be called works of art or literature. Specifying and narrowing the definition of literature to a "work of art" does not, then, immediately provide consensus or a consistent rule about how to declare a text a "work of literature."

Whether one accepts the broad or narrow definition, many argue that a text must have certain peculiar qualities before it can be dubbed "literature." Those who hold this view believe that an artist's creation or secondary world often mirrors the author's primary world, the world in which the writer lives and moves and breathes. Because reality or the primary world is highly structured, the secondary world must also be so structured. To achieve this structure, the artist must create plot, character, tone, symbols, conflict, and a host of other elements or parts of the artistic story, with all of these elements working in a dynamic relationship to produce a literary work. Some would argue that it is the creation of these elements—how they are used and in what context—that determines whether a piece of writing is literature.

Still other critics add the "test of time" criterion to their essential components of literature. If a work such as Dante's *Divine Comedy or La Divina Commedia* (1308–1321) withstands the passage of time and is still being read centuries after its creation, it is deemed valuable and worthy to be called literature. This criterion also denotes literature's functional or cultural value: If people value a written work, for whatever reason, they often declare it to be literature whether or not it contains the prescribed elements of a text.

What this work may contain is a peculiar aesthetic quality—that is, some element of beauty—that distinguishes it as literature from other forms of writing. **Aesthetics,** the branch of philosophy that deals with the concept of the beautiful, strives to determine the criteria for beauty in a work of art. Theorists such as Plato and Aristotle declare that the source of beauty is inherent within the art object itself; other critics, such as David Hume, maintain that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And some contemporary theorists argue that one's perception of beauty in a text rests in the dynamic relationship between the object (the text) and the perceiver (the reader) at a given moment in time. Wherever the criteria for judging beauty of a work of art finally resides, most critics agree that a work of literature does have an appealing aesthetic quality.

While distinguishing literature from other forms of writing, this appealing aesthetic quality directly contributes to literature's chief purpose: telling a story. Although it may simultaneously communicate facts, literature's primary aim is to tell a story. The subject of this story is particularly human, describing and detailing a variety of human experiences, not stating facts or bits and pieces of information. For example, literature does not define the word *courage* but shows us a courageous character acting courageously. By so doing, literature concretizes an array of human values, emotions, actions, and ideas in story form. It is this concretization that allows us to experience vicariously the stories of a host of characters. Through these characters, we observe people in action, making decisions, struggling to maintain their humanity in often inhumane circumstances, and embodying for us a variety of values and human characteristics that we may embrace, discard, enjoy, or detest.

LITERARY THEORY AND THE DEFINITION OF LITERATURE

Is literature simply a story that contains certain aesthetic and literary qualities that all somehow pleasingly culminate in a work of art? If so, can texts be considered **artifacts** that can be analyzed, dissected, and studied to discover their essential nature or meaning? Or does a literary work have **ontological** status; that is, does it exist in and of itself, perhaps in a special **neo-Platonic** realm? Or must it have an audience, a reader, before it becomes literature? And can we even define the word *text?* Is it simply print on a page? If pictures are included, do they automatically become part of the text? Who determines, then, when print becomes a work of art? The reader? The author? Both?

The answers to these and similar questions have been long debated, and the various responses make up the corpus of literary theory. Literary theory offers a variety of methodologies that enable readers to interpret a

text from different and often conflicting points of view. By so doing, it asks pertinent and often controversial questions concerning the philosophical assumptions surrounding the nature of the reading process, the epistemological nature of learning, the nature of reality itself, and a host of related concerns. Such theorizing empowers readers to examine their personal worldviews, to articulate their individual assumptions about the nature of reality and to understand how these assumptions directly affect their interpretations not only of a work of art but also of the definition of literature itself.

Although any definition of literature is debatable, most would agree that an examination of a text's total artistic situation would help us decide what constitutes literature. This total picture of the work involves such elements as the work itself (e.g., an examination of the fictionality or secondary world created within the story), the artist, the universe or world the work supposedly represents, and the audience or readers. Although readers and critics will emphasize one, two, or even three of these elements while deemphasizing the others, such a consideration of a text's artistic situation immediately broadens the definition of literature from the concept that it is simply a written work that contains certain qualities to a definition that must include the dynamic interrelationship of the actual text and the readers. Perhaps, then, the literary competence of the readers themselves helps determine whether a work should be considered literature. If this is so, then a literary work may be more functional than ontological, its existence and, therefore, its value being determined by its readers and not by the work itself.

Overall, the definition of literature depends on the particular kind of literary theory or school of criticism that the reader or critic espouses. For **Formalists,** for example, the text and text alone contains certain qualities that make a particular piece of writing literature. On the other hand, for **reader-oriented critics,** the interaction and psychological relationships between the text and the reader help determine whether a document should be deemed literary. A working knowledge of literary theory can thus help all readers formulate their ever-developing definition of literature and what they believe constitutes a literary work.

THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE AND LITERARY THEORY

Critics continually debate literature's chief function. Tracing their arguments to Plato, many contend that literature's primary function is moral, its chief value being its usefulness for cultural or societal purposes. But others, like Aristotle, hold that a work of art can be analyzed and broken down into its various parts, with each part contributing to the overall enjoyment of the

work itself. For these critics, the value of a text is found within the text itself or is inseparably linked to the work itself. In its most simple terms, the debate centers around two concerns: Is literature's chief function to teach (extrinsic) or to entertain (intrinsic)? In other words, can we read a text for the sheer fun of it, or must we always be studying and learning from what we read?

Such questions and their various answers lead us directly to literary theory because literary theory concerns itself not only with ontological questions (e.g., whether a text really exists) but also with epistemological issues (e.g., how we know or ways of knowing). When we ask, then, if literature's chief function is to entertain or to teach, we are really asking epistemological questions. Whether we read a text to learn from it or to be entertained, we can say that once we have read a text, we "know" that text.

We can know a text, however, in two distinct ways. The first way involves the typical literature classroom analysis. When we have studied, analyzed, and critiqued a text and have arrived at an interpretation, we can then confidently assert that we know the text. On the other hand, when we stay up all night turning the pages of a P. D. James mystery novel to discover who the murderer is, we can also say that we know the text because we have spent time devouring its pages, lost in its secondary world, consumed by its characters, and by novel's end eagerly seeking the resolution of its **tensions.** Both methods—one with its chief goal to learn, the other to entertain—involve similar yet distinct epistemological endpoints: to know a text, but in two different ways.

The French verbs *savoir* and *connaître* can both be translated "to know" and can highlight for us the difference between these two epistemological goals or ways of knowing a text. *Savoir* means "to analyze" (from the Greek *analuein*, "to undo") and "to study." The word is used to refer to knowing something that is the object of study and assumes that the object, such as a text, can be examined, analyzed, and critiqued. Knowledge or learning *about* is the ultimate goal.

Connaître, on the other hand, implies that we intimately know or have experienced the text. *Connaître* is used for knowing people and refers also to knowing an author's canon. Both knowing persons and knowing all a writer's works imply intimacy, learning the particular qualities of one person or author, the ins and outs of each. Indeed, it is this intimacy that one often experiences while reading a mystery novel all night long. It is knowing or knowledge *of* that the word means.

To know how to analyze a text, to discuss its literary elements, and to apply the various methodologies of literary criticism means that we know that text *(savoir)*. To have experienced the text—to have cried along with or about its characters, to have lost time and sleep immersed in the secondary world it creates, and to have felt our emotions stirred by the text—also means that we know that text *(connaître)*. From one way of knowing, we

learn facts or information; from the other, we encounter and participate in an intimate experience.

At times, we have actually known the text from both these perspectives. While analyzing and critiquing a text *(savoir)*, we have often (and perhaps more often than not) simultaneously experienced it, becoming emotionally involved with its characters' choices and destinies *(connaître)* and imagining ourselves to be these characters or at least recognizing some of our own characteristics dramatized by the characters.

To say that we know a text is no simple statement. Underlying our private and public reactions and our scholarly critiques and analyses is our literary theory, the fountainhead of our most intimate and our most public declarations. The formal study of literary theory, therefore, enables us to explain our responses to any text and allows us to articulate the function of literature in an academic and a personal way.

BEGINNING THE FORMAL STUDY OF LITERARY THEORY

This chapter has stressed the importance of literary theory and criticism and its relationship to literature and the interpretative processes. It has also articulated the underlying premises of why a study of literary theory is essential:

- Literary theory assumes that there is no such thing as an innocent reading of a text. Whether our responses are emotional and spontaneous or well reasoned and highly structured, all such interactions with and about a text are based on underlying factors that cause us to respond to that text in a particular fashion. What elicits these responses or how a reader makes sense of a text is at the heart of literary theory.
- Because our reactions to any text have theoretical bases, all readers must have a literary theory. The methods we use to frame our personal interpretations of any text directly involve us in the process of literary criticism and theory, automatically making us practicing literary critics.
- Many readers have a literary theory that is more often than not unconscious, incomplete, ill informed, and eclectic; therefore, readers' interpretations can easily be illogical, unsound, and haphazard. A well-defined, logical, and clearly articulated literary theory consciously and purposefully enables readers to develop their own methods of interpretation, permitting them to order, clarify, and justify their appraisals of a text in a consistent and logical manner.
- Today many critics use the terms *literary criticism* and *literary theory* interchangeably. Still others use the terms *literary theory* and *Continental philosophy* synonymously. Although the semantic boundaries between literary criticism and literary theory (and sometimes Continental philosophy) are a bit blurred, literary criticism assumes that literary theory exists and that literary criticism rests on literary theory's concepts, ideas, and ever-developing principles.

It is the goal of this text to enable readers to make such conscious, informed, and intelligent choices, and in doing so, refine their own methods of literary interpretation and more precisely understand their personal and public reactions to texts. To accomplish this goal, this text will introduce readers to literary theory and criticism, its historical development, and the various theoretical positions or schools of criticism, enabling readers to become knowledgeable critics of their own and others' interpretations. By becoming acquainted with diverse and often contradictory approaches to textual analysis, readers will broaden their perspectives not only about themselves but also about others and the world in which they live.

2

A Historical Survey of Literary Criticism

No poet, no artist, has his [or her] complete meaning alone.

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

INTRODUCTION

Questions about the value, the structure, and the definition of **literature** undoubtedly arose in all cultures as people heard or read works of art. Such practical criticism probably began with the initial hearing or reading of the first literary works. The Greeks of the fifth century BCE were the first, however, to articulate and develop the philosophy of art and life that serves as the foundation for most theoretical and practical criticism. Assuredly, hearers and performers of the Homeric poems commented on and interpreted these works before the fifth century BCE, but it was the fifth-century Athenians who questioned the very act of reading and writing itself while pondering the purpose of literature. Some scholars date the origin of literary criticism by citing the performance of Aristophanes' play, *The Frogs* in 405 BCE. The play was performed as a part of a contest among dramatists, with Aristophanes receiving first prize. To win the contest, a literary judge or judges had to declare *The Frogs* the "best" play, thus initiating literary criticism. By so doing, these early critics began a debate about the nature and function of literature that continues to the present day. What they inaugurated was the formal study of literary criticism.

From the fifth century BCE to the present, numerous critics—such as Plato, Dante Alighieri, William Wordsworth, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, Louise Rosenblatt, Stephen Greenblatt, Judith Butler, Lawrence Buell, and a host of others, have developed principles of criticism that have had a major influence on the continuing discussion of literary criticism. By examining these critics' ideas, we can gain an understanding of and participate

in this critical debate while acquiring an appreciation for and a working knowledge of both practical and theoretical criticism.

PLATO (C. 427–347 BCE)

Alfred North Whitehead, a modern British philosopher, once quipped that "all of Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato." Although others have indeed contributed to Western thought, Plato's ideas, expressed in his *Ion*, *Crito*, the *Republic*, *Laws*, and other works, laid the foundation for many, if not most, of the pivotal issues of philosophy and literature, including the concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness; the nature of reality; the structure of society; the nature and relations of being (ontology); questions about how we know what we know (epistemology); and ethics and morality. Since Plato's day, such ideas have been debated, changed, debunked, or simply accepted, but none has been ignored.

Before Plato, only fragmentary comments about the nature and value of literature can be found. In the plays and writings of the comic dramatist Aristophanes, a contemporary of Plato's, a few tidbits of practical criticism arise but no clearly articulated literary theory. It is Plato who systematically begins for us the study of literary theory and criticism. Plato's theories and criticism, however, would be more clearly articulated and developed several hundred years later by the philosopher Plotinus (204–270 CE), who reintroduced Plato's ideas to the Western world, known today as Neoplatonism. Nevertheless, Plato's writings form the foundation upon which literary theory rests.

The core of Platonic thought resides in Plato's doctrine of Essences, Ideas, or Forms. Ultimate reality, he states, is spiritual. This spiritual realm, what Plato calls **The One,** is composed of "ideal" forms or absolutes that exist whether or not any mind posits their existence or reflects their attributes. It is these ideal forms that give shape to our physical world because our material world is nothing more than a shadow, a replica, of the absolute forms found in the spiritual realm. In the material world, we can, therefore, recognize a chair as a chair because the ideal chair exists in this spiritual realm and preceded the existence of the material chair. Without the existence of the ideal chair, the physical chair, which is nothing more than a shadow or replica—representation, imitation, reflection—of the ideal chair, could not exist.

Such an emphasis on philosophical ideals earmarks the beginning of the first articulated literary theory and becomes the foundation for literary criticism. Before Plato and the establishment of his Academy (the name of the school he founded in 387 BCE), Greek culture ordered its world through poetry and the poetic imagination—that is, by hearing such epics as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or by attending the play cycles, the Greeks saw good characters

in action performing good deeds. From such stories, they formulated their theories of goodness and other similar standards, thereby using the presentational mode for discovering truth: observing good characters acting justly, honorably, and courageously and inculcating these characteristics within themselves. With the advent of Plato and his Academy, philosophical inquiry and abstract thinking usurped the narrative as a method for discovering truth. Not by accident, then, Plato places above his school door the words, "Let no one enter here who is not a geometer" (a master of geometry; one skilled in formal logic and reasoning). To matriculate at Plato's Academy, Plato's students had to value the art of reason and abstraction as opposed to the presentational mode for discovering truth.

This art of abstract reasoning and formal logic not only usurps literature's role as an evaluating mode for discerning truth, but also condemns it. If ultimate reality rests in the spiritual realm, and the material world is only a shadow or replica of the world of ideals, then according to Plato and his followers, poets (those who compose imaginative literature) are merely imitating an imitation when they write about any object in the material world. Accordingly, Plato declares that a poet's craft is "an inferior who marries an inferior and has inferior offspring," because the poet is one who is now two steps removed from ultimate reality. These imitators of mere shadows, contends Plato, cannot be trusted.

While condemning poets for producing art that is nothing more than a copy of a copy, Plato also argues that poets produce their art irrationally, relying on untrustworthy intuition rather than reason for their inspiration. He writes, "For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and then the mind is no longer in him." Because such inspiration opposes reason and asserts that truth can be attained intuitively, Plato condemns all poets.

Because poets are untrustworthy and damned, their works can no longer be the basis of the Greeks' morality or ethics. Lies abound in the works of poets, argues Plato—critical lies about the nature of ultimate reality and dangerous lies about human reality. In the *Iliad*, for example, the gods lie and cheat and are one of the main causes of suffering among humans. Even the mortals in these works steal, complain, and hate each other. Such writings, contends Plato, set a bad example for Greek citizens and may lead normally law-abiding people down paths of wickedness and immorality. In the *Republic*, Plato ultimately concludes that the poets must be banished from Greek society.

In a later work, *Laws, Book VIII*, Plato recants the total banishment of poets from society, acknowledging the need for poets and their craft to "celebrate the victors" of the state. In this work, Plato then asserts that only those poets "who are themselves good and also honourable in the state" can be tolerated. In making this statement, Plato decrees poetry's function and value in and for his society: to sing the praises of loyal Greeks. Accordingly,

poets must be supporters of the state or risk exile from their homeland. Being mere imitators of reality—in effect, good liars—these artisans and their craft must be religiously censured.

By directly linking politics and literature in a moral and reasoned worldview, Plato and his Academy founded a complex theory of literary criticism that initiated the debate, still ongoing, on the value, nature, and worth of the artist and literature itself.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BCE)

Whereas literary criticism's concern with morality began with Plato, its emphasis on the elements of which a work is composed began with Plato's famous pupil, Aristotle. Rejecting some of Plato's beliefs about the nature of reality, Aristotle opts for a detailed investigation of the material world.

The son of a medical doctor from Thrace, Aristotle reveled in the physical world. After studying at Plato's Academy and mastering the philosophy and the techniques of inquiry taught there, Aristotle founded the Lyceum, a school of scientific and philosophical thought and investigation in 335 BCE. Unlike Plato's private Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum (its name originating from the Athenian public exercise park or gymnasium where Aristotle taught) was open to the general public and free to all. The Lyceum is also known as the Peripatetic School of Athens, taking its name from the Greek word *peripatein*, meaning walk, because Aristotle supposedly lectured his pupils while strolling the tree-lined grounds of the park. Applying his scientific methods of investigation to the study of literature, Aristotle answers Plato's accusations against poetry in a series of lectures known as the ***Poetics***. Unlike **exoteric treatises** meant for general publication, the *Poetics* is an **esoteric work,** one meant for private circulation to those who attended the Lyceum. Although it lacks the unity and coherence of Aristotle's other works, it remains one of the most important critical influences on literary theory and criticism.

Aristotle's *Poetics* has become the cornerstone of Western literary criticism. By applying his analytic abilities to a definition of tragedy, Aristotle began in the *Poetics* a discussion of the basic components of a literary work that continues to the present day. Unfortunately many critics and scholars mistakenly assume that the *Poetics* is a how-to manual, defining and setting the standards for literature (particularly tragedy) for all time. Aristotle's purpose, however, was not to formulate a series of absolute rules for evaluating a tragedy, but to state the general principles of tragedy, as he viewed them in his time, while responding to many of Plato's doctrines and arguments. Even his title, the *Poetics*, reveals Aristotle's purpose because in Greek the word ***poetikes*** means "things that are made or crafted." Like a biologist, Aristotle dissects tragedy to discover its constituent or crafted parts.

At the beginning of the *Poetics*, Aristotle notes that "epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most forms of flute and lyre playing all happen to be, in general, imitations." Although all of these imitations differ in how and what they imitate, Aristotle agrees with Plato that all the arts are imitations. In particular, the art of poetry exists because people are imitative creatures who enjoy such imitation. Whereas Plato contends that the aesthetic pleasure poetry is capable of arousing can undermine the structure of society and all its values, Aristotle strongly disagrees. His disagreement is basically a metaphysical argument concerning the nature of imitation itself. Whereas Plato decrees that imitation is two steps removed from the truth or realm of the ideal (the poet imitating an object that is itself an imitation of an ideal form), Aristotle contends that poetry is more universal, more general than things as they are, asserting that "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity." It is the historian, not the poet, who writes of what has already happened. The poet's task, declares Aristotle, is to write of what could happen. "Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." In arguing that poets present things not as they are, but as they should be, Aristotle rebuffs Plato's concept that the poet is merely imitating an imitation, for Aristotle's poet, with his emphasis on the universal, actually attains something nearer to the ideal than does Plato's.

In Aristotle's view, not all imitations by poets are the same because "writers of greater dignity imitated the noble actions of noble heroes; the less dignified sort of writers imitated the actions of inferior men." "Comedy," writes Aristotle, "is an imitation of base men [. . .] characterized not by every kind of vice but specifically by 'the ridiculous,' some error or ugliness that is painless and has no harmful effects." It is to tragedy, written by poets imitating noble actions and heroes, that Aristotle turns his major attention.

Aristotle's complex definition of **tragedy** as found in the *Poetics* has perplexed and frustrated many readers:

> Tragedy is, then, an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced by each of the kinds of linguistic adornment, applied separately in the various parts of the play; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents.

When placed in context with other ideas in the *Poetics*, this complex definition highlights Aristotle's chief contributions to literary criticism:

1. Tragedy, or a work of art, is an imitation of nature that reflects a high form of art in exhibiting noble characters and noble deeds, the act of imitation itself giving us pleasure.

2. Art possesses form, that is, tragedy, unlike life, has a defined beginning, a middle, and an end, with each of the parts being related to every other part. A tragedy, then, is an organic whole, with its various parts all being formally interrelated.
3. In tragedy, concern for form must be given to the characters as well as to the structure of the drama because the tragic hero must be "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous." Furthermore, all tragic heroes have a tragic flaw, or **hamartia,** that leads to their downfall in such a way as not to offend the audience's sense of justice.
4. The tragedy must have an emotional effect on its audience and "through pity and fear" effect a **catharsis**—that is, by the play's end, the audience's emotions should be purged, purified, or clarified. (What Aristotle really meant by *catharsis* is debatable; see glossary entry for further details.)
5. The universal, not the particular, should be stressed. Unlike history that deals with what happens, poetry or tragedy deals with what could happen and is, therefore, closer to perfection or truth than history itself.
6. The poet must give close attention to diction or language, be it in verse, prose, or song; but ultimately, it is the thoughts expressed through language that are of the utmost concern.

Interestingly, nowhere in the *Poetics* does Aristotle address the didactic value of poetry or literature. Unlike Plato, whose chief concern is the subject matter of poetry and its effects on the reader, Aristotle emphasizes literary form or structure, examining the component parts of a tragedy and how these parts must work together to produce a unified whole.

From the writings of these philosopher-artists arise the concerns, questions, and debates that have spearheaded the development of most literary criticism. By addressing different aspects of these fourth-century BCE critics' ideas and concepts, other literary critics from the Middle Ages to the present have formulated theories of literary criticism that force us to ask different, but also legitimate, questions of a text. Nevertheless, the shadows of Plato and Aristotle and their concerns loom over much of what these later theorists espouse.

HORACE (65–8 BCE)

With the passing of the glory that was Greece and its philosopher-artists came the grandeur of Rome and its chief stylist, Quintus Horatius Flaccus, or simply Horace. Friend of Emperor Augustus and many other members of the Roman aristocracy, Horace enjoyed the wealth and influence of these associates. In a letter to the sons of one of his friends and patrons, Maecenas, Horace articulated what became the official canon of literary taste during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and much of the Neoclassic period. By reading this letter and his *Ars Poetica (The Art of Poetry)*, any Roman aristocrat, any medieval knight, and even such literary masters as the eighteenth-

century scholar-poet Alexander Pope could learn the standards of good or proper literature.

Although Horace was probably acquainted with Aristotle's works, his concerns are quite different. Whereas both Plato and Aristotle decree that poets must, and do, imitate nature, Horace declares that poets must imitate other poets, particularly those of the past and especially the Greeks. Less concerned with **metaphysics** than his predecessors, Horace establishes the practical do's and don'ts for a writer. To be considered a good writer, he maintains, one should write about traditional subjects in unique ways. In addition, the poet should avoid all extremes in subject matter, diction (word choice), vocabulary, and style. Gaining mastery in these areas could be achieved by reading and following the examples of the classical Greek and Roman authors. For example, because authors of antiquity began their epics in the middle of things, all epics must begin **in medias res.** Above all, writers should avoid appearing ridiculous and must aim their sights low, not attempting to be a new Virgil or Homer.

Literature's ultimate aim, declares Horace, is *"dulce et utile,"* to be "sweet and useful." The best writings, he asserts, both teach and delight. To achieve this goal, poets must understand their audiences; the learned reader may want to be instructed, whereas others may simply read to be amused. The poet's task is to combine usefulness and delight in the same literary work.

Often oversimplified and misunderstood, Horace opts for giving the would-be writer practical guidelines for the author's craft while leaving unattended and unchallenged many of the philosophical concerns of Plato and Aristotle. For Horace, a poet's greatest reward is the adulation of the public.

LONGINUS (FIRST CENTURY CE)

Although his date of birth and national origin remain controversial, Longinus (sometimes referred to as Pseudo-Longinus) garners an important place in literary history for his treatise *On the Sublime,* a response to a work by Caecillus of Calacte, a Sicilian rhetorician. Probably a Greek, Longinus often peppers his Greek and Latin writings with Hebrew quotations, making him the first literary critic to borrow from a different literary tradition than his own and earning him the title of the first comparative critic in literary history.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle, and Horace, who focus respectively on a work's essence, the constituent parts of a work, and literary taste, Longinus concentrates on single elements of a text. In addition, he is the first critic to define a literary classic.

One cannot accurately judge a literary work, he argues, unless one is exceedingly well read. A well-read critic can evaluate and recognize what is great or what Longinus calls the sublime: "For that is really great which bears

a repeated examination, and which it is difficult or rather impossible to withstand, and the memory of which is strong and hard to efface." Simply put, Longinus defines the sublime as "the echo of greatest of spirit" while also identifying its five key elements: (1) the power of forming great conceptions; (2) vehement and inspired passion; (3) the due formation of figures, such as word order and appropriate audience; (4) noble diction; and (5) dignified and elevated composition. Longinus also contends that all readers are innately capable of recognizing the sublime, for "Nature has appointed us to be no base or ignoble animals [. . .] for she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we." When our intellects, our emotions, and our wills harmoniously respond to a given work of art, we know, says Longinus, that we have been touched by the sublime.

Until the late seventeenth century, few people considered Longinus's *On the Sublime* important or had even read it. By the eighteenth century, its significance was recognized, and the treatise was quoted and debated by most public authors. Emphasizing the author (one who must possess a great mind and a great soul), the work itself (a text that must be composed of dignified and elevated diction while simultaneously disposing the reader to high thoughts), and the reader's response (the reaction of a learned audience in large part determines the value or worth of any given text), Longinus's critical method foreshadows New Criticism, reader-oriented criticism, and other schools of twentieth-century criticism.

PLOTINUS (204–270 CE)

Born in Egypt in 204 CE, Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, traveled to Alexandria in his mid-twenties, where he was taught by Longinus's teacher, Ammonius Saccas. Ammonius sparked Plotinus's inextinguishable love for philosophy, and in 244 CE, Plotinus left Ammonius in an attempt to discover Persian and Indian wisdom firsthand. Accompanying the Emperor Gordian on an expedition to Persia, Plotinus hoped to engage Persia's leading philosophers in dialogue. Plotinus never reached Persia because Emperor Gordian was assassinated. Plotinus then traveled to Rome, where he taught philosophy for the next twenty years. Urged on by his most famous student, Porphyry, Plotinus began to write his own treatises in an attempt, he believed, to articulate clearly other scholars' garbled misinterpretations of Plato, whom Plotinus declared to be the ultimate authority on all philosophical matters. At the time of his death in 270, Plotinus had authored fifty-four treatises, all of which were collected, edited, and named the *Enneads* by his student and friend Porphyry.

Through dialogues with his students, and especially Porphyry, Plotinus developed and clearly articulated the most pivotal concept stemming from the teachings of Plato: The One. Plato mentions The One only briefly in *Parmenides*, also referring to parts of this concept, such as the Good, in the

Republic. Simultaneously The One is "unique and absolutely uncomplex" but also "absolutely transcendental." Both to and from The One all things flow, and it is the complete origin of everything. Humanity's goal, both Plato and Plotinus believed, was to achieve unity with The One through contemplation and study.

Because unity with The One is the goal of humanity, Plotinus asserts that humanity exists in other forms of being: Intelligence *(nous)*, Soul *(psyche)*, and Matter *(physis)*—which are separate from The One but also stem from it. Intelligence corresponds with Plato's realm of ideas. In this mode, people comprehend ideas and concepts through the intellect, not the senses. Within this level of intellect emerges cognitive identity. By thinking and conceptualizing, Intelligence also conceptualizes itself. This dimension Plotinus refers to as "the realm of number," giving this name to the next domain, the Soul. In Plotinus's philosophic system, the Soul refers to the overarching Soul that runs through not only humanity but also the entire creation. According to Plotinus, all souls form only one Soul; such unity allows all souls to intercommunicate by extrasensory means. The Soul, however, has a selfish desire to possess itself, resulting in Matter, the third or lowest mode of being. For Plotinus, Matter is at first praiseworthy because creation is able to know The One only because of its overflow into matter. But matter is also fallen, for it is the lowest form of existence, one that is more frequently than not separate from The One.

Plotinus's complex philosophy becomes pivotal to literary criticism because of its adoption and adaptation by many scholars and philosophers throughout the subsequent centuries. Immediately following Plotinus, Porphyry of Tyre and his contemporaries continue the journey toward transcendence. In the fourth century, St. Augustine, accompanied by Boethius in the fifth century, blended Plotinus's concepts of Neoplatonism with Christianity. This blending of Neoplatonism and Christianity eventually influenced medieval scholars such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhard. Not surprisingly, centuries later the American transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau borrow and amend some of Plotinus's key concepts, incorporating these ideas into the key assumptions of American Romanticism.

Alongside Plato and Aristotle, many scholars consider Plotinus one of the greatest philosophers of antiquity. Clearly, it is the writings and teaching of Plotinus that form much of the Western perception of Plato and his works.

DANTE ALIGHIERI (1265–1321)

Born in Florence, Italy, during the Middle Ages, Dante is one of the most significant contributors to literary criticism since Longinus and Plotinus and the appearance of their texts *On the Sublime* and the *Enneads*, approximately

one thousand years earlier. Like Longinus, Dante's concern is the proper language for poetry.

Banished from his native Florence for political reasons, Dante wrote many of his works in exile, including his masterpiece, *Commedia* (c. 1310–1321), later named *La Divina Commedia*, or *The Divine Comedy*. Written in three parts—*Inferno* (c. 1314), *Purgatorio* (c. 1319), and *Paradiso* (c. 1321)—*The Divine Comedy* (and the world depicted in it) mirrors Dante's contemporary world and his concept of Christianity. Even before the third part of *The Divine Comedy* was published, Dante was already being heralded as Tuscany's greatest poet. As an introduction to the *Paradiso*, the third and last section of the *Commedia*, Dante wrote a letter to Can Grande della Scala explaining his literary theory. Known today as *Letter to Can Grande della Scala*, this pivotal work of literary theory states that the language spoken by the people (the vulgar tongue or the vernacular) is an appropriate, acceptable, and beautiful language for writing.

Until the publication of Dante's works, Latin was the universal language, and all important works—such as histories, Church documents, and even government decrees—were written in this official Church tongue. Only frivolous or popular works appeared in the vulgar language of the common people. But in his *Letter*, Dante asserts and establishes that the vernacular is both an excellent and appropriate vehicle for works of literature.

In the *Letter*, Dante also notes that he uses multiple levels of interpretation or symbolic meaning in *The Divine Comedy*. Since the time of St. Augustine and throughout the Middle Ages, Church theologians, writers, and priests had followed a tradition of **allegoric reading** of Scripture that interpreted many of the Old Testament laws and stories as symbolic representations (allegories) of Christ's actions. Such a **semiotic interpretation**—reading of signs—had been applied only to Scripture. Until Dante's *Commedia*, no secular work had used these principles of symbolic interpretation.

Praising the lyric poem and ignoring a discussion of genres, Dante established himself as the leading critic of the Middle Ages. Because he declared a people's common language or the vernacular to be an acceptable vehicle of expression for writing literature, literary works found an ever-increasing audience.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO (1313–1375)

Little is known of the early life of Giovanni Boccaccio. Born the illegitimate son of a wealthy merchant from Florence, Italy, in 1313, Boccaccio moved to Paris in his late teens to pursue his studies of the new humanistic literature appearing on the literary scene. In Paris he wrote some of his first vernacular poetry and was exposed to the works of Petrarch. But Dante was Boccaccio's "poet-hero," and like Dante, Boccaccio often wrote in the vernacular. He

eventually returned to Florence, where he and most other Europeans experienced the Black Death of 1348 (a disease that killed about 25 million Europeans), writing about events of this time in his most famous work, *Decameron* (1358), a frame narrative consisting of one hundred tales. By 1360, Boccaccio was the center of Florentine culture, being one of the founders of the Renaissance. In 1373, he delivered the now famous *Lecturae Dantis* ("Reading of Dante"), the first lecture series ever dedicated to a European vernacular text, Dante's *Commedia*. Boccaccio's most influential scholarly work is his *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, or *On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles* (1374), a collection of classical myths and legends. It is this work that serves as a window into literary criticism of the 1300s. In this mammoth encyclopedia of myths, Boccaccio successfully maneuvers through the scholasticism of the late medieval ages and the humanism of the dawning Renaissance, a shift of focus from God and the afterlife to the present moment, focusing primarily on the problem of the human condition. For Boccaccio, myths reflect both truth and reality, while simultaneously having moral and religious value. Particularly in books fourteen and fifteen of *The Genealogy of the Gods*, Boccaccio defends poetry and classical myth, stating that the purpose of poetry is to improve life by revealing both truth and God, thereby disavowing Plato's beliefs that poetry is useless or full of lies. Poetry, asserts Boccaccio, comes from "the bosom of God" and "moves the minds of a few men from on high to a yearning for the eternal." The poet is like a philosopher who seeks truth through contemplation rather than reason. In similar fashion, the poet is equal to the theologian who seeks knowledge about God Himself. And the truth found by the poet in poetry or literature lies in allegory, revealing its truthfulness "in a fair and fitting garment of fiction." Even Christ Himself, Boccaccio points out, used stories or literature to reveal truth.

Boccaccio's defense of poetry had an immediate and lasting impact on literary theory and criticism, especially throughout the Renaissance. Boccaccio's concerns, critical writings, and collection of myths continue to appear in texts for the next several centuries, including those of Chaucer, Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and Shelley, to name a few. And it is Boccaccio's defense of poetry that paves the way for one of the most famous defenses of all, Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554–1586)

The paucity of literary criticism and theory during much of the Middle Ages is remedied by the abundance of critical activity during the Renaissance, especially by the critic and writer Sir Philip Sidney.

Considered the representative scholar, writer, and gentleman of Renaissance England, Sidney has been appropriately named the first great

English critic-poet. His work *An Apology for Poetry* (published 1595; originally *Defence of Poesy*) is the definitive formulation of Renaissance literary theory and the first influential piece of literary criticism in English history. With Sidney begins the English tradition and history of literary criticism.

As evidenced in *An Apology for Poetry*, Sidney is eclectic, borrowing and often amending the theories of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, and a few of his contemporary Italian critics. He begins his criticism by quoting from Aristotle: "Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word **mimesis**, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth." Eight words later, he adds a Horatian note, declaring poesy's chief end to be "to teach and delight." Like Aristotle, Sidney values poetry over history, law, and philosophy, but he takes Aristotle's idea one step further in declaring that poetry, above all the other arts and sciences, embodies truth. For poetry alone, he declares, is a teacher of virtue, moving the mind and spirit to both teach and desire to be taught. And the poet "is the most persuasive advocate of virtue, and none other exposes vice so effectively."

Unlike critics before him, Sidney best personifies the Renaissance period when he delineates his literary precepts. After ranking the different literary genres and declaring all to be instructive, he proclaims that poetry excels all because poetry is "the noblest of all works of [humankind]." He mocks other genres (e.g., tragicomedy) and adds more dictates to Aristotelian tragedy by insisting on unity of action, time, and place.

Throughout *An Apology for Poetry*, Sidney stalwartly defends poetry against those who would view it as a mindless or immoral activity. For Sidney, creative poetry is akin to religion, for both guide and achieve their purpose by stirring the emotions of the reader. The poet, says Sidney, not only affirms morality, but by engaging the reader's emotions, blends truth with symbolism, delighting "every sense and faculty of the whole being." By the essay's end, a passionate and somewhat Platonically inspired poet places a curse on all those who do not love poetry. Sidney concludes, "I conjure you all . . . no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of Poesy . . . Thus doing, your name shall flourish in the printer's shops . . . you shall dwell upon superlatives." England did indeed rise up and take notice, for in the twenty-five years after *An Apology for Poetry*, thirty-seven new works of drama and poetry took England by storm. And echoes of Sidney's emotionality reverberate throughout the centuries in English literature, especially in British romantic writings of the early 1800s.

JOHN DRYDEN (1631–1700)

More than any other English writer, John Dryden—poet laureate, dramatist, and critic—embodies the spirit and ideals of the Neoclassical period, the literary age that follows Sidney and the Renaissance. Dr. Samuel Johnson, a

lexicographer who authored *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), a work considered to be "one of the greatest single achievements of scholarship," attributes to Dryden "the improvement, perhaps the completion of our meter, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments." The most prolific writer of the Restoration (the name given to that period of English literature from 1660 to 1700), Dryden excelled in almost all genres, including literary criticism. In effect, says one critic, Dryden "brought literary criticism out of the church and into the coffee house." And T. S. Eliot, the great twentieth-century poet and essayist, asserts that Dryden wrote "the first serious literary criticism in English by an English poet." Dryden's lasting contribution to literary criticism, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), highlights his genius.

The structure of Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* dramatizes Dryden's keen literary talent: During a naval battle between the English and the Dutch, four men are floating down a barge on the Thames River, each setting forth a different aesthetic theory among those prominently espoused in Renaissance and Neoclassical literary criticism. The Platonic and Aristotelian debate concerning the nature or inherent condition of art as an imitation of nature itself begins the discussion. Nature, argues one debater, must be imitated directly, whereas another declares that writers should imitate the classical authors such as Homer because such ancient writers were the best imitators of nature. Through the voice of Neander, Dryden presents the benefits of both positions.

A lengthy discussion then ensues over the Aristotelian concept of the three unities of time, place, and action within a drama. Should the plot of a drama take place during one twenty-four-hour cycle (time)? And in one location (place)? Should it be only a single plot, with no subplots (action)? The position that a drama must keep the three unities unquestionably wins the debate. Other concerns center on the following:

1. The language or diction of a play, with the concluding emphasis being placed on "proper" speech
2. Issues of decorum, that is, whether violent acts should appear on the stage, with the final speaker declaring it would be quite "improper"
3. The differences between the English and French theaters, with the English drama winning out for its diversity, its use of the stage, and its Shakespearian tradition
4. The value of rhymed as opposed to blank verse in the drama, with rhymed verse the victor—although Dryden later recanted this position and wrote many of his tragedies in blank verse. A reflection of his age in his life and works, Dryden sides with politesse (courteous formality), clarity, order, decorum, elegance, cleverness, and wit as the controlling characteristics of literary works.

Overall, Dryden's contribution to literary criticism is immense. First, he develops the study of literature in and of itself, not obsessing over its moral

and theological worth. Second, he creates a natural, simple prose style that still guides and affects modern criticism and writing in general. Third, by making use of a variety of critical perspectives—from Greek to French—Dryden brings all of these critical perspectives' best insights into the still infant discipline of English literary criticism. And finally, Dryden advocates for the establishing of objective principles of criticism, while simultaneously moving the emphasis of criticism away from the construction of a work into its more modern emphasis on how readers and critics appreciate texts.

JOSEPH ADDISON (1672–1719)

Essayist, poet, dramatist, politician, and literary critic Joseph Addison was born on May 1, 1672, the son of the rector of Milston, Wiltshire, England. After graduating from Charterhouse, a prominent English boarding school, Addison attended Magaden College, Oxford University, graduating in 1693. Receiving a royal pension and multiple political appointments throughout his life, this Latin poet and classical scholar saw his popularity rise in 1704 with the publication of his poem "The Campaign." Working alongside other critics such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope, Addison highlights the concept of the "greatness of literature" in his essays and newspaper articles, appealing to the common readers of England. His classical training served him well throughout his life, fostering his reading and criticism of literature. His literary criticism first appeared in the newspaper begun by Richard Steele and Addison, *The Tatler,* and its successor, *The Spectator.* Although his critical essays were rather sparse in *The Tatler,* Addison's critical commentaries blossomed in *The Spectator,* filling the newspaper with classical and contemporary readings while simultaneously tempering the readings' tone, diction, and content for popular readers, making his writing "polite."

Throughout his essays, Addison more frequently than not acknowledges the superiority of the ancient critics compared with the modern ones, paying homage to Aristotelian and Longinian ideas, among others. In *Spectator* 25, for example, he writes, "It is impossible for us who live in the later Ages of the World to make Observations in Criticism, Morality, or in any Art or Science, which has not been touched upon by others." In short, the past critics have already said all there is to say, and to write after them is to expound upon and justify their past criticism.

Believing that "philosophy was the elegant common sense apt to mould [humankind]," Addison became known as the "British Virgil," and "the suave and homely Marcus Aurelius" who brought "philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies,

at tea-tables and coffee-houses" *(Spectator 10)*. Avoiding lofty or pious language in his criticism, Addison's literary goal was "to endeavor to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality" *(Spectator 10)*. And his audience, he declared, was the common person, especially the women of England, noting, "there are none to whom this paper will be more useful" *(Spectator 10)*. Whereas other English criticism of the time focuses on the author and the rules of literature, Addison highlights the *sublime* or what he calls the *greatness* of literature: "By *greatness* I do not mean only the Bulk of any single Object, but the Largeness of the whole View, considered as one entire Piece" *(Spectator 412)*. For Addison, greatness in literature is not mechanical superiority, but the prowess to display the immensity of life in a way that transcends imagination. Greatness, or the sublime, comes from both "great ideas and vehement passions." The aim of the literary critic, attests Addison, is not to dissect the writer of genius, but to look at what occurs in the interaction of literature and its audience. Our curiosity, says Addison, is one of the strongest and most lasting appetites implanted in us. Because of such curiosity, a critic's writings must be necessarily broad, touching on politics, sciences, arts, society, and any other concern pertinent to humanity. And the audience of such writings should be the general public, enlightening ordinary people with well-written prose combined with wit while simultaneously introducing them to the study of genius, the sublime, greatness, and audience response over the mechanics of a text.

Unlike his contemporary critics and authors such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope, Addison aimed to enlighten the common British citizen by giving to each of them the writings of the classical authors presented in simple, clear prose that could and would be discussed in the coffeehouses and at the tea tables throughout Great Britain.

ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744)

A Roman Catholic family in Protestant-controlled England bore a healthy infant who was soon deformed and twisted in body by spinal tuberculosis. Born at the beginning of the Neoclassical age (English literature from 1660 to 1798) and becoming its literary voice by age twenty, Alexander Pope embodies in his writings eighteenth-century thought and literary criticism. His early poems such as "Pastorals" (1709), *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), and "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717) establish him as a major British poet, but with the publication of his *Essay on Criticism* (1711), he becomes for all practical purposes the "literary pope" of England.

In this essay Pope, unlike previous literary critics and theorists, directly addresses critics rather than poets as he undertakes to codify Neoclassical

literary criticism. Toward the end of the essay, however, he does speak to both critics and poets.

According to Pope, the golden age of criticism is the classical age, the age of Homer, Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus. These are the writers who discovered the truth about "unerring Nature." It is the critic and the poet's task first to know and then to copy these authors and not nature because "To copy nature is to copy them [the classical authors]."

Pope asserts that the chief requirement of a good poet is natural genius, coupled with a knowledge of the classics and an understanding of the rules of poetry (literature). Such knowledge must be tempered with politeness and grace because "Without good breeding truth is disapproved/That only makes superior sense beloved."

Natural genius and good breeding being established, the critic/poet must then heed certain rules, says Pope. To be a good critic or poet, one must follow the established traditions as defined by the ancients. Not surprisingly, Pope spells out what these rules are and how they should be applied to eighteenth-century verse. Great concern for poetic diction, the establishment of the heroic couplet as a standard for verse, and the **personification** of abstract ideas, for example, now become fixed standards, whereas emotional outbreaks and free verse are *extraordinaire* and considered unrefined.

Governed by rules, restraint, and good taste, poetry, as defined by Pope, seeks to reaffirm truths or absolutes already discovered by the classical writers. The critic's task is clear: to validate and maintain classical values in the ever-shifting flux of cultural change. In effect, the critic becomes the custodian and defender of good taste and cultural values.

By affirming the imitation of the classical writers and through them of nature itself and by establishing the acceptable or standard criteria of poetic language, Pope grounds his criticism in both **mimetic** (imitation) and **rhetoric** (patterns of structure) literary theories. By the end of the 1700s, however, a major shift in literary theory occurs.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850)

By the close of the eighteenth century, the world had witnessed several major political rebellions, among them the American and French Revolutions, along with extreme social upheavals and prominent changes in philosophical thought. During this time, a paradigmatic shift occurred in how people viewed the world. Whereas the eighteenth century valued order and reason, the emerging nineteenth-century worldview emphasized intuition as a proper guide to truth. The eighteenth-century mind likened the world to a great machine, with all its parts operating harmoniously, but in the nineteenth century, the world was perceived as a living organism that

was always growing and eternally becoming. For the rationalistic mind of the eighteenth century, the city housed the centers of art and literature and set the standards of good taste. In contrast, the emerging nineteenth-century citizen saw rural places as fundamental, as the setting in which a person could discover the inner self. Devaluing the empirical and rationalistic methodologies of the previous century, the nineteenth-century thinker believed that truth could be attained by tapping into the core of our humanity or our transcendental natures, best sought in our original or natural setting.

Such radical changes found their spokesperson in William Wordsworth. Born in Cockermouth, Cumberlandshire, and raised in the Lake District of England, Wordsworth completed his formal education at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1791. After completing his grand tour of the Continent, he published *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), then met one of his literary admirers and soon-to-be friends and coauthors, Samuel T. Coleridge. In 1798 Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems that heralded the beginning of British romanticism. In the ensuing fifteen-year period, Wordsworth wrote most of his best poetry, including *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807), *The Excursion* (1814), *Miscellaneous Poems* (1815), and *The Prelude* (1850). But it is *Lyrical Ballads* that ushers in the Romantic age in English literature and shifts the focus of both literary theory and criticism.

In an explanatory preface written as an introduction to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth espouses a new vision of poetry and the beginnings of a radical change in literary theory. His purpose, he notes, is "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and [. . .] describe them in language really used by [people] in situations [. . .] the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement." Like Aristotle, Sidney, and Pope, Wordsworth concerns himself with the elements and subject matter of literature but changes the emphasis: Common men and women people his poetry, not kings, queens, and aristocrats, because in "humble and rustic life," Wordsworth asserts, the poet finds that "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language."

Not only does Wordsworth suggest a radical change in subject matter but he also dramatically shifts the focus of poetry's "proper language." Unlike Pope and his predecessors, Wordsworth chooses "language really used by [people]"—everyday speech, not the inflated poetic diction of heroic couplets, complicated rhyme schemes, and dense figures of speech placed in the mouths of the typical eighteenth-century character. Wordsworth's rustics, such as Michael and Luke in his poetic narrative "Michael," speak in the simple, everyday diction of their trade.

In addition to reshaping the focus of poetry's subject and language, Wordsworth redefines poetry itself: "For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Unlike Sidney, Dante, and Pope, who decree that poetry should be restrained, controlled, and reasoned, Wordsworth now

highlights poetry's emotional quality. Although Wordsworth does not abandon reason and disciplined thought, for him, the effective use of a passion-filled imagination becomes the central characteristic of poetry.

In altering poetry's subject matter, language, and definition, Wordsworth redefines the role of the poet. The poet is no longer the preserver of civilized values or proper taste, but "he is a man speaking to men: a man [. . .] endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind." Wordsworth's poet "has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement." Such a poet need no longer follow a prescribed set of rules because this artist may now freely express his or her own individualism, valuing and writing about feelings that are peculiarly the artist's.

Because Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings [. . .] [taking] its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility," Wordsworth's new kind of poet crafts a poem by internalizing a scene, circumstance, or happening and "recollects" that occasion with its accompanying emotions at a later time when the artist can shape the remembrance into words. Poetry, then, is unlike biology or one of the other sciences because it deals not with something that can be dissected or broken down into its constituent parts, but primarily with the imagination and feelings. Intuition, not reason, reigns.

What, then, of the reader? What part does the audience play in such a process? Toward the end of the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," Wordsworth writes, "I have one request to make of my reader, which is, that in judging these poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others." Wordsworth hopes that his readers' responses to and opinions of his poems will not depend on critics who would freely dispense their evaluations. Wordsworth desires his readers to rely on their own feelings and their own imaginations as they grapple with the same emotions the poet felt when he first saw and then later "recollected in tranquility" the subject or circumstances of the poem itself. Through poetry, declares Wordsworth, the poet and the reader share such emotions.

This subjective experience of sharing emotions leads Wordsworth away from the preceding centuries' mimetic and rhetorical theories of criticism and toward a new development in literary theory: the **expressive school**, which emphasizes the individuality of the artist and the reader's privilege to share in this individuality. By expressing such individuality and valuing the emotions and the imagination as legitimate concerns in poetry, Wordsworth lays the foundation for English Romanticism and broadens the scope of literary criticism and theory for both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792–1822)

One of the strongest and most vocal voices of British Romanticism, Percy Shelley was born in Sussex, England, in 1792, the eldest child of a wealthy country squire. Educated at an academy in London, Shelley enrolled in Oxford University, where he found intellectual companionship with Thomas Jefferson Hogg (1792–1862), who became a lifelong friend. After mastering the works of Plato and the writings of William Godwin (1756–1836), especially *Political Justice* (1793), Shelley and Hogg authored a pamphlet titled "The Necessity of Atheism," the contents of which resulted in Hogg's and Shelley's expulsion from Oxford. Ironically Shelley was not an atheist, but wanted to establish the right to debate the beliefs of Christianity.

Such disputes and quarrels with the establishment of both Church and state followed Shelley the remainder of his life, including an unhappy marriage to Harriet Westbrook, an elopement with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and a variety of other events esteemed disgraceful by Britain's citizenry. Yet Shelley produced some of the best known Romantic poems—"Ozymandias" (1817), "Ode to the West Wind" (1819), and "Adonais" (1821), to name a few—and a pivotal text of literary criticism, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), written in response to a whimsical attack on Romantic poetry by Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866), a good friend of Shelley's and a poet, essayist, and scholar in his own right.

Of all the Romantic poets, Shelley, by far, is the greatest devotee of Plato, embracing Plato's beliefs and establishing himself as the voice of Neoplatonism in British Romanticism. In *A Defence of Poetry,* Shelley's indebtedness to Plato quickly becomes obvious. Shelley, for example, adopts and adapts Plato's concept of the Ideal Forms, the belief that all things around us are merely representations or shadows of Truth, of the Ideal world, and of spiritual reality—what Plato names The One. Shelley blends Plato's concept of spiritual reality with his own understanding, asserting that poetry is by far the best way to gain access to the Forms and to ultimate Truth. Disavowing Neoclassicism's allegiance to order and reason, Shelley emphasizes the individual and the imagination. For Shelley, Plato's Forms intertwine with the Romantic ideal of the imagination. In his poetic craft, poetry is less concerned with reason and rationality and more concerned about the spiritual and the transcendental. Now the imagination and the emotions, not didactic structural elements, become center stage in interpreting a text, with Shelley redefining poetry as "the expression of the imagination." For him, "poetry is . . . that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and succession of the scions of the tree of life." Poetry is not only an outstanding art form, but a teacher and a guide to Truth, one embodied in nature and the individual, not in science or reason or philosophy. Shelley believes that philosophy and history stem from poetry,

with poetry occupying a superior place to these disciplines. And poets, the crafters of poetry, are found in all walks of life: architects, painters, musicians, teachers, and lawmakers. If true to their craft, poets will lead people toward Truth—the Truth of the spiritual nature of ultimate reality and of Plato's The One—opening the minds of their readers to the unseen beauty all around them.

For Shelley, there is nothing more sacred and perfect than poetry. In his creative theory, the poet is the greatest among all the various kinds of artists because the poet alone can see the future in the present and, as Shelley notes, "participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one," becoming more than just an ordinary person. His passion for both the poet and poetry and their role in the world as teacher and prophet who can lead us to ultimate Truth represents a paradigmatic shift in thought from the Age of Reason or Neoclassicism to British Romanticism, a new direction in literary criticism that profoundly affects literary theory and criticism to this, our present age.

HIPPOLYTE ADOLPHE TAINE (1828–1893)

Wordsworth's romanticism, with its stress on intuition as a guide to ultimate truth and its belief that emotions and the imagination are the essential elements of good poetry, dominated literature and literary criticism throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and its influence still continues today. With the rise of the Victorian era in the 1830s, reason, science, and a sense of historical determinism began to supplant Romanticism's emphasis on intuition and the imagination as avenues to truth. The growing sense of historical and scientific determinism found its authoritative voice and culminating influence in Charles Darwin and his text *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Humankind was now demystified because we now knew our origins and understood our physiological development. Science, it seemed, had provided us with the key to our past and an understanding of the present and would help us determine our future if we relied on the scientific method in all our human endeavors.

Science's methodology, its philosophical assumptions, and its practical applications found an admiring adherent and a strong voice in French historian and literary critic Hippolyte A. Taine. Born in Vouziers, France, Hippolyte Taine was a brilliant but unorthodox student at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. After finishing his formal education, he taught in various schools throughout France, continuing his investigations in both aesthetics and history. During the 1850s, he published various philosophical and aesthetic treatises, but his chief contribution to literary criticism and history is his text the *History of English Literature*, published in 1864. In this work

Taine crystallizes what is now known as the historical approach to literary analysis.

In the introduction to the *History of English Literature,* Taine uses a scientific **simile** to explain his approach to literary criticism:

> What is your first remark on turning over the great, stiff leaves of a folio, the yellow sheets of a manuscript—a poem, a code of laws, a declaration of faith? This, you say, was not created alone. It is but a mould, like fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except to represent to yourself the animal? So do you study the document only in order to know the [person].

For Taine, a text is like a fossil shell that naturally contains the likeness of its inhabiter, who in this case is the author. To study only the text (e.g., discovering its date of composition or the accuracy of its historical references or allusions) without considering the author and his or her inner psyche would result in an incomplete analysis. An investigation of both the text and the author, Taine believes, would result in an accurate understanding of the literary work.

Taine asserts that to understand any literary text, we must examine the environmental causes that joined together in its creation. He divides such influences into four main categories: race, milieu, moment, and dominant faculty. By race, Taine posits that authors of the same **race,** or those born and raised in the same country, share peculiar intellectual beliefs, emotions, and ways of understanding. By examining each author's inherited and learned personal characteristics, Taine believes we will then be able to understand more fully the author's text. In addition, we must also examine the author's milieu or surroundings. English citizens, he asserts, respond differently to life than do French or Irish citizens. Accordingly, by examining the culture of the author, Taine proposes that we would understand more fully the intellectual and cultural concerns that inevitably surface in an author's text. Further, Taine maintains that we must investigate an author's epoch or moment—that is, the time period in which the text was written. Such information reveals the dominant ideas or worldview held by people at that particular time and, therefore, helps us identify and understand the literary characters' actions, motivations, and concerns more fully than if we did not have such information. Finally, Taine decrees we must examine each author's individual talents or dominant faculty that makes him or her different from others who share similar characteristics of race, milieu, and moment. For Taine, a work of art is "the result of given causes" and can best be represented by using the following formula: race + milieu + moment + dominant faculty = work of art. Taine argues that we

cannot appreciate art as it "really" is without considering all four of these stated elements.

MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822–1888)

In the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," Wordsworth declares that "poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science." Such a lofty statement concerning the nature and role of poetry finds an advocate in Matthew Arnold, the self-appointed voice for English Victorianism (1837–1901), the literary epoch immediately following Wordsworth and Shelley's Romanticism.

Born during the Romantic era, Matthew Arnold was the son of an English educator. Following in his family's tradition, Arnold attended Oxford University, and upon graduation accepted a teaching position at Oriel College. He spent most of his professional life (nearly thirty-five years) as an inspector of schools. By age thirty-five, he had already written the majority of his poetry, including "Dover Beach (1851)," "The Scholar-Gipsy (1853)," and "Sohrab and Rustum (1853)," some of his most famous poems.

During Arnold's early career, reactions against Romanticism and its adherents arose. Writers, philosophers, and scientists began to give more credence to empirical and rationalistic methods for discovering the nature of their world rather than to Romantic concepts of emotion, individualism, and intuition as pathways to truth. With the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and the writings of philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and German theologian and philosopher David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), science seemingly usurped the place of Romanticism's "religion of nature" and the beliefs of most other traditional religions. At the same time, philosophy became too esoteric and, therefore, less relevant as a vehicle for understanding reality for the average Victorian. Into this void stepped Arnold, proclaiming that poetry can provide the necessary truths, values, and guidelines for society.

Fundamental to Arnold's literary criticism is his reapplication of classical criteria to literature. Quotes and borrowed ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Longinus, and other classical writers pepper his criticism. From Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example, Arnold adapts his idea that the best poetry is of a "higher truth and seriousness" than history—or any other human subject or activity, for that matter. Like Plato, Arnold believes that literature reflects the society in which it is written and heralds its values and concerns. Like Longinus, he attempts to define a classic, decreeing that such a work belongs to the "highest" or "best class." And in support of many of his other ideas, he cites the later "classical" writers such as Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton.

For Arnold, poetry—not religion, science, or philosophy—is humankind's crowning activity. He notes, "More and more [human]kind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry." In the best of this poetry, he declares, we find "in the eminent degree, truth and seriousness." Equating "seriousness" with moral excellence, Arnold asserts that the best poetry can and does provide standards of excellence, a yardstick by which both Arnold and his society should judge themselves.

In his pivotal essays "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865) and "The Study of Poetry" (1888), Arnold crystallizes his critical position. Like Plato's critic, Arnold reaffirms but slightly amends the social role of criticism: to create "a current of true and fresh ideas." To accomplish this goal, the critic must avoid becoming embroiled in politics or any other activity that would lead to a form of bias, for the critic must view society disinterestedly, keeping aloof from the world's mundane affairs. In turn, such aloofness will benefit all society because the critic will then be able to pave the way for high culture—a prerequisite for the poet and the writing of the best poetry.

How, then, may the best poetry be achieved or discovered? By establishing objective criteria whereby we can judge whether any poem contains or achieves, in Aristotelian terms, "higher truth or seriousness." The critic's task is "to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry." By comparing the newly written lines to classical poems that contain elements of the "sublime," the critic will instantly know whether a new poem is good or bad.

In practice, such apparent objectivity in criticism becomes quite subjective. Whose judgments, for example, shall we follow? Shall lines written by Homer and Dante be considered excellent? How about Sidney's or even Aristophanes'? Need the critic rank all past poets in an attempt to discover who is great and who is not in order to create a basis for such comparisons and value judgments? And whose moral values shall become the yardstick by which we judge poetry? Arnold's only?

Such "objective" **touchstone theory** redefines the task of the literary critic and introduces a subjective approach in literary criticism. No longer just being the interpreter of a literary work, the critic now functions as an authority on values, culture, and tastes. This new literary "watchdog" must guard and defend high culture and its literature while simultaneously defining what high culture and literature really are.

Decreeing the critic to be the preserver of society's values and poetry to be its most important activity, Arnold became the recognized spokesperson for Victorian England and its literature. Even modern-day literary criticism

remains peppered with some of his distinct phrases: "a disinterested effort to learn and propagate the best that has been known and thought," "to see the object as in itself it really is," "culture and anarchy," "a criticism of life," to cite a few. By taking Wordsworth's concept of the poet one step further, Arnold separated both the critic and the poet from society in order to create a type of poetry and criticism that could supposedly rescue society from its baser elements and preserve its most noble characteristics. Opposed by some modern critics whose analyses stop short of considering literary criticism of the previous two centuries, Arnold's criticism serves as either a rallying point or a standard of opposition by which theorists can now measure their own critical statements. More than any other critic, Arnold helps establish "culture" and, in particular, literature as the highest object of veneration among civilized peoples.

HENRY JAMES (1843–1916)

While Arnold was decreeing how poetry would rescue humanity from its baser elements and would help lead us to truth, literary works were also being written in other genres, particularly the novel. Throughout both the Romantic and Victorian eras, for example, people in England and America were reading such works as *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Vanity Fair* (1848), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *Great Expectations* (1860–61). Few were providing for either the writers or the readers of this genre a body of criticism comparable to that continually being formulated for poetry. As Henry James notes in his critical essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884), the English novel "had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it—of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison." It was left to James himself to provide us with such a theory.

Born in New York City in 1843, Henry James enjoyed the privileges of education, travel, and money. Throughout his early life, he and his family (including his brother William, the founder of American pragmatic philosophy) traveled to the capitals of Europe, visiting the sites and meeting the leading writers and scholars of the day. Having all things European early injected into his life and thought, James believed he wanted to be a lawyer and enrolled in Harvard Law School. Quickly discovering that writing, not law, captivated him, he abandoned law school for a career in writing. By 1875, the early call of Europe on his life had to be answered, and James, a bachelor for life, settled permanently in Europe and began in earnest his writing career.

Noted for his short stories—"The Real Thing" (1892), "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903), and "The Jolly Corner" (1908), to name a few—and his

novels—*The American* (1877), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880–81), *The Bostonians* (1885–88), and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), among others—James's favorite theme is the conflict he perceives between Europe and America. The seasoned aristocracy with its refined manners and taste is often infiltrated in his stories by the naive American who seemingly lacks refined culture and discernment. Though a very involved practicing writer, James was also concerned with developing a theory of writing, particularly for the novel. Indeed, in his critical essay "The Art of Fiction," he provides us with the first well-articulated theory of the novel in English literature.

In "The Art of Fiction," published in a book of critical essays titled *Partial Portraits* (1888), James states that "a novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression"; furthermore, "the only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting. The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result [are] innumerable." From the start, James's theory rejects the romantic notion of either Wordsworth or Coleridge that the readers suspend disbelief while reading a text. For James, a text must first be realistic, a representation of life as it is and one that is recognizable to its readers. Bad novels, declares James, are either romantic or scientific; good novels show us life in action and, above all else, are interesting.

Bad novels, James continues, are written by bad authors, whereas good novels are written by good authors. Unlike weak authors, good writers are good thinkers who can select, evaluate, and imaginatively utilize the "stuff of life" (i.e., the facts or pictures of reality) in their work. These writers also recognize that a work of art is organic. The work itself is not simply the amassing of realistic data from real-life experiences but has a life of its own that grows according to its own principles or themes. Writers must acknowledge this fact and distance themselves from directly telling the story. Shunning the omniscient, third-person narrator as a vehicle for telling a story, James asserts that a more indirect point of view is essential so the author shows characters, actions, and emotions to readers rather than telling us about them. By showing rather than telling us about his characters and their actions, James believes that he creates a greater illusion of reality than if he were to present his story through one point of view or one character. Ultimately James declares that the reader must decide the worth of the text, and "nothing of course, will ever take the place of the good old fashion liking of a work of art or not liking it: the most improved criticism will not abolish that primitive, that ultimate test."

Thanks to Henry James, the genre of the novel becomes a respectable topic for literary critics. With his emphasis on realism and "the stuff of life," James formulates a theory of fiction that is still discussed and debated today.

MIKHAIL BAKHTIN (1895–1975)

Perhaps more than any other modern-day literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin exemplifies present-day literary theory because Bakhtin himself represents diverse academic disciplines and interests. Bakhtin has been dubbed a linguist, a historian, a philosopher, a writer, a semiotician, an artist, a Formalist critic, a Marxist critic, a literary historian, an ethicist, and a cultural critic. Without question, he is one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century.

Ironically Bakhtin received little attention during his lifetime, except perhaps in his later years. Born in Orel, Russia, to a middle-class family, Bakhtin grew up in Vilnius and Odessa before moving to Petrograd to study at the University of St. Petersburg in 1913. Leaving the university without completing his studies, he then moved first to Nevel then to Vitebsk, where he worked as a schoolteacher. At Vitebsk, he was surrounded by a group of intellectuals who addressed the social and cultural influences of the Russian Revolution and its rule under Joseph Stalin. Today this group of scholars, including Bakhtin, P. N. Medvedev, and V. N. Voloshinov, is known as the **Bakhtin Circle.** By 1924, the group had moved to Leningrad. Here Bakhtin struggled financially as his illness (osteomyelitis in his leg) and his lack of proper political credentials prevented him from finding work. In 1929 he was arrested for supposedly participating in the underground Russian Orthodox Church. Sentenced to exile in Siberia for ten years, he appealed his sentence because of his weakening physical condition and was then sentenced to six years of internal exile in Kazakhstan.

Throughout the 1930s, Bakhtin worked as a bookkeeper then as a teacher at Mordovia State Teachers College in Saransk, moving often to escape further imprisonment during various political purges. In 1938 his osteomyelitis advanced, causing his right leg to be amputated. Although he was plagued with pain for the rest of his life, his scholarly work dramatically improved after the amputation. In 1946 he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation on Rabelais and his world. And from the late 1940s until his retirement in 1961, Bakhtin taught at the Mordov Pedagogical Institute, now the University of Saransk. In the latter part of the 1950s, Russian academics and scholars were once again interested in his work and were more than surprised to discover that he was still alive. Producing a new edition of his 1929 study of Dostoevsky along with additional works on Rabelais and the Renaissance culture, Bakhtin quickly became the "poster scholar" for Russian scholarship. After his death in 1975, a variety of his manuscripts became available, few being edited by the author himself. By the 1980s and '90s, Bakhtin was regarded as one of the most profound scholars of the twentieth century.

His most renowned academic writings include his first work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929, 2nd ed., 1963); his doctoral dissertation, *Rabelais and His World,* that was successfully defended in 1946 but not published until 1968; and *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (edited, translated, and published in 1981). Since Bakhtin's death in 1975, many other speeches and essays have been translated and published, but the core of his linguistic and literary theories can be discovered in the earlier works.

Central to Bakhtin's critical theory is the concept of the **dialogic.** According to Bakhtin, all language is a dialogue in which a speaker and a listener form a relationship. Language is always the product of at least two people in a dialogue, not a monologue. And it is language that defines us as individuals. Our personal consciousness consists of the inner conversations we have only in our heads, conversations with a variety of voices that are significant for us. Each of these voices can respond in new and exciting ways, developing who we are and continually helping shape who we become. In one very real sense, no individual can ever be completely understood or fully known. That any person always has the capability to change or never fully be known in this world Bakhtin labels **unfinalizability.**

Because Bakhtin posits that all language is a dialogue, not monologic, he employs the term **heteroglossia** (a translation of the Russian word *raznorecie,* meaning "other or different tongues" or "multilanguagedness") to demonstrate the multiplicity of languages that operate in any given culture. Bakhtin thus expands the traditional definition of the word *language* from being defined only as the spoken tongue of a given, cultural people. For Bakhtin, all forms of social speech that people use in their daily activities constitute heteroglossia. Professors speak one way while lecturing to their classes, another to their spouses, another to their friends, another to the clerk at the store, another to the server at a restaurant, and another to the police officer who gives the professor a speeding ticket. Each individual speech act is a **dialogic utterance** that is oriented toward a particular listener or audience, demonstrating the relationship that exists between the speaker and listener.

In his essay "Discourse in the Novel" (1935), Bakhtin applies his ideas directly to the novel. He believes that the novel is characterized by **dialogized heteroglossia.** Within the novel, multiple world views and a variety of experiences are continually dialoguing with each other, resulting in multiple interactions, some of which are real and others of which are imagined. Although the characters' utterances are indeed important, it is the commenting narrator's dialogic utterances, Bakhtin asserts, that are the most important. For through these utterances, diverse voices and interactions and relationships form, creating a complex unity. Whatever meaning the language of the text possesses, says Bakhtin, resides not in the intention of the speaker nor in the text, but somewhere between the speaker or writer, or between the listener or reader. Such dialogized heteroglossia is continually occurring, for even within a single utterance, two different languages clash, a process Bakhtin calls **hybridization.**

Bakhtin maintains that some novels, especially those written by Dostoevsky, are polyphonic. In **nonpolyphonic novels,** the author knows the ending of the novel while writing the novel's beginning. The writer knows all the characters' actions and choices, and the author also knows the work's entire structure. In this kind of novel, the author's understanding of truth is what is exhibited in the work. In a **polyphonic novel,** there is no overall outlined structure or prescribed outcome, nor is the text a working out of the author's worldview or understanding of truth. The truth of the polyphonic novel is an active creation in the consciousnesses of the author, the readers, and the characters, allowing for genuine surprises for all concerned. All participants—author, reader, and characters—interact as equals in creating the novel's "truth," for truth requires a plurality of consciousnesses.

For Bakhtin, the polyphonic nature of the novel implies that there are many truths, not just one. Each character speaks and thinks his or her own truth. Although one truth may be preferred to others by a character, a reader, or the author, no truth is particularly certain. Readers watch as one character influences another, and readers listen to the multitude of voices heard by each character as these voices shape those who hear them. What develops, says Bakhtin, is a **carnivalistic** atmosphere, a sense of joyful relativity. This sense of **carnival** is one of Bakhtin's most significant contributions to literary theory and helps describe the novel's polyphonic style, especially the novels of Dostoevsky. Polyphonic novels, asserts Bakhtin, have a carnival sense of the world, a sense of joyful abandonment where many voices are simultaneously heard and directly influence their hearers. Each participant tests both the ideas and the lives of other participants, creating a somewhat seriocomic environment.

Bakhtin's interest in language, culture, literature, religion, and politics encompasses much of contemporary literary theory and criticism. His ideas have become starting points for conversations and dialogues among competing and often conflicting voices in various contemporary cultural theories.

MODERN LITERARY CRITICISM

Matthew Arnold's death in 1888 (and to a lesser degree Henry James's death in 1916) marks a transitional period in literary criticism. Like Dryden, Pope, and Wordsworth before him, Arnold was the recognized authority and leading literary critic of his day, and it is his theories and criticism that embody the major ideas of his era. With the passing of Arnold, the predominance of any one person or set of ideas representing a broad time period or literary movement ends, although Bakhtin's concerns and voice vie for prominence. After Arnold, literary theory and criticism become splintered and more

diversified, with no one voice speaking *ex cathedra* or no one theory tenaciously held by all. At the end of the nineteenth century, most critics emphasized either a biographical or a historical approach to texts. Using Taine's historical interests in a text and Henry James's newly articulated theory of the novel, many critics investigated a text as if it were the embodiment of its author or a historical artifact. In the years that follow Arnold and James, no single, universally recognized voice dominates literary theory. Instead, many distinctive literary voices give rise to a host of differing and exciting ways to examine a text.

What follows in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is a variety of schools of criticism, with each school asking legitimate and relevant but different questions about a text. Most of these schools abandon the **holistic approach** to literary study, which investigates, analyzes, and interprets all elements of the artistic situation in favor of concentrating on one or more specific aspects. For example, modernism (and, in particular, the New Criticism, the first critical movement of the twentieth century) wishes to break from the past, deemphasizing the cultural and historical influences that may affect a work of literature. The text, these critics declare, will interpret the text. On the other hand, Cultural Poetics, a school of criticism that first appeared in the 1980s and continues to develop its underlying assumptions and methodologies, argues that most critics' historical consciousness must be reawakened because, in reality, the fictional text and its historical and cultural milieu are amazingly similar. For these critics, a reader can never fully discern the truth about a historical or a literary text since truth itself is perceived differently from one era to another. For those who espouse the principles of Cultural Poetics, the text-only criticism of the early and mid-twentieth century appears biased and incomplete.

In the remaining chapters of this book, we will examine the most prominent schools of twentieth- and twenty-first-century interpretation. For each of these diverse schools, we will note the tenets of the philosophy underlying their literary theory. Most, if not all, have borrowed ideas, principles, and concerns from the literary critics and theories already discussed. We will examine closely what they borrow from these past schools of criticism, what they amend, and what concepts they add. We will also note each school's historical development, its working assumptions, its particular vocabulary, and its methodology for interpreting texts. By so doing, we will become informed about literary theorists and critics who articulate clearly our analyses of a text.

3

Russian Formalism and New Criticism

The essential structure of a poem (as distinguished from the rational or logical structure of the "statement" which we abstract from it) resembles that of architecture or painting: it is a pattern of resolved stresses.

Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, Chapter 11

INTRODUCTION

By the end of the nineteenth century, no single school of criticism dominated literary studies. For the most part, literary criticism was not even considered an academic activity. Academic research was more frequently than not governed by psychological or sociohistorical principles that attempted to show that a literary work was a social or political product encased in a particular history. Some scholars who rejected this view espoused a theory that exulted the author, claiming a text to be the personal impressions and visions of its creator, a place where the author and the reader can imaginatively revel in the text and perhaps communicate with each other. And still others declared that a literary work should be read biographically, seeing the author's life and private concerns peeping throughout the text. But in the early part of the twentieth century, a radical break occurred in these traditional ways of interpretation with the emergence of a group of Russian scholars who articulated a set of interpretive principles known as **Russian Formalism.**

RUSSIAN FORMALISM

In the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century, two distinct groups of Russian scholars emerged in Moscow and Petrograd (St. Petersburg) who would radically change the direction of literary theory and criticism. Founded in 1915, the Moscow Linguistic Circle included in its

practitioners such members as Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukarovsky, Peter Bogatyrev, and G. O. Vinokur. The following year in Petrograd, the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ) was formed, including in its membership Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, and Victor Vinogradov. Although the adherents of both groups often disagreed concerning the principles of literary interpretation, they were united in their rejection of many nineteenth-century assumptions of textual analysis, especially the belief that a work of literature was the expression of the author's worldview and their dismissal of psychological and biographical criticism as being irrelevant to interpretation. These Russian scholars boldly declared the autonomy of literature and poetic language, advocating a scientific approach to literary interpretation. Literature, they believed, should be investigated as its own discipline, not merely as a platform for discussing religious, political, sociological, or philosophical ideas. By radically divorcing themselves from previous literary approaches and advocating new principles of hermeneutics, these members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language are considered the founders of modern literary criticism, establishing what is known as Russian Formalism.

Coined by opponents of the movement to deprecate Russian Formalism's supposedly strict methodological approach to literary interpretation, the terms ***Formalism*** and ***Formalist*** were first rejected by the Russian Formalists themselves, for they believed that their approach to literature was both dynamic and evolutionary, not a "formal" or dogmatic one. Nevertheless, the terms ultimately became the battle cry for the establishment of what they dubbed a science of literature.

The first task of the Russian Formalists was to define their new science. Framing their theory on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, the French linguist and founder of modern **linguistics,** the Formalists emphasized the autonomous nature of literature. The proper study of literature, they declared, is literature itself. To study literature is to study **poetics,** which is an analysis of a work's constituent parts—its linguistic and structural features—or its **form.** Form, they asserted, included the internal mechanics of the work itself, especially its poetic language. It is these internal mechanics or what the Formalists called **devices** that compose the artfulness and literariness of any given text, not a work's subject matter or content. Each device or compositional feature possesses peculiar properties that can, as in any science, be analyzed. For the Formalists, this new science of literature became an analysis of the literary and artistic devices that the writer manipulates in creating a text.

The Formalists' chief focus of literary analysis was the examination of a text's **literariness,** the language employed in the actual text. Literary language, they asserted, is different from everyday language. Unlike everyday speech, literary language **foregrounds** itself, shouting, "Look at me; I am special; I am unique." Through structure, imagery, syntax, rhyme scheme, paradox and a host of other devices, literary language identifies itself as

deviations from everyday speech patterns, ultimately producing the defining feature of literariness, **defamiliarization.** Coined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, defamiliarization is the process of making strange **(ostranenie)** the familiar, of putting the old in new light, what Shklovsky called a "sphere of new perception." By making strange the familiar, defamiliarization (or what some Russian Formalists call **estrangement**) slows down the act of perception of everyday words or objects, forcing the listener or reader to reexamine the image. For example, when we read in a poem the words "dazzling darkness," our attention is caught by the unusual pairing of these words. Our ordinary experience of everyday language is slowed down because we must now unpack the meaning of the author's choice of language. When we do so, poetry with its accompanying poetic diction has called attention to itself as poetry and to its literariness, allowing its listeners or readers to experience a small part of their world in a new way by intensifying the act of perception.

In addition to examining the constituent devices present in poetry, Shklovsky also analyzed narrative prose and declared that the structure of a narrative has two aspects: **fabula** (story) and **syuzhet** (plot). Fabula is the raw material of the story and can be considered somewhat akin to the writer's working outline. This outline contains the chronological series of events of the story. The syuzhet is the literary devices the writer uses to transform a story (the fabula) into plot. By using such techniques as digressions, surprises, and disruptions, the writer dramatically alters the fabula, making it a work of literature that now has the potential to provoke defamiliarization, "to make strange" the language of the text and render a fresh view of language and/or the reader's world.

What Russian Formalism contributed to the study of literature and literary theory is a reevaluation of the text itself. Bringing a scientific approach to literary studies, the Formalists redefined a **text** to mean a unified collection of various literary devices and conventions that can be objectively analyzed. Literature is not, they declared, the vision of an author or authorial intent. Using linguistic principles, the Formalists asserted that literature, like all sciences, is a self-enclosed, law-governed system. To study literature is to study a text's form and only incidentally its content. For the Formalists, form is superior to content.

As a group, the Russian Formalists were suppressed and disbanded in 1930 by the Soviet government because they were unwilling to view literature through the Stalinist regime's political and ideological perspectives. Their influence did continue to flourish in Czechoslovakia through the work of the Prague Linguistic Circle (founded in 1926, its leading figure being Roman Jakobson) and through the work of the Russian folktale scholar Vladimir Propp. Fortunately for the advancement of literary theory and criticism, Russian Formalism resurfaces in the 1960s in French and American structuralism (see Chapter 5).

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RUSSIAN FORMALISM AND NEW CRITICISM

Russian Formalism is sometimes paired with the first modern school of Anglo-American criticism: the New Criticism. Dominating both American and British criticism from the 1930s to the 1950s, New Criticism can be considered a second cousin of Russian Formalism. Although both schools employ some similar terminology and are identified as types of Formalism, there exists no direct relation between them. New Criticism has its own unique history and development in Great Britain and the United States. Interestingly, in the 1940s, two leading Russian Formalists, Roman Jakobson and René Wellek, came to the United States and actively participated in the scholarly discussions of the New Critics. The interaction of these Russian Formalists with the New Critics does evidence itself in some of Russian Formalism's ideas being mirrored in New Critical principles.

APPLYING RUSSIAN FORMALISM TO A LITERARY TEXT

Read carefully the following poem by the contemporary American essayist, poet, scholar, and editor Mary M. Brown. After reading the text several times, be able to apply, discuss, and demonstrate how the following terms from Russian Formalism can be used in developing an interpretation of this text:

- poetics
- form
- devices
- literariness
- foregrounding of literary language
- defamiliarization.

Early Spring Aubade

The branches outside this office window
too often block the light, but today the early

morning sun wavers, then prevails, stippling
this space with a tentative dawn that crawls

toward an even more fragile day. All the failures
of my life on earth are erased in this quivering

grace that works its lacy way through its own
curious birth. This is the one appointed hour

that comes and gives and goes again—too soon—
the briefest visit, that leaves this faltering glow,

the gift of a faint, definite urging, the finest
power we have—so close, *this* close to Love.

Mary M. Brown

NEW CRITICISM

If Brown's poem "Early Spring Aubade" were taught in many high school or introductory-level college literature courses, the instructor would probably begin the discussion with a set of questions that contain most, if not all, of the following: What is the meaning of the title? What is the title's relationship to the rest of the poem? Where is the *office* located in line 1? What is the meaning of the word *stippling* in line 3? Are there other words in the text that need to be defined? In line 4, how can the *dawn* "crawl toward an even more fragile day"? What is the relationship that Brown establishes between *failures* and *grace*? What kind of *birth* occurs in the poem? What is the gift referred to in the penultimate line of the poem? How is Brown defining the word *Love* in the poem's last line? What relationships between words or concepts is Brown establishing in the text? What of the poem's physical structure? Does the arrangement of the words, phrases, or sentences help establish relationships among them? What is the poem's tone? How do you know this is the tone, and what devices does Brown employ to establish this tone? What tensions does Brown create in the poem? What ambiguities? Does Brown successfully resolve these tensions by the poem's end? Based on the answers to all of these questions, what does the poem mean? In other words, what is the poem's form or its overall meaning?

Upon close examination of these discussion questions, a distinct pattern or methodology quickly becomes evident. This particular interpretive model begins with a close analysis of the poem's individual words, including both denotative and connotative meanings, then moves to a discussion of possible allusions within the text. Following this discussion, the teacher/critic searches for any patterns developed through individual words, phrases, clauses, sentences, figures of speech, and allusions. The critic's sharp eye also notes any **symbols** (either **public** or **private**) that represent something else. Other elements for analysis include point of view, tone, and any other poetic device that will help the reader understand the dramatic situation. After ascertaining how all the aforementioned information interrelates and finally coalesces in the poem, the critic can then declare what the poem means. The poem's overall meaning or form depends almost solely on the text in front of the reader. No library research, no studying of the author's

life and times, and no other extratextual information is needed, except, perhaps, a dictionary. The poem itself contains all the necessary information to discover its meaning.

This method of analysis became the dominant school of thought and interpretative methodology during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century in most high school and college literature classes and in both British and American scholarship. Known as **New Criticism,** this approach to literary analysis provides the reader with a formula for arriving at the correct interpretation of a text using—for the most part—only the text itself. Such a formulaic approach gives both the beginning student of literature and academicians a seemingly objective approach for discovering a text's meaning. Using New Criticism's clearly articulated methodology, any intelligent reader, say its adherents (called **New Critics**), can uncover a text's hitherto so-called hidden meaning.

New Criticism's theoretical ideas, terminology, and critical methods are, more often than not, disparaged by many present-day critics who themselves are introducing new ideas concerning literary theory. Despite its current unpopularity, New Criticism stands as one of the most important English-based contributions to literary critical analysis. Its easily repeatable principles, teachableness, and seemingly undying popularity in the literature classroom and in some scholarly journals have enabled New Criticism to enrich theoretical and practical criticism while helping generations of readers to become **close readers** of texts.

The term *New Criticism* came into popular use to describe this approach to understanding literature with the 1941 publication of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism,* a work that contained Ransom's personal analysis of several of his contemporary theorists and critics. Ransom himself was a Southern poet, a critic, and one of the leading advocates of this evolving movement. While teaching at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, in the 1920s, Ransom, along with several other professors and students, formed the Fugitives, a group of scholars and critics who believed in and practiced similar interpretative approaches to a text. Other sympathetic groups, such as the Southern Agrarians (also in Nashville, Tennessee), soon formed. In *The New Criticism,* Ransom articulates the principles of these various groups and calls for an **ontological critic,** one who will recognize that a **poem** (used as a synonym in New Criticism for any literary work) is a concrete entity, as is Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or the score of Handel's *Messiah* or any chemical element, such as iron or gold. Like these concrete objects, a poem can be analyzed to discover its true or correct meaning independent of its author's intention or of the emotional state, values, or beliefs of either its author or its reader. Because this claim rests at the center of the movement's critical ideas, it is not surprising that the title of Ransom's book quickly became the official name for this approach to literary analysis.

Called modernism, Formalism, aesthetic criticism, textual criticism, or ontological criticism throughout its long and successful history, New Criticism, like all schools of criticism, does not represent a coherent body of critical theory and methodology espoused by its followers. At best, New Criticism and its adherents (i.e., New Critics) are an eclectic group, each challenging, borrowing, and changing terminology, theory, and practices from one another while asserting a common core of basic ideas. Their ultimate unity stems from their opposition to the prevailing methods of literary analysis found in academia in the first part of the twentieth century.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning of the twentieth century (often said to mark the start of **modernism** or the modernist period), historical and biographical research dominated literary scholarship. Criticism's function, many believed, was to discover the historical context of a text and to ascertain how the authors' lives influenced their writings. Such **extrinsic analysis** (examining elements outside the text to uncover the text's meaning) became the norm in the literature departments of many American universities and colleges. Other forms of criticism and interpretation were often intermingled with this prominent emphasis on history and biography. For example, some critics believed we should appreciate the text for its beauty. For these **impressionistic critics,** how we feel and what we personally see in a work of art are what really matter. Others were more philosophical, arguing a naturalistic view of life that emphasizes the importance of scientific thought in literary analysis. For advocates of **naturalism,** human beings are considered animals who are caught in a world that operates on definable scientific principles and who respond somewhat instinctively to their environments and internal drives. Still other critics, the **New Humanists,** valued the moral qualities of art. Declaring that human experience is basically ethical, these critics demanded that literary analysis be based on the moral values exhibited in a text. Finally, remnants of nineteenth-century **romanticism** asserted themselves. For the romantic scholar, literary study concerns itself with the artists' feelings, attitudes, and personal visions exhibited in their works. Known as the expressive school, this view values the individual artist's experiences as evidenced in a text.

Along with impressionism, the New Humanism, and naturalism, expressionism and its romantic view of life and art were rejected by the "New" Critics—and thus their name: critics who reacted against these "old" forms of criticism. In declaring the objective existence of the poem or text, the New Critics assert that only the poem itself can be objectively evaluated, not the feelings, attitudes, values, and beliefs of the author or the reader. Because they concern themselves primarily with an examination of the work itself

and not its historical context or biographical elements, the New Critics belong to a broad classification of literary criticism called Formalism. Like the Russian Formalists, the New Critics espouse what many call "the text and text alone" approach to literary analysis. Although the New Critics do indeed investigate a text's historical content and an author's biographical, social, and cultural concerns, their approach to textual analysis emphasizes a close reading of the text itself. Both the Russian Formalists and the New Critics believe that every text and indeed all literature is a complex, rule-governed system of forms (literary devices) that are analyzable. Such an analysis will reveal with considerable objectivity the text's meaning.

New Criticism's approach to textual criticism automatically leads to multiple and divergent views about the elements that constitute what the New Critics call the poem. Because many of the practitioners of this formalistic criticism disagree with each other concerning the various elements that constitute a poem and also hold differing approaches to textual analysis, it is difficult to cite a definitive list of critics who consider themselves New Critics. We can, however, group together critics who hold to some of the same New Critical assumptions of poetic analysis. Among this group are John Crowe Ransom, René Wellek, William K. Wimsatt, Monroe Beardsley, William Empson, R. P. Blackmur, I. A. Richards, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks. Thanks to the publication of the 1938 college text *Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students* by Brooks and Warren, New Criticism emerged in American universities as the leading form of textual analysis from the late 1930s until the early 1960s.

Although New Criticism dominated literary theory and criticism in the 1940s and 1950s, its roots stem from the early 1900s. Two British critics and authors, T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, helped lay the foundation for this form of formalistic analysis. From Eliot, New Criticism borrows its insistence that criticism be directed toward the poem, not the poet. The poet, declares Eliot in his best-known essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), does not infuse the poem with his or her personality and emotions, but uses language in such a way as to incorporate within the poem the impersonal feelings and emotions common to all humankind. According to Eliot, poetry is not a freeing of the poet's emotions, but an escape from them. Because the poem is an impersonal formulation of common feelings and emotions, the successful poem unites the poet's impressions and ideas with those common to all humanity, producing a text that is not simply a reflection of the poet's personal feelings.

The New Critics also borrow Eliot's belief that the reader of poetry must be instructed in literary technique. Eliot maintains that a good reader perceives a poem structurally, resulting in good criticism. Such a reader must necessarily be trained in reading good poetry (especially the poetry of the Elizabethans, John Donne, and other metaphysical poets), and be well acquainted with established poetic traditions. A poor reader, on the other

hand, simply expresses his or her personal emotions and reactions to a text. Such a reader is untrained in literary technique and craftsmanship. Following Eliot's lead, the New Critics declare that there are both good and bad readers or critics and good and bad criticism. A poor reader and poor criticism may argue that a poem can mean anything its reader or its author wishes it to mean. On the other hand, a good reader or critic and good criticism will assert that only through a detailed structural analysis of a poem can a reader discover the correct interpretation of a text.

Eliot also lends New Criticism some of its technical vocabulary. Thanks to Eliot, for example, the term *objective correlative* has become a staple in poetic jargon. According to Eliot, a writer can best express emotion through art by devising what Eliot calls an objective correlative, or a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, or reactions that can effectively awaken in the reader the emotional response the author desires without being a direct statement of that emotion. When the external elements are thus effectively presented in a poem, they coalesce, immediately evoking an emotion. The New Critics readily adopted and advanced this indirect or impersonal theory of the creation of emotions in poetry.

From Eliot's British contemporary I. A. Richards, a psychologist, rhetorician, poet, and literary critic, New Criticism borrows a term that has become synonymous with its methods of analysis, practical criticism. In an experiment at Cambridge University, Richards distributed to his students copies of poems minus such information as the authors, dates, and oddities of spelling and punctuation, and asked them to record their responses. From these data, Richards identified the difficulties that poetry presents to its readers, including matters of interpretation, poetic techniques, and specific meanings. From this analysis, Richards then devised an intricate system for arriving at a poem's meaning, including a minute scrutiny of the text. It is this close scrutiny or **close reading** of a text that has become synonymous with New Criticism.

From Eliot, Richards, and other critics, New Criticism borrows, amends, and adds its own ideas and concerns. Although few of its advocates would agree on many tenets, definitions, and techniques, a core of assumptions does exist, thereby allowing us to identify adherents of this critical approach.

ASSUMPTIONS

New Criticism begins by assuming that the study of imaginative literature is valuable; to study poetry or any literary work is to engage oneself in an **aesthetic experience** (i.e., the effects produced on an individual when contemplating a work of art) that can lead to truth. The truth discoverable through an aesthetic experience is distinguishable from the truth that science

provides us. Science speaks propositionally, telling us whether a statement is demonstrably either true or false. Pure water, in the language of science, freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, not 30 or 31. Poetic truth, on the other hand, involves the use of the imagination and intuition, a form of truth that, according to the New Critics, is discernable only in poetry. In the aesthetic experience alone we are cut off from mundane or practical concerns, from mere rhetorical, doctrinal, or propositional statements. Through an examination of the poem itself, we can ascertain truths that cannot be perceived through the language and logic of science. Both science and poetry, then, provide different but valid sources of knowledge and avenues to truth.

Similar to many other critical theories, New Criticism's theory begins by defining its object of concern, in this case a poem. (New Critics use the word *poem* synonymously with *work of art;* however, their methodology works most efficiently with poetry rather than any other genre.) New Critics assert that a poem has ontological status—that is, it possesses its own being and exists like any other object. For the New Critics, a poem becomes an artifact, that is, an objective, self-contained, autonomous entity with its own structure. As William K. Wimsatt declares, a poem becomes a "verbal icon," or the New Critical assumption that a work of art achieves its meaning through the interrelationships of sound, texture, structure, rhetoric, and a host of other literary devices.

Having declared a poem an object in its own right, the New Critics then develop their **objective theory of art.** For them, the meaning of a poem must not be equated with its author's feelings or stated or implied intentions. To believe that a poem's meaning is nothing more than an expression of the private experiences or intentions of its author is to commit a fundamental error of interpretation, which the New Critics call the **intentional fallacy.** According to William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, the New Critics who coined this term, the design or intent of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging a literary work. Along with many other New Critics, Wimsatt and Beardsley believe that the poem is an object. Any literary work is a *public* text that can only be understood by applying the standards of public discourse, not simply the private experience, concerns, and vocabulary of its author. In their widely read New Critical text *Understanding Poetry,* however, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren temper the dogmatism of the intentional fallacy, asserting that understanding the origin of a poem may indeed enhance its appreciation. They do insist, however, that a poem's origin or historical setting must not be confused with a close reading of the actual poem itself.

That the poem is somehow related to its author cannot be denied. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot states the New Critical position on the relationship between the author and his or her work. The basis of Eliot's argument is an analogy. We all know, he says, that certain chemical reactions occur in the presence of a **catalyst,** an element that causes, but is not

affected by, the reaction. For example, if we place hydrogen peroxide, a common household disinfectant, in a clear bottle and expose it to the sun's rays, we will no longer have hydrogen peroxide. Acting as a catalyst, the sun's rays will cause a chemical reaction to occur, breaking down the hydrogen peroxide into its various parts, while the sun's rays remain unaffected.

Similarly, the poet's mind serves as a catalyst for the reaction that yields the poem. During the creative process, the poet's mind, serving as the catalyst, brings together the experiences of the author's personality (not the author's personality traits or attributes), into an external object and a new creation: the poem. It is not the personality traits of the author that coalesce to form the poem, but the experiences of the author's personality. In distinguishing between the personality and the mind of the poet, Eliot asserts that the created entity, the poem, is about the experiences of the author that are similar to all of our experiences. By structuring these experiences, the poem allows us to examine them objectively.

Dismissing the poet's stated or supposed intentions as a means of discovering the text's meaning, the New Critics give little credence to the biographical or contextual history of a poem. If the intentional fallacy is correct, then unearthing biographical data will not help us ascertain a poem's meaning. Likewise, trying to place a poem in its social or political context will tell us much social or political history about the time when the poem was authored. Although such information may indeed help in understanding the poem's sociological or historical context, the poem's real meaning cannot reside in this extrinsic or outside-the-text information.

Of particular importance to the New Critics is the etymology of individual words. Because the words of a poem sometimes change meaning from one time period to another, the critic often needs to conduct historical research, discovering what individual words meant at the time the poem was written. For example, if a fifteenth-century poet called someone a "nice person," the New Critics would investigate the meaning of the word *nice* in fifteenth-century usage, discovering that at that time *nice* meant foolish. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (a dictionary that cites a word's multiple historical meanings chronologically) becomes one of the New Critic's most used tools.

Placing little emphasis on the author, the social context, or a text's historical situation as a source for discovering a poem's meaning, the New Critics assert that a reader's emotional response to a text is neither important nor equivalent to its interpretation. The New Critics call such an error in judgment the **affective fallacy,** a mistake in interpretation that confuses what a poem *is* (its meaning) with what it *does*. If we derive our standard of criticism, say the New Critics, from the psychological effects of the poem, we are then left with impressionism or, worse yet, **relativism,** the belief that a poem has innumerable valid interpretations.

Where, then, can we find or discover a poem's meaning? According to the New Critics, a poem's meaning does not reside in the author, the historical or

social context of the poem, or even in the reader. Because the poem itself is an artifact or an objective entity, its meaning must reside within its own structure, within the poem itself. Like all other objects, a poem and its structure can be analyzed scientifically. Accordingly, careful scrutiny reveals that a poem's structure operates according to a complex series of laws. By closely analyzing this structure, the New Critics believe that they have devised a methodology and a standard of excellence that we can apply to all poems to discover their correct meaning. It is the critic's job, they conclude, to ascertain the structure of the poem, to see how it operates to achieve its unity, and to discover how meaning evolves directly from the poem itself.

New Criticism sees the poet as an organizer of the content of human experience. Structuring the poem around the often confusing and sometimes contradictory experiences of life, the poet crafts the poem in such a way that the text stirs its readers' emotions and causes its readers to reflect on the poem's contents. As an artisan, the poet is most concerned with effectively developing the poem's structure because the artist realizes that the meaning of a work emerges from its structure. The poet's chief concern, maintain the New Critics, is how meaning is achieved through the various and sometimes conflicting elements operating in the poem itself.

The chief characteristic of a poem—and therefore of its structure—is coherence or interrelatedness. Borrowing their ideas from the writings of Samuel T. Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817), the New Critics posit the **organic unity** of a poem—that is, all parts of a poem are necessarily interrelated, with each part reflecting and helping to support the poem's central idea. Such organic unity allows for the harmonization of conflicting ideas, feelings, and attitudes, and results in the poem's overall oneness. Superior poetry, declare the New Critics, achieves such oneness through **paradox, irony,** and **ambiguity.** Because such tensions are necessarily a part of everyone's life, it is only fitting and appropriate, say the New Critics, that superior poetry presents these tensions while at the same time showing how they are resolved within the poem to achieve the text's organic unity.

Because the poem's chief characteristic is its oneness, New Critics believe that a poem's form and content are inseparable. For the New Critics, form is more than the external structure of a poem; a poem's form encompasses and simultaneously rises above the usual definition of poetic structure (i.e., whether or not the poem is a Shakespearean or Petrarchan sonnet, or a lyric, or any other poetic structure having meter, rhyme, or some other poetic pattern). In New Criticism, form is defined as the overall effect the poem creates. Because all the various parts of a poem combine to create this effect, each poem's form is unique. When all the elements of a poem work together to form a single, unified effect—the poem's form—New Critics declare that the poet has written a successful or good poem, one that possesses organic unity.

Because all good and successful poems have organic unity, it would be inconceivable to try to separate a poem's form and its content, maintain the

New Critics. How can we separate what a poem says from how it says it? Because all the elements of a poem, both structural and aesthetic, work together to achieve a poem's effect or form, it is impossible to discuss the overall meaning of a poem by isolating or separating form and content.

For the New Critic, it is also inconceivable to believe that a poem's interpretation is equal to a mere paraphrased version of the text. Labeling such an erroneous belief the **heresy of paraphrase,** a term coined by Cleanth Brooks in his book *The Well Wrought Urn,* New Critics maintain that a poem is not simply a statement that is either true or false, but a bundle of harmonized tensions and resolved stresses, more like a ballet or musical composition than a statement of prose. No simple paraphrase can equal the meaning of a poem because the poem itself resists through its inner tensions any prose statement that attempts to encapsulate its meaning. Paraphrases may help readers in their initial understanding of a poem, but such prose statements must be considered working hypotheses that may or may not lead to a true understanding of the poem's meaning. The New Critics insist that such paraphrased statements about a poem must never be considered equivalent to the poem's structure or form.

METHODOLOGY

Believing in both the thematic and structural unity of a poem, New Critics search for a poem's meaning within the text's structure by finding the tensions and conflicts that must eventually be resolved into a harmonious whole and that inevitably lead to the creation of the poem's chief effect. Such a search first leads New Critics to the poem's diction or word choice. Unlike scientific discourse with its precision of terminology, poetic diction often has multiple meanings and immediately sets up a series of tensions within the text. For example, many words have both a **denotation,** or dictionary meaning, and **connotation(s),** or implied meanings. A word's denotation may be in direct conflict with its connotative meaning determined by the context of the poem. In addition, it may be difficult to differentiate between the various denotations or connotations of a word. For example, if someone writes that "a *fat* head enjoys the *fat* of the land," the reader must note the various denotative and connotative differences of the word *fat*. At the start of poetic analysis, then, conflicts or tensions exist by the very nature of poetic diction. New Critics call this tension ambiguity, or language's capacity to sustain multiple meanings. At the heart of literary language or discourse, claim the New Critics, is ambiguity. At the end of a close reading of a text, all such ambiguities must be resolved.

Even a surface level of understanding or upon a first reading, a poem, from a New Critic's perspective, is a reconciliation of conflicts, of opposing meanings and tensions. Because a poem's form and content are indivisible, it

is the critic's task to analyze the poetic diction to ascertain such tensions. Although various New Critics give a variety of names to the poetic elements that make up a poem's structure, all agree that the poem's meaning is derived from the oscillating tensions and conflicts that are brought to the surface through the poetic diction.

For example, Cleanth Brooks claims that the chief elements in a poem are paradox and irony, two closely related terms that imply that a word or phrase is qualified or even undercut by its context. By definition, a paradox is a seemingly self-contradictory statement that must be resolved on a higher metaphysical level. The New Critics broaden this definition, maintaining that literary language by its very nature is ambiguous. Literary discourse, unlike normal or everyday language, is able to sustain multiple meanings. For Brooks, the discourse of poetry is "the language of paradox." Similarly, the New Critics enhance the meaning of the word *irony*. Irony is a figure of speech in which the words express a meaning that is often the direct opposite of their literal meaning. In New Criticism irony is the poet's ability to recognize incongruities, and it becomes New Criticism's master trope because it is essential for the production of paradox and ambiguity. Some New Critics use the word **tension** to describe the opposition or conflicts operating within a text. For these critics, tension implies the conflicts between a word's denotation and its connotation, between a literal detail and a figurative one, and between an abstract and a concrete detail.

Because conflict, ambiguity, or tension controls the poem's structure, the meaning of a poem can be discovered only by contextually analyzing the poetic elements and diction. Furthermore, because context governs meaning, meanings of individual words or phrases are necessarily context related and unique to the poem in which they occur. It is the task of the critic to unravel the various apparent conflicts and tensions within each poem and ultimately to show that the poem possesses organic unity, thereby demonstrating how all parts of the poem are interrelated and support the poem's chief paradox. This paradox, which New Critics often call form or overall effect, can usually be expressed in one sentence that contains the main tension and the resolution of that tension. It is this "key idea" to which all other elements of the poem must relate.

Although most New Critics would agree that the process of discovering the poem's form is not necessarily linear (because advanced readers often see ambiguities and ironies upon a first reading of a text), New Criticism provides the reader with a distinct methodology to discover a text's central paradox or tension. These guided steps allow both novices and advanced literary scholars to enter the discussion of a text's ultimate meaning, each contributing to the poem's interpretation. From a New Critical perspective, one begins the journey of discovering a text's correct or valid interpretation by reading the poem several times and by carefully noting the work's title (if it has one) and its relationship to the text. Then, by following the prescribed steps listed here, the reader can ascertain a text's meaning. The more practice

a reader has at following this methodology and the more opportunities he or she has to be guided by an advanced reader and critic, the more adept the reader will undoubtedly become at textual analysis:

Step 1 Examine the text's diction. Consider the denotations, connotations, and etymological roots of all words in the text.

Step 2 Examine all allusions found within the text by tracing their roots to the primary text or source, if possible.

Step 3 Analyze all images, symbols, and figures of speech within the text. Note the relationships, if any, among the elements, both within the same category (e.g., between images) and among the various elements (e.g., between an image and a symbol).

Step 4 Examine and analyze the various structural patterns that appear within the text, including the technical aspects of **prosody,** or the principles that govern the writing of poetry, such as rhyme, meter, rhythm, and so forth. Note how the poet manipulates metrical devices, grammatical constructions, tonal patterns, and syntactic patterns of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. Determine how these various patterns interrelate with each other and with all elements discussed in steps 1 to 3.

Step 5 Consider such elements as tone, theme, point of view, and any other element—dialogue, foreshadowing, narration, parody, setting, and so forth—that directly relate to the text's dramatic situation.

Step 6 Look for interrelationships of all elements stated in steps 1–5, noting where tensions, ambiguities, or paradoxes arise.

Step 7 After carefully examining all of the above, state the poem's chief, overarching tension, and explain how the poem achieves its dominant effect by resolving this tension.

Because all poems are unique, the process of uncovering a poem's chief tension is also unique. By using the prescribed methodology of New Criticism, New Critics believe that readers will be able to justify their interpretations of a text with information gleaned from the text alone while enjoying the aesthetic process that allows them to articulate the text's meaning.

According to such New Critical principles, a **good critic** examines a poem's structure by scrutinizing its poetic elements, rooting out and showing its inner tensions, and demonstrating how the poem supports its overall meaning by reconciling these tensions into a unified whole. By implication, **bad critics** are those who insist on imposing mainly extrinsic evidence, such as historical or biographical information, on a text to discover its meaning. These critics fail to realize that the text itself elicits its own meaning. More frequently than not, they also fail to discuss or examine the definitive aspects of a work of art: irony, paradox, and ambiguity. They, therefore, flounder in their analysis, declare the New Critics, because such unskilled critics believe more often than not that a text can have multiple meanings.

Asserting that a poem or work of art has ontological status, the New Critics believe that a text ultimately has one and only one correct interpretation

and that the poem itself provides all the necessary information for revealing its meaning. By scrutinizing the text and giving it a close reading, and by providing readers with a set of norms that will assist them in discovering the correct interpretation of the text, New Criticism provides a teachable, workable framework for literary analysis.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

To apply the assumptions and methodology of New Criticism, read carefully Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" (located at the back of this text). After reading the story, answer each of the following questions as they relate to Hawthorne's tale. When you have completed your answers, be prepared to discuss your findings or what the New Critics call your interpretation of this short story.

- If the text has a title, what is the relationship of the title to the rest of the poem? Before answering this question, New Critical theory and practice assume that the critic has read the text several times.
- What words, if any, need to be defined?
- What words and their etymological roots need to be scrutinized?
- What relationships or patterns do you see among any words in the text?
- What words in the text possess various connotative meanings? Do these various shades of meaning help establish relationships or patterns in the text?
- What allusions, if any, are in the text? Trace these allusions to their appropriate sources and explore how the origins of the allusions help elucidate meaning in this particular text.
- What symbols, images, and figures of speech are used? What is the relationship between any symbol and/or image? Between an image and another image? Between a figure of speech and an image? A symbol?
- What elements of prosody can you note and discuss? Look for rhyme, meter, and stanza patterns.
- What is the tone of the work?
- From what point of view is the content of the text being told?
- What tensions, ambiguities, or paradoxes arise within the text?
- What do you believe the chief paradox or irony is in the text?
- How do all the elements of the text support and develop the text's chief paradox?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

With the emergence of New Criticism in the 1940s came the birth and growth of literature departments in colleges and universities across America. Its methodological and somewhat scientific approach to literature gained

enormous support as monies for academic research expanded and as armed forces personnel returned to America from the battlefields of Europe after World War II. As the influence of English literature expanded, there arose a practical need for a consistent and a convenient form of literary criticism. Brooks and Warren's text *Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students* (1938) provided such consistency. College professors could now focus upon a single text (particularly poetry but also any text written in any genre) that could be easily studied and analyzed by following the prescribed "formula" as developed by the New Critics. No longer did students have to know the sociohistorical background of any given text because now the text itself was the object of examination.

Such a formulaic approach to literary analysis, which excludes most external evidence from its analytic methodology, readily opens itself to criticism. Some critics assert that different perspectives for understanding a text's meaning do indeed exist and can help broaden what constitutes literature. Examining authors' lives, for example, can illuminate their works. Psychology, sociology, and history, claim many critics, do impact both individual writers and their works, helping to fill a vacuum created by examining only the text. Without such analyses, argue many critics, we will miss out on many relevant and important meanings and purposes of texts. By dismissing such external-text analyses, the New Critics may indeed be contradicting their own claims that the meaning of a text is context-bound. For example, a work's sociohistorical context, assert New Criticism's challengers, is indeed part of its context and, therefore, its meaning. Other critics argue that the methodology espoused by New Criticism is elitist. To arrive at the so-called "correct" interpretation of a text, a reader much first learn the vocabulary and the correct procedures for such analysis. Do the feelings or ideas of an actual reader who has not mastered New Criticism's theory really matter? Can such feelings or beliefs lead to a valid interpretation of a text? Need the interpretation of a text always be so objective as claim the New Critics? Must all "good" texts possess organic unity? And can New Criticism's search for a text's organic unity blind the critic to important elements of a text that do not contribute to such unity? Albeit New Criticism's insistence on the objective nature of literary interpretation, individual readers who may or may not be trained in New Critical methodology will most certainly find a variety of ways to make meaning of a particular text.

Despite these and other criticisms, the influence of New Criticism on twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary analyses remains. All schools of criticism, for example, espouse a close reading of a text. And New Criticism's terminology and its understanding of a literary work of art have influenced—either directly or indirectly—all modern schools of literary criticism.

What other advantages or disadvantages do you see in using the principles of New Criticism to critique a literary work?

See **Readings on Literary Criticism** at the back of the text for a pivotal essay on New Criticism, "The Formalist Critics," authored by one of New Criticism's leading scholars Cleanth Brooks.

4

READER-ORIENTED CRITICISM

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will.

Henry James, Preface to the New York edition of *Portrait of a Lady*

INTRODUCTION

Imagine, for a moment, that you and three of your closest friends are once again eight years old. All of you have been invited to a birthday party at another friend's house three blocks away. For four weeks you have been eagerly anticipating the big event. Unlike you and your three friends, the birthday party celebrant is the child of millionaires and lives in a mansion containing thirty-four rooms and has let it be known that the party would be the biggest and best you have ever attended. Not surprisingly, rumors that the celebration would include a circus with clowns and animals dressed in human clothes and accompanied by a host of costumed people and the full trappings of a Barnum and Bailey production have been circulating among the four of you for weeks. But today is Saturday, the day of the big event.

Meeting at your house at 9:30 a.m., you and your friends excitedly walk the three blocks to the birthday house. Upon arrival, you see that the front door is completely covered with red aluminum foil with no doorknob visible. Even the doorbell is shielded from view by the bright foil covering. Quickly one of your friends dashes to the back of the house, hoping to gain access through the back door. With head hung low, this friend returns in about a minute with the news that the back door is also covered with red foil.

Being the nearest to the front window to the right of the door, you peek into the house—and what a sight you see! On the tile near the fireplace sleeps a lion. To the left of the lion is a cage containing a leopard licking a block of ice. And directly below the window is the longest snake you have

ever seen. You scream for your friends to come and see the animals, but they, too, have each discovered their own view into the house. To your right, one of your friends is standing on a window ledge and is peering through a porthole window. Through this opening, the den is clearly visible, but no one is there—no decorations, no movement, no signs of any party. All looks a bit gloomy and most certainly uninhabited. But another friend has found a ladder and placed it to the left of the house's front door. Climbing up the ladder, this friend gazes into the second-story window and sees at least fifteen laughing children playing pin the tail on the donkey while they are drinking purple punch and eating chocolate chip cookies, corn chips, and cake. But the fourth child has discovered another view into the party house: running around the back, this friend peeks into the kitchen window and sees a mountain of presents wrapped in funny-looking paper, some with big bows, other with little ones, and still others with none at all.

The door being barred, all four children have discovered a way to see into the same house, each of the openings being of a different size and shape, with each opening providing a different view. Where one child is longing to pet the lion, the leopard, and the snake, another is saddened by the apparent emptiness of the house. Another, however, is eager to gain entrance and join the many children eating and playing, and the last friend is joyous at the sight of the mountain of presents. The same house but different views. The same house but different reactions to each view into its contents.

According to Henry James (1843–1916), this house represents a literary text—a story, a novel, a poem, or an essay—with each window being an individual reader's distinct view into or impression of that literary work. Like the four children peering into the house's windows and seeing different views, readers will read the same text but "see" unique scenes, coming away from the text with various impressions and interpretations. Each will most certainly be reading the same text, but all will gain entrance into the meaning of that text through different apertures and come away with a variety of differing and sometimes contradictory interpretations.

Now imagine that you and other members of your college-level, introductory literature class have been asked to read Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), part of which reads as follows:

> And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness, in this dark world. A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the Shape of Evil dip his hand, and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

"Faith! Faith!" cried the husband. "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One!"

Whether Faith obeyed, he knew not. Hardly had he spoken, when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind, which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock and felt it chill and damp, while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning, young goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard, to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint, as if to avoid an anathema. Old deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words of his prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth goodman Brown. Goody Close, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine, at her own lattice, catechising a little girl, who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child, as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him, that she skipt along the street, and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But, goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?

Be it so, if you will. But, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young goodman Brown.

Several class members are now voicing their interpretations of this concluding portion of Hawthorne's story. Student A declares that Goodman Brown's struggle is obvious; Brown finds himself engrossed in the age-old tension of appearance versus reality, a theme that has permeated Western literature for centuries. It is ambiguity, maintains Student A, that unites the short story and shows how every character and every event contribute to the text's organic unity. For example, in commanding his wife to "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One," Brown attests both to the struggle between and the reality of good and evil. When, however, Brown finds himself "amid calm night and solitude," he convinces himself that his wife—and, in fact, all members of his Salem village—did not resist the Wicked One. For Brown, maintains Student A, all except himself are hypocrites, and all except himself have been baptized into evil. And yet his personal revelation concerning the presence and the mystery of evil in the lives of others seemingly affects only him and no other Salem villager, neither any member of the clergy nor even Brown's wife. Perhaps, says the narrator, Brown merely fell asleep in the forest and the events he experienced are simply a dream. All elements of the story, declares Student A, point to and demonstrate Hawthorne's use of ambiguity as the key to unlocking the meaning of this tale.

Student B objects, declaring that Student A's interpretation is not relevant for the twenty-first century. Student A is correct, claims Student B, when she notes that Goodman Brown realizes the evil in others; however, Brown does not recognize the evil in himself. Hawthorne's chief purpose in "Young Goodman Brown" is to show the hypocrisy within all of us. The story's significance rests in how its meaning can be applied today. Such hypocrisy and prejudice, contends Student B, still exist in our university town. We all have the potential to be Goodman Browns, people filled with prejudice and hypocrisy, thinking that we alone know and understand truth and goodness.

Student C affirms that although both Student A and Student B have made valid criticisms of Hawthorne's text, they have overlooked the change that takes place in Goodman Brown himself. After the events of that fateful night in the forest—either real or imagined—no longer do we see a Goodman Brown who trusts in the goodness of humanity. We now have a character whose entire life—his thoughts and actions—is one of despair, a life that sees no good in anyone. Everyone in the Salem village, Brown believes, is living a lie because all are hypocrites. And for the rest of his life he remains a solemn person who casts suspicious and supposedly knowing glances at his peers and his wife, all of whom, he believes, have pledged their allegiance to evil. And thus Brown's "dying hour was gloom," just like his life after the forest scene.

With a quiver in her voice, Student D remarks that Goodman Brown reminds her of her friend Rita. Whenever Rita's husband meets her in public—at the mall, grocery store, or McDonald's—he gives her a quick stare then looks the other way. Even when they are at home together, he prefers to sit in his study watching a movie on his computer than sitting with her and their two children in the family room watching one of the children's favorite movies. Like Faith Brown, says Student D, Rita has no idea what she has done to distance herself from her husband. Nightly she cries herself to sleep, wishing her husband would hold her. In "Young Goodman Brown," asserts Student D, Hawthorne has successfully captured the predicament of some twenty-first-century wives, women whose lives are filled with despair and they know not why.

Each of these four students sees something slightly different in Hawthorne's passage, peeking into the text from different windows and, thus, seeing different scenes, receiving different impressions, and coming away from their readings with different interpretations. Consciously or unconsciously, each of their interpretations rests upon different theoretical assumptions with their corresponding interpretative methodologies. Of the four interpretations, Student A's is the most theoretically distinct approach to the passage. Seeing an overall textual unity, this student presupposes that the text is autonomous; it must interpret itself with little or no help from historical, societal, or any other extrinsic factors, with all its parts relating back to its

central theme. Using the tenets of New Criticism, Student A posits the organic unity of the text. For this student, learning and applying literary terminology and searching for the correct interpretation are of utmost importance.

Unlike Student A, who applies a given set of criteria to the text in an attempt to discover its meaning, Students B, C, and D become participants in the interpretive process, actively bringing their own experiences to bear upon the text's meaning. Student B's interpretation, for example, highlights the theoretical difference between a text's meaning (the author's intentions) and its significance or relevance to present-day readers. Student C's approach begins filling in the gaps in the text, hypothesizing how Goodman Brown will act toward his peers and family based on his either real or imagined experience in the forest. Whether Student C is correct or not about Brown's actions throughout the rest of his life remains an open question. Student D's theoretical framework objectifies the text and its meaning based on the reader's personal experiences with prejudice.

Although Students B, C, and D differ in their various approaches, none views the text as an objective entity that contains its own meaning (as does Student A). For these readers, the text does not and cannot interpret itself. To determine a text's meaning, these students believe they must become active readers and participants in the interpretive process. The various theoretical assumptions and methodologies they used to discover the text's meaning exemplify reader-response criticism, now frequently referred to as **reader-oriented criticism.**

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Although reader-oriented criticism rose to prominence in the United States in the early 1970s and still influences much contemporary criticism, its historical roots can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s. But such precise dating is artificial because readers have obviously been responding to what they have read and experienced since the dawn of literature itself. Even the classical writers Plato and Aristotle were aware of and concerned about the reader's (or viewer's) reactions. Plato, for example, asserts that watching a play could so inflame the passions of the audience that the attendees would forget that they were rational beings and allow passion, not reason, to rule their actions. Similarly, in the *Poetics,* Aristotle voices concern about the effects a play will have on the audience's emotions. Will it arouse the spectators' pity or fear? Will these emotions purge the viewer? Will they cleanse a spectator of all emotions by the play's end? Like Plato's and Aristotle's audience-centered concerns, such interest in audience response to the artistic creation dominates much present-day literary criticism. Critics who emphasize such audience response frequently involve themselves in **rhetorical criticism,** focusing on

the strategies, devices, and techniques authors use to elicit a particular reaction or interpretation of a text.

Underlying both Plato's and Aristotle's concerns about audience response—as well as the concern of many critics who follow in their paths—is the assumption that the audience or the reader is passive. As if watching a play or reading a book were a spectator sport, readers sit passively, absorbing the contents of the artistic creation and allowing it to dominate their thoughts and actions. From this point of view, the reader brings little to the play or text, with the text providing all that is needed to arrive at a valid interpretation.

From Plato's time until the beginning of the romantic movement in British literature in the early 1800s, such a passive view of the reader dominated literary criticism. Although many critics recognized that a text did indeed have an effect on its readers, criticism concerned itself primarily with the text. With the advent of British romanticism, emphasis shifted from the text to the author. The author now became the genius who could assimilate truths that were unacknowledged or unseen by the general populace. And as the nineteenth century progressed, concern for the author continued, with literary criticism stressing the importance of the author's life, times, and social context as chief aids in textual analysis.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, emphasis in textual analysis once again shifted to the text. With the ascendance of New Criticism's theory and practice in the 1930s, the text became autonomous—an objective entity that could be dissected and analyzed. If studied thoroughly, the New Critics believed, the text would reveal its own meaning. Extrinsic factors, such as historical or social context, mattered somewhat, but the key to a text's interpretation was the actual text the reader had in hand. Now considered a verbal icon, the text itself, declared the New Critics, contains what is needed to discover its meaning. We need only master the technical vocabulary and the correct techniques to unlock its meaning.

Declaring a text an **autotelic artifact** (i.e., a text exists in its own right as an autonomous object that can be analyzed), the New Critics did acknowledge the effects a text could have on its readers. Studying the effects of a literary work, they decreed, was not the same as studying the text itself. This New Critical emphasis on the objective nature of the text once again created a passive reader who did not bring personal experiences or private emotions to bear when engaged in textual analysis.

I. A. Richards

In the midst of New Criticism's rise to dominance in the field of textual analysis that would last for more than thirty years, one of its two early pioneers, I. A. Richards (T. S. Eliot being the other), became interested in the reading process itself. Unlike many of his Formalist friends who disavowed

any significant relationship between a reader's personal feelings and a text's interpretation, Richards set about to investigate such a relationship. Using a decidedly reader-oriented approach to textual analysis, Richards distributed to his classes at Cambridge University copies of short poems of widely diverse aesthetic and literary value, without citing their authors and titles but with various editorial changes that updated spelling and pronunciation. He then asked his students to record their free responses to and evaluations of each of these texts. What surprised Richards was the wide variety of seemingly incompatible and contradictory responses.

After collecting and analyzing these responses, Richards published his findings, along with his own interpretations of the examined texts, in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). Underlying Richards's text is his assumption that science, not poetry or any other literary genre, leads to truth—that is, science's view of the world is the correct one. Poems, on the other hand, can produce only "pseudo-statements" about the nature of reality. But such pseudo-statements, declares Richards, are essential to the overall psychological health of each individual. In fact, according to Richards, human beings are basically bundles of desires called **appetencies.** In order to achieve psychic health, one must balance these desires by creating a personally acceptable vision of the world. Richards observes that religion was once able to provide this vision, but has now lost its effectiveness to do so. Borrowing from the thoughts of the nineteenth-century poet Matthew Arnold, Richards decrees that poetry, above all other art forms, can best harmonize and satisfy humankind's appetencies and help create a fulfilling and intellectually acceptable worldview.

After creating this substantially affective system of analysis, which gives credence to a reader's emotional response to a text, Richards then abandons this same reader-oriented approach in his own analysis of his students' responses. Like the New Critics who were to follow him in the next several decades, he asserts that "the poem itself" contains all the necessary information to arrive at the "right" or "more adequate" interpretation. Through textual analysis—that is, by closely examining the poem's diction, imagery, and overall unity—Richards believes a reader can arrive at a better or more nearly correct interpretation of a poem than one derived from personal responses to a text.

Despite this seemingly complete departure from his initial reader-oriented methodology, Richards recognizes the contextual nature of the reading process. In his text *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), Richards acknowledges that a reader brings to the text a vast array of ideas amassed through life's experiences, including previous literary experiences, and applies such information to the text to develop an interpretation. These life experiences provide a kind of reality check for the reader, either validating or negating the authenticity of the experiences as represented in the text. In so doing, the reader becomes an active participant in the creation of a text's meaning.

Louise M. Rosenblatt

In the 1930s, Louise M. Rosenblatt, literary theorist, author, scholar, and renowned professor of literacy, further develops Richards's earlier assumptions concerning the contextual nature of the reading process. In her text *Literature as Exploration* (1938), Rosenblatt asserts that both the reader and the text must work together to create meaning. Unlike the New Critics, she shifts the emphasis of textual analysis away from the text alone and views the reader and the text as partners in the interpretative process. For Rosenblatt, a text is not an autotelic artifact, and there are no generic literary works or generic readers who must master the Formalists' methodology with its accompanying complex and often dense terminology to gain the so-called correct interpretation of a text. Instead, Rosenblatt declares, there are millions of potential individual readers of the potential millions of individual texts. Readers bring their individual personalities, their memories of past events, their present concerns, their particular physical conditions, and all of their personhood to the reading of a text. Disavowing New Criticism's affective fallacy and other such beliefs, Rosenblatt asserts the validity of multiple interpretations of a text shaped not only by the text but also by the reader.

In the late 1930s, Rosenblatt's ideas seemed revolutionary, too abstract, and simply off the beaten, acceptable critical path. Although New Criticism dominated literary practice for the next thirty years or so, Rosenblatt continued to develop her ideas, publishing in 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. This work became a pivotal force in helping to cause a paradigm shift in the teaching of literature. As articulated by Rosenblatt, the key element in the interpretive process now changed from focusing almost exclusively on the text alone to a reader's individual response to a text. In this work, Rosenblatt clarifies her earlier ideas and presents what has become one of the main critical positions held by many theorists and practical critics today.

According to Rosenblatt, the reading process involves both a reader and a text. The reader and the text participate in or share a **transactional experience:** The text acts as a stimulus for eliciting various past experiences, thoughts, and ideas from the reader, those found in both the reader's everyday existence and in his or her reading experiences. Simultaneously, the text shapes the reader's experiences by functioning as a blueprint that selects, limits, and orders those ideas that best conform to the text. Through this transactional experience, the reader and the text produce a new creation, what Rosenblatt calls the poem. For Rosenblatt and many other reader-oriented critics, a poem is defined as the result of an *event* that takes place during the reading process, or what Rosenblatt calls the *aesthetic transaction*. No longer synonymous with the word *text*, a poem is created each and every time a reader transacts with a text, be that transaction a first reading or any one of countless rereadings of the same text.

For Rosenblatt, readers can and do read in one of two ways: *efferently* or *aesthetically*. When we read for information—for example, when we read the directions for heating a can of soup—we are engaging in **efferent reading** (from the Latin *effere* "to carry away"). During this process, we are interested only in newly gained information that we can "carry away" from the text, not in the actual words as words themselves. When we read efferently, we are motivated by a specific need to acquire information. When we engage in **aesthetic reading,** we experience the text. We note its every word, its sounds, its patterns, and so on. In essence, we live through the transactional experience of creating the poem. Of primary importance is our engagement or our unique "lived-through" experience with the text. Rosenblatt adds that at any given moment in the reading process a reader may shift back and forth along a continuum between an efferent and an aesthetic mode of reading.

When reading aesthetically, Rosenblatt maintains that we involve ourselves in an elaborate give-and-take encounter with the text. Though the text may allow for many interpretations by eliciting and highlighting different experiences of the reader, it simultaneously limits the valid meanings the poem can acquire. For Rosenblatt, a poem's meaning is not a smorgasbord of infinite interpretations; rather, it is a transactional experience in which several different yet probable meanings emerge in a particular social context and thereby create a variety of "poems."

What differentiates Rosenblatt's and other reader-oriented critics' concerns from other critical approaches (especially New Criticism) is their purposive shift in emphasis away from the text, as the sole determiner of meaning and toward the significance of the reader as an essential participant in the reading process and the creation of meaning. Such a shift negates the Formalists' assumption that the text is autonomous and can be scientifically analyzed to discover its meaning. No longer is the reader passive, merely applying a laundry list of learned, poetic devices to a text in the hope of discovering its intricate patterns of paradox and irony, which, in turn, will lead, supposedly, to the one correct interpretation. For reader-oriented critics, the reader is an active participant along with the text in creating meaning. It is from the **literacy experience** (an event that occurs when a reader and print transact), they believe, that meaning evolves.

ASSUMPTIONS

Similar to most approaches to literary analysis, reader-oriented criticism does not provide us with a unified body of theory or a single methodological approach for textual analysis. What those who call themselves reader-response critics, reader-oriented critics, reader-critics, or audience-oriented critics share is a concern for the reader. Believing that a literary work's interpretation

is created when a reader and a text interact and/or transact, these critics assert that the proper study of textual analysis must consider both the reader and the text, not simply a text in isolation. For these critics,

$$\text{Reader} + \text{Text} = \text{Meaning (Poem)}$$

Only in context, with a reader actively involved in the reading process with the text, does meaning emerge.

Meaning, declare reader-oriented critics, is context-dependent and intricately associated with the reading process. Like literary theory as a whole, several theoretical models and their practical applications exist to explain the reading process—or how we make sense of printed material. Using these models, we can group the numerous approaches to the literacy experience into three broad categories. Each category emphasizes a somewhat different philosophy, a body of assumptions, and a methodology to explain what these various critics believe happens when a reader interacts or transacts with printed material.

Although each model espouses a different approach to textual analysis, all hold to some of the same presuppositions and concerns and ask similar questions. All, for example, focus directly on the reading process. What happens, they ask, when a person picks up printed material and reads it? Put another way, their chief interest is what occurs when a text and a reader interact or transact. During this exchange, reader-oriented critics investigate and theorize whether the reader, the text, or some combination finally determines the text's interpretation. Is it the reader who manipulates the text, they ponder, or does the text manipulate the reader to produce meaning? Does some word, phrase, or image trigger in the reader's mind a specific interpretation, or does the reader approach the text with a conscious or unconscious collection of learned reading strategies that systematically impose an interpretation on the text? Is the reading process linear or nonlinear, and is it predictable? Can texts deliberately try to mislead the reader, thereby causing readers to make predictable mistakes? And are reader's responses always predictable?

Such questions then lead reader-oriented critics to a further narrowing and developing of terminology. They ask, for example, what is a text? Is it simply the words or symbols on a page? How, they ask, can we differentiate between what is actually in the text and what is in the mind of the reader? And who is this reader, anyway? Are there various kinds of readers? Is it possible that different texts presuppose different kinds of readers?

In addition, what about a reader's response to a text? Are the responses equivalent to the text's meaning? Can one reader's response, they speculate, be more correct than some other reader's, or are all responses of equal validity? Although readers respond to the same text in a variety of ways, why is it, they ask, that oftentimes many readers individually arrive at the same conclusions or interpretations of the same text?

Reader-oriented critics also ask questions about another person: the author. What part, if any, does the author play in a work's interpretation? Can the author's attitudes toward the reader, they wonder, actually influence a work's meaning? And if a reader knows the author's clearly stated intentions for a text, does this information play any part in creating the text's meaning, or should an author's intentions for a work simply be ignored?

The concerns, then, of reader-oriented critics can best be summarized in one question: What is the reading process—that is, how does the reader construct meaning or make sense of a text? The answer to this question is perplexing because it involves investigating such factors as these:

- The reader—including his or her view of the world, background, purpose for reading, knowledge of the world, knowledge of words, and other such factors
- The text, with all its various linguistic elements
- Meaning, or how the text and the reader interact or transact so the reader can make sense of the printed material.

How reader-oriented critics define and explain each of these elements will, in fact, determine their approach to textual analysis. Furthermore, their definitions and explications also help determine what constitutes a valid interpretation of a text for each critic.

Although many reader-oriented critics allow for a wide range of legitimate responses to a text, most agree that reader-oriented criticism does not mean that any and all interpretations are valid or of equal importance. The boundaries and restrictions placed on possible interpretations of a text will vary, depending on how the critic defines the multiple elements of the reading process. It is these definitions and assumptions that allow us to group reader-oriented critics into several broad subgroups.

METHODOLOGY

Although reader-oriented critics employ a wide variety of critical approaches—from those espousing their own particular and modified form of New Criticism to postmodern practitioners such as deconstructionists—most adherents of reader-oriented theory and practice fall into three distinct groups. While members within each group may differ slightly, each group espouses its own distinct theoretical and methodological concerns. Student B's interpretation at the beginning of this chapter represents the focus of the first group.

Similar to all reader-oriented critics, this group believes that the reader must be an active participant in the creation of meaning. For these critics, however, the text has more control over the interpretative process than does the reader. A few of these critics lean toward New Critical theory, asserting

that some interpretations are more valid than others, while others differentiate between a text's meaning and its significance. For them, the text's meaning can be synonymous with its author's intention, while its significance can change from one context or historical period to another. Notwithstanding these variations, the majority of critics in this first group belong to a school of criticism known as **structuralism.**

Structuralism

Basing their ideas on the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, structuralists often approach textual analysis as if it were a science. The proponents of structuralism—Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gerald Prince, and Jonathan Culler in his early works—look for specific codes within a text that allow meaning to occur. These codes or signs embedded in the text are part of a larger system that allows meaning to occur in all facets of society, including literature. For example, when we are driving a car and we see a red light hanging above an intersection, we have learned that we must stop our car. Or when we hear a fire engine or an ambulance siren, we have learned that we must drive our car to the side of the road. Both the red light and the sirens are signs or codes in our society that provide us with ways of interpreting and ordering our world.

According to structuralist critics, a reader brings to the text a predetermined system for ascertaining meaning (a complex system of signs or codes like the sirens and the red light) and applies this sign system directly to the text. The text becomes important because it contains signs or signals to the reader that have preestablished and acceptable interpretations. Many structuralists are, therefore, more concerned about the overall system of meaning a given society has developed (called **langue** by linguists) than with textual analysis itself and concentrate their efforts on what a reader needs to know about interpreting any sign (such as a road sign or a word) in the context of acceptable societal standards. Because of this emphasis, structuralists seem to push both the text and the reader to the background and concentrate their attention on a linguistic theory of communication and interpretation. Since structuralism has become a springboard for many other twentieth- and twenty-first-century theories of literary criticism, its significance to literary theory and practical criticism will be explored at length in the next chapter. Meanwhile, the ideas of one leading structuralist, Gerald Prince, will illustrate the methodology of structuralism.

Gerald Prince In the 1970s, Gerald Prince helped develop a specific kind of structuralism known as **narratology,** the process of analyzing a story using all the elements involved in its telling, such as narrator, voice, style, verb

tense, personal pronouns, audience, and so forth. Prince noted that critics often ask questions about the story's point of view—omniscient, limited, first person, and so on—but rarely do they ask about the person to whom the narrator is speaking, the **narratee.** Usually, the narratee is not the actual person reading the text, for Prince argues that the narrative itself—that is, the story—produces the narratee. By first observing then analyzing various signs in the text, such as pronoun reference; direct address ("Dear reader"); gender, race, and social class references; and writing style, Prince believes it is possible not only to identify the narratee but also to classify stories based on the different kinds of narratees created by the texts themselves. Such narratees may include the **real reader** (the person actually reading the book), the **virtual reader** (the reader to whom the author believes he or she is writing), and the **ideal reader** (the one who explicitly and implicitly understands all the nuances, terminology, and structure of a text).

Although such an approach relies heavily on textual analysis, Prince's concerns about the reader place him in the reader-oriented school of criticism. Other structuralists such as Jonathan Culler who distance themselves from Prince and this kind of close reliance on the text to generate meaning will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Phenomenology

Student C represents the second major group of reader-oriented critics. For the most part, these theorists follow Rosenblatt's assumption that the reader is involved in a transactional experience when interpreting a text. Both the text and the reader, they declare, play somewhat equal parts in the interpretative process. For them, reading is an event that culminates in the creation of the poem.

Many adherents in this group—George Poulet, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Roman Ingarden, and Gaston Bachelard—are often associated with phenomenology. **Phenomenology** is a modern philosophical tendency that emphasizes the perceiver. Objects can have meaning, phenomenologists maintain, only if an active consciousness (a perceiver) absorbs or notes their existence. In other words, objects exist if, and only if, we register them in our consciousness. Rosenblatt's definition of a poem directly applies this theory to literary study. The true poem can exist only in the reader's consciousness, not on the printed page. When reader and text transact, the poem and, therefore, meaning are created; they exist only in the consciousness of the reader. Reading and textual analysis now become an aesthetic experience wherein both the reader and the text combine in the consciousness of the reader to create the poem. Like Student C's interpretation, the reader's imagination must work, filling in the gaps in the text and conjecturing about characters' actions, personality traits, and motives. The ideas and practices of two

reader-response critics, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, will serve to illustrate phenomenology's methodology.

Hans Robert Jauss Writing toward the end of the 1960s, the German critic Hans Robert Jauss emphasizes that a text's social history must be considered when interpreting a text. Unlike New Critical scholars, Jauss declares that critics must examine how any given text was accepted or received by its contemporary readers. Espousing a particular kind of reader-oriented criticism known as **reception theory,** Jauss asserts that readers from any given historical period devise for themselves the criteria whereby they will judge a text. Using the term **horizon of expectations** to include all of a historical period's critical vocabulary and assessment of a text, Jauss points out that how any text is evaluated from one historical period to another (from the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment to the nineteenth-century Romantic period, for example) necessarily changes. For example, Alexander Pope's poetry was heralded as the most nearly perfect poetry of its day, for heroic couplets and poetry that followed prescribed forms were judged superior. During the Romantic period, however, with its emphasis on content, not form, the critical acclaim and reception of Pope's poetry was not as great.

Accordingly, Jauss argues that since each historical period establishes its own horizon of expectations, the overall value and meaning of any text can never become fixed or universal. Readers from any given historical period establish for themselves, Jauss maintains, what they value in a text. A text, then, does not have one and only one correct interpretation because its supposed meaning changes from one historical period to another. A final assessment about any literary work thus becomes impossible.

For Jauss, the reader's reception or understanding and evaluation of a text matters greatly. Although the text itself remains important in the interpretive process, the reader, declares Jauss, plays an essential role.

Wolfgang Iser The German phenomenologist Wolfgang Iser borrows and amends Jauss's ideas. Iser believes that any object—a stone, a house, or a poem—does not achieve meaning until an active consciousness recognizes or registers this object. It is thus impossible to separate what is known (the object) from the mind that knows it (human consciousness). Using these phenomenological ideas as the basis for his reader-oriented theory and practice, Iser declares that the critic's job is not to dissect or explain the text. Iser believes that once a text is read, the object and the reader (the perceiver) are essentially one. Hence, the critic's role is to examine and explain the text's effect on the reader.

Iser, however, differentiates two kinds of readers. The first is the **implied reader** who "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader [. . .]

has his or her roots firmly planted in the structure of the text" (Iser, 1978); in other words, the implied reader is the reader implied by the text, one who is predisposed to appreciate the overall effects of the text. The second kind of reader is the **actual reader,** or the person who physically picks up the text and reads it. It is this reader as opposed to the implied reader who comes to the text shaped by particular cultural and personal norms and prejudices. By positing the implied reader, Iser affirms the necessity of examining the text in the interpretive process. At the same time, by acknowledging the actual reader, Iser declares the validity of an individual reader's response to the text.

Like Jauss, Iser disavows the New Critical stance that a text has one and only one correct meaning and asserts that a text has many possible interpretations. For Iser, texts, in and of themselves, do not possess meaning. When a text is **concretized** by the reader (the phenomenological concept whereby the text registers in the reader's consciousness), the reader automatically views the text from his or her personal worldview. Since texts, however, do not tell the reader everything that needs to be known about a character, a situation, a relationship, and other such textual elements, readers must automatically fill in these "gaps," using their own knowledge base, grounded as it is in a particular worldview. In addition, each reader creates his or her own *horizon of expectations*—that is, a reader's expectations about what will or may or should happen next. (Note the variation in meaning Iser gives this term compared with Jauss, who coined it.) These horizons of expectations change frequently because at the center of all stories is conflict or dramatic tension, often resulting in sudden loss, pain, unexpected joy or fear, and at times great fulfillment. Such changes cause a reader to modify his or her horizon of expectations to fit a text's particular situation. For example, when, in Chapter 31 of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck declares that he will not write a letter to Miss Watson telling her the location of Jim, Huck openly chooses to side with Jim against the precepts of Huck's society. A reader may then assume that Huck will treat Jim differently, for now Jim, the slave, has a chance to become a free person. According to Iser, the reader has now established a horizon of expectations. When, however, in just a few short chapters, Tom Sawyer talks Huck into chaining Jim to a table, the reader may necessarily reformulate his or her horizon of expectations, for Huck is not treating Jim as a free man, but once again as a slave.

In making sense of the text, in filling in the text's gaps, and in continually adopting new horizons of expectations, the reader uses his or her own value system, personal and public experiences, and philosophical beliefs. According to Iser, each reader makes "concrete" the text, and each concretization is personal, thereby allowing the new creation—the text's meaning and effect on the reader—to be unique.

For Iser, the reader is an active, essential player in the text's interpretation, writing part of the text as the story is read and concretized and, indispensably, becoming its coauthor.

Subjective Criticism

Student D represents the third group of reader-oriented critics who place the greatest emphasis on the reader in the interpretative process. For these psychological or subjective critics, the reader's thoughts, beliefs, and experiences play a greater part than the actual text in shaping a work's meaning. Led by Norman Holland and David Bleich, these critics assert that we shape and find our self-identities in the reading process.

Norman Holland Using Freudian psychoanalysis as the foundation for his theory and practices formulated in the early 1970s, Norman Holland believes that at birth we receive from our mothers a primary identity. We personalize this identity through our life's experiences, transforming it into our own individualized **identity theme** that becomes the lens through which we see the world. Textual interpretation, then, becomes a matter of working out our own fears, desires, and needs to help maintain our psychological health.

Like Rosenblatt, Holland asserts that the reading process is a transaction between the text and the reader. The text is indeed important because it contains its own themes, its own unity, and its own structure. A reader, however, transforms a text into a private world, a place where one works out (through the ego) his or her fantasies, which are, in fact, mediated by the text so they will be socially acceptable.

For Holland, all interpretations are subjective. Unlike New Criticism, his reader-oriented approach asserts that there exists no such thing as a correct interpretation. From his perspective, there are as many valid interpretations as there are readers because the act of interpretation is a subjective experience where the text is subordinated to the individual reader.

David Bleich The founder of "subjective criticism," David Bleich agrees with Holland's psychological explanation of the interpretive process, but Bleich devalues the role the text plays, denying its objective existence. Meaning, Bleich argues, does not reside in the text but is *developed* when the reader works in cooperation with other readers to achieve the text's **collective meaning** (what Bleich calls "the interpretation"). Only when each reader is able to articulate his or her individual responses about the text within a group, then and only then can the group, working together, negotiate meaning. Such communally motivated negotiations ultimately determine the text's meaning.

For Bleich, the starting point for interpretation is the reader's responses to a text, not the text itself. Bleich states that these responses do not constitute the text's meaning because meaning cannot be found within a text or within responses to the text. Rather, a text's meaning must be *developed* from and out of the reader's responses, working in conjunction with other readers' responses and with past literary and life experiences. In other words,

Bleich differentiates between the reader's response(s) to a text (which for Bleich can never be equated to a reader's interpretation) and the reader's interpretation or meaning, which must be developed communally in a classroom or similar setting.

For Bleich and his adherents, the key to developing a text's meaning is the working out of one's responses to a text so these responses will be challenged and amended and accepted by one's social group. Subjective critics such as Bleich assert that when reading a text, a reader may respond to something in the text in a bizarre and personal way. These private responses will, through discussion, be pruned away by members of the reader's social group. Finally, the group will decide what is the acceptable interpretation of the text. As in Student D's interpretation cited at the beginning of this chapter, the reader responds personally to some specific element in the text, seeks to objectify this personal response, and then declares it to be an interpretation of the text. Only through negotiations with other readers and other texts—a process critics call intertextuality—can a reader develop the text's meaning.

A Two-step Methodology

Although reader-oriented critics all believe the reader plays a part in discovering a text's meaning, just how small or large a part is debatable. Espousing various theoretical assumptions, these critics must necessarily have different methodologies for textual analysis. According to the contemporary critic Steven Mailloux, all reader-oriented critics share a two-step procedure, which they then adapt to their own theories. First, these critics all show that a work gives a reader a task or something to do, and second, such tasks represent the reader's response(s) or answer(s) to that task.

Returning, for example, to Student D: At the beginning of the chapter, Student D's argument shows that she saw something in the text that triggered her memories of her friend Rita. Her task is to discover what in the text triggered her memory and why. She moves, then, from the text to her own thoughts, memories, and experiences. These personal experiences temporarily overshadow the text, but she realizes that her personal reactions must in some way become acceptable to her peers. She, therefore, compares Rita to Faith Brown and herself to Rita, thereby objectifying her personal feelings while having her interpretation deemed socially respectable in her **interpretive community**—a term coined by the reader-oriented critic Stanley Fish to designate a group of readers who share the same interpretive strategies.

Stanley Fish (1938–), a contemporary reader-oriented critic, has coined the term **affective stylistics** or **reception aesthetics** to describe his reading strategy. Like other theorists, Fish's approach to texts has developed through time, with Fish periodically appending his theoretical and practical concerns. Presently, Fish argues that meaning inheres in the reader, not the text.

A text's meaning, he declares, resides in the reading community to which an individual reader belongs, or what Fish calls the interpretive community. The interpretation of a text is, therefore, dependent on a reader's subjective experience in one or more of these interpretive communities. It is this community or communities that ultimately invest meaning. Unlike the New Critics, Fish declares that the objectivity of a text is an illusion, for the text is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate upon which the reader, while engaged in the reading process, writes the actual text. For Fish, the text being held by the reader is like a Rorschach blot on which the reader projects his or her understanding as filtered through cultural assumptions held by one or more interpretive communities. In effect, it is the reader who determines the form and content of the text. Gone is New Criticism's assumption that the text is a self-enclosed system or structure that determines its own meaning. For Fish, the reader, not the text, is preeminent.

Because the term *reader-oriented criticism* allows for so much divergence in theory and methods, many present-day schools of criticism, such as deconstructionism, feminism, Marxism, and Cultural Poetics, declare their membership in this broad classification. Each of these approaches to textual analysis provides its own ideological basis to reader-oriented theory and develops its unique methods of practical criticism. Such an eclectic membership heralds the continued growth and ongoing development of reader-oriented criticism.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Since reader-oriented critics use a variety of methodologies, no particular listing of questions can encompass all their concerns. Nevertheless, by asking the following questions of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," you can participate in both the theory and practice of reader-oriented criticism:

- Who is the actual reader?
- Who is the implied reader?
- Who is the ideal reader?
- Who is the narratee?
- What are some gaps you see in the text?
- Can you list several horizons of expectations and show how they change in Hawthorne's text from its beginning to its conclusion?
- Using Jauss's definition of horizon of expectations, can you develop first on your own, then with your classmates an interpretation of "Young Goodman Brown"?
- Can you articulate your identity theme as you develop your personal interpretation of "Young Goodman Brown?"

- Using Bleich's subjective criticism, can you state the difference between your response to "Young Goodman Brown" and your interpretation?
- In a classroom setting, develop your class's interpretive strategies for arriving at the meaning of "Young Goodman Brown."
- As you interpret "Young Goodman Brown," can you cite the interpretive community or communities to which you, the reader, belong? By so doing, you will be identifying how this community or communities have influenced your interpretation.

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

Like most schools of criticism that have emerged since the 1960s, reader-oriented criticism is a collective noun embodying a variety of critical positions. Unlike New Criticism's "text and text alone" approach to interpretation that claims that the meaning of a text is enclosed in the text itself, reader-oriented critics emphasize the reader of a text, declaring that the reader is just as much (or more) a producer of meaning as is the text itself. To varying degrees, the reader helps create the meaning of any text. In approaching a work, the reader brings to the interpretive process his or her **forestructure,** one's accrued life experiences, memories, beliefs, values, and other characteristics that make an individual unique. In making sense of the text—what we call the interpretation—the elements of the reader's forestructure interact, transact, or intermingle (depending on the reader's theoretical stance), thereby producing the actual interpretation. Because reader-oriented critics agree that an individual reader creates the text's meaning, reader-orientated criticism declares that there can be no one correct meaning for any text, but many valid interpretations. What the reading process is and how readers read are major concerns for all reader-oriented critics. Their answers to these and similar questions, however, are widely divergent.

Reader-oriented criticism has been harshly critiqued by scholars who believe that the text, not the reader, creates meaning. If multiple interpretations of the same text can exist side by side, how can we ever say what a text means? Can a text actually mean anything a reader says it means? Are there no clearly delineated guidelines for interpretation? Are there no fixed values in any text? If the reader is the producer of meaning, then the reader's physical or mental condition while reading a text will directly influence the interpretation, producing an array of bizarre and, more frequently than not, misguided and pointless interpretations. In response, reader-oriented critics provide a wide range of answers, from Wolfgang Iser's gap theory, to Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, to Stanley Fish's rather relativistic assumption that no text can exist until either the reader or an interpretive community creates it.

Presently reader-oriented criticism is not as popular as it was in the 1960s or '70s. Although its theoretical assumptions and critical theorists—Louise Rosenblatt, David Bleich, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and Norman Holland—still influence literary criticism and in all probability will continue to do so for decades, many reader-oriented critics now emphasize how certain groups read, asking such questions as these: Do African-Americans read differently from Caucasians? How do women read? How do men read? How do gays or lesbians read? In other words, different schools of literary criticism such as feminism, gender studies, and queer theory have embraced the principles of reader-oriented criticism, once again turning the attention of theorists and critics to the reading process and the reader.

5

Modernity/Postmodernism Structuralism/ Poststructuralism: Deconstruction

Everyone, left to his [or her] own devices, forms an idea about what goes on in language which is very far from the truth.

Ferdinand de Saussure, *Lectures on General Linguistics*

We are all mediators, translators.

Jacques Derrida, Interview

MODERNITY

Modernity is that which is ephemeral, fugitive, contingent upon the occasion; it is half of art, whose other half is eternal and unchangeable.

Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life"

For many historians and literary theorists alike, the Enlightenment (or the Age of Reason in the eighteenth century) is synonymous with **modernity** (from the Latin word *modo,* meaning "just now"). That its roots predate this time period is unquestioned, with a few scholars even dating its beginnings to 1492, coincident with Columbus's journeys to the Americas, and its overall spirit lasting until the middle of the twentieth century. At the center of this view of the world lie two prominent features: a belief that reason is humankind's best guide to life, and that science, above all other human endeavors, can lead humanity to a new promised land. Philosophically, modernity rests on the foundations laid by René Descartes (1596–1650), a French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician. Ultimately, declares Descartes, the only thing one cannot doubt is one's own existence. Certainty and knowledge begin with the self. "I think; therefore, I am" thus becomes the only solid foundation on which

knowledge and a theory of knowledge can be built. For Descartes, the rational essence freed from superstition, from human passions, and from one's oftentimes irrational imagination will allow humankind to discover truth about the physical world.

Whereas Descartes' teachings elevated to new heights of the individual's rational essence and humankind's ability to reason, the scientific writings and discoveries of both Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727) allowed science to be likewise coronated. Thanks to Bacon, the scientific method has become part of everyone's elementary and high school education. It is through experimentation, conducting experiments, making inductive generalizations, and verifying the results that one can discover truths about the physical world. And thanks to Newton, the physical world is no longer a mystery, but a mechanism that operates according to a system of laws that can be understood by any thinking, rational human being who is willing to apply the principles of the scientific method to the physical universe.

Armed with an unparalleled confidence in humankind's capacity to reason—the ability to inquire and to grasp necessary conditions essential for seeking out such undoubtable truths as provided by mathematics—and the assurance that science can lead the way to a complete understanding of the physical world, the Enlightenment (i.e., modern) scholar was imbued with a spirit of progress. Anything the enlightened mind set as its goal, so these scholars believed, was attainable. Through reason and science, all poverty, all ignorance, and all injustice would be finally banished.

Of all Enlightenment thinkers, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) may best exemplify the characteristics of modernity. Gleaned from self-portraits contained in his autobiography (first published in France in 1791, titled *Memoires De La Vie Privee*, with the English translation appearing in 1793, titled *The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin*), Franklin is the archetypal modern philosopher-scientist. Self-assured, Franklin declares that he "pulled himself up by his own bootstraps," overcoming poverty and ignorance through education to become America's first internationally known and respected scientist-philosopher-diplomat. Believing in the power and strength of the individual mind, he delighted in the natural world and decided early in life to know and explore all possible aspects of his universe. In this process, he abandoned superstitions and myths, placing his trust in science to lead him to truths about his world. Through observations, experiments, and conclusions drawn upon the data discovered by using the scientific method, Franklin believed he could obtain and know the necessary truths for guiding him through life.

Similar to Descartes, Franklin does not abandon religion and replace it with science. Holding to the tenets of deism, he rejects miracles, myths, and much of what he called religious superstitions. What he does not reject is a belief in the existence of God. He asserts, however, that God leaves it to

humanity, to each individual, to become the master of his or her own fate. According to Franklin, individuals must find salvation within themselves. By using one's God-given talent for reason and joining these rational abilities to the principles of science, each person, declares Franklin, can experience and enjoy human progress.

For Franklin and other enlightened minds, truth is to be discovered scientifically, not through the unruly and passionate imagination or through one's feelings or intuition. Indeed, what is to be known and discovered via the scientific method is reality: the physical world. All people, declares Franklin, must know this world objectively and must learn how to investigate it to discover its truths.

Self-assured, self-conscious, and self-made, Franklin concludes that all people possess an essential nature. It is humanity's moral duty to investigate this nature contained within ourselves and also to investigate our environment through rational thinking and the methods of science so we can learn and share the truths of the universe. By devoting ourselves to science and to the magnificent results that will necessarily follow, Franklin proclaims that human progress is inevitable and will usher in a new golden age.

Franklin and modernity's spirit of progress permeated humankind's beliefs well into the twentieth century. For several centuries, modernity's chief tenets—that reality can be known and investigated and that humanity possesses an essential nature characterized by rational thought—became the central ideas upon which many philosophers, scientists, educators, and writers constructed their worldviews. Briefly put, modernity's core characteristics are as follows:

- The concept of the self is a conscious, rational, knowable entity.
- Reality can be studied, analyzed, and known.
- Objective, rational truth can be discovered through science.
- The methodology of science can and does lead to ascertaining truth.
- The yardstick for measuring truth is reason.
- Truth is demonstrable.
- Progress and optimism are the natural results of valuing science and rationality.
- Language is referential, representing the perceivable world.

In particular, writers and literary theoreticians—New Critics, structuralists, and others—believed that texts possessed some kind of objective existence and could, therefore, be studied and analyzed, with appropriate conclusions to follow from such analyses. Whether a text's actual value and meaning were intrinsic or extrinsic was debatable; nevertheless, an aesthetic text's meaning could be discovered and articulated. Such a basic assumption concerning a text's meaning was soon to be challenged by principles espoused by what has been dubbed postmodernism.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM OR POSTMODERNISM

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives.

Jean-François Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition"

What is truth? How can truth be discovered? What is reality? Is there an objective reality on which we can all agree? If so, how can we best investigate this reality so all humanity can understand the world in which we live and prosper from such knowledge? Until the late 1960s (with a few notable exceptions), the worldview espoused by modernity and symbolized by Benjamin Franklin provided acceptable and workable answers to these questions. For Franklin and other modern thinkers, the primary form of discourse is like a map. The map itself is a representation of reality as known, discovered, and detailed by humanity. By looking at a map, a traveler who holds these assumptions can see a delineated view of the world and obtain an accurate picture of reality itself: the mountains, the rivers, the plains, the cities, the deserts, and the forests. By placing his or her trust in this representation of reality, the traveler can then plot a journey, feeling confident in the accuracy of the map and its depictions. For the modern mind, objective reality as pictured on the map was knowable and discoverable by any intelligent person who wished to do so.

With the inception of deconstruction as authored and portrayed in Jacques Derrida's poststructural view of the world in the mid-1960s, however, modernity's understanding of reality is challenged and turned on its head by **postmodernism,** meaning "after modernity" or "just after now," from its Latin root meaning "just now." For Derrida and other postmodernists, there is no such thing as "objective reality." For these thinkers, all definitions and depictions of truth are subjective, simply creations of human minds. Truth itself is relative, depending on the nature and variety of cultural and social influences in one's life. Because these poststructuralist thinkers assert that many truths exist, not *the* truth, they declare that modernity's concept of one objective reality must be disavowed and replaced by many different concepts, each a valid and reliable interpretation and construction of reality.

Postmodern thinkers reject modernity's representation of discourse (the map) and replace it with a collage. Unlike the fixed, objective nature of a map, a collage's meaning is always in flux, always changing. Whereas the viewer of a map relies on and obtains meaning and direction from the map itself, the viewer of a collage actually participates in the production of meaning. Unlike a map, which allows one interpretation of reality, a collage permits many possible meanings: the viewer (or "reader") can simply juxtapose a variety of combinations of images, thereby constantly changing the meaning of the collage. Each viewer, then, creates his or her own subjective picture of reality.

To say postmodernism popped onto the American literary scene with the coming of Derrida to America in 1966 would, of course, be inaccurate. Although historians disagree about who actually coined the term, there is general agreement that the word first appeared in the 1930s. Its seeds, however, had already germinated far earlier in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). As Zarathustra, the protagonist of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), proclaims the death of God, simultaneously the death knell begins to sound for the demise of objective reality and ultimate truth. World Wars I and II, a decline in the influence of Christianity and individualism, and the appearance of a new group of theologians led by Thomas Altizer, who in the 1950s echoed Nietzsche's words that God is dead, all contributed to the obsolescence of objective reality and of the autonomous scholar who seeks to discover ultimate reality.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing to the present, the voices of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the French cultural historian Michel Foucault (1926–1984), the aesthetician Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998), and the ardent American pragmatist Richard Rorty (1931–2007) declare unequivocally the death of objective truth. These leading articulators of postmodernism assert that modernity failed because it searched for an external point of reference—God, reason, and science, among others—on which to build a philosophy. For these postmodern thinkers, there is no such point of reference because there is no ultimate truth or inherently unifying element in the universe and, thus, no ultimate reality.

According to postmodernism, all that is left is difference. We must acknowledge, they say, that each person shapes his or her own concepts of reality. Reality, then, becomes a human construction shaped by each individual's dominant social group. There exists no center, nor one all-encompassing objective reality, but as many realities as there are people. Each person's interpretation of reality will necessarily be different. No individual or group can claim it alone understands or possesses absolute truth. Tolerance of each other's points of view, therefore, becomes the postmodern maxim.

Because postmodern philosophy is constantly being shaped, reshaped, defined, redefined, and articulated by its adherents, no single voice can adequately represent it or serve as an archetypal spokesperson, as Franklin does for modernity. By synthesizing the beliefs of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and Rorty, however, we can hypothesize what this representative postmodern thinker would possibly espouse:

> I believe, like my forebears before me, that we, as a race of people, will see progress, but only if we all cooperate. The age of the lone scholar, working diligently in the laboratory, is over. Cooperation among scholars from all fields is vital. Gone are the days of individualism. Gone are the days of conquest. Now is the time for tolerance, understanding, and collaboration.
>
> Because our knowledge always was and always will be incomplete, we must focus on a new concept: holism. We must realize that we all need each

other, including all our various perspectives on the nature of reality. We must also recognize that our rationality, our thinking processes, is only one of many avenues that can lead to an understanding of our world. Our emotions, our feelings, and our intuition can also provide us with valid interpretations and guidelines for living.

And we have finally come to realize that no such thing as objective reality exists; there is no ultimate truth because truth is perspectival, depending upon the community and social group in which we live. Since many truths exist, we must learn to accept each other's ideas concerning truth, and we must learn to live side by side, in a pluralistic society, learning from each other while celebrating our differences.

We must stop trying to discover the undiscoverable—absolute truth—and openly acknowledge that what may be right for one person may not be right for another. Acceptance, not criticism; open-mindedness, not closed-mindedness; tolerance, not bigotry; and love, not hatred, must become the guiding principles of our lives. When we stop condemning ourselves and others for "not having, possessing, or knowing truth," then and only then will we be able to spend more time interpreting our lives and giving them meaning, as together we work and play.

When such principles are applied to literary interpretation, the postmodernist realizes that no such thing as *the* meaning—or, especially, the *correct* meaning—of an aesthetic text exists. Like looking at a collage, meaning develops as a reader interacts with a text because meaning does not reside within the text itself. And since each reader's view of truth is perspectival, the interpretation of a text that emerges when a reader interacts with a text will necessarily be different from every other reader's interpretation. For each text, then, there exists an almost infinite number of interpretations, or at least as many interpretations as there are readers.

Overall, postmodernism's core characteristics can be stated as follows:

- A skepticism or rejection of grand metanarratives to explain reality
- The concept of the self as ever-changing
- No objective reality, but many subjective interpretations
- Truth as subjective and perspectival, dependent on cultural, social, and personal influences
- No "one correct" concept of ultimate reality
- No metatheory to explain texts or reality
- No "one correct" interpretation of a text.

MODERNITY TO MODERNISM

Rooted in the philosophy and ideals of the Enlightenment, modernity with its accompanying philosophical, political, scientific, and ethical ideas provides much of the basis for intellectual thought from the 1700s to the midpoint

of the twentieth century. World War I, however, marks a dramatic shift, especially in the arts. Growing out of the devastation of the war, the arts began to reflect society's new concerns, emphasizing decay, loss, and disillusionment. The term *modernism* is given to this aesthetic movement dated from 1914 to 1945 that questioned the ideals of British Victorianism and reflected both the material and the psychological devastation of two world wars. Writers such as W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, and many others began to question some of modernity's core beliefs, such as the objective status of reality and the fixed nature of aesthetic forms. Employing unconventional stylistic techniques such as stream of consciousness and multiple-narrated stories, artists and writers began to emphasize the subjective, highlighting how "seeing" or "reading" actually occurs rather than investigating the actual object being seen or read. Characterized by a transnational focus, literary artists blurred the established distinctions among the various genres, rejecting previously established aesthetic theories, choosing to highlight unconscious or subconscious elements in their works by employing the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Decentering the individual and introducing ambiguity and fragmentation, modernism began to see life as a collage rather than a map.

Partly in answer to the growing skepticism and the rising sense of meaningless of both life and art, a new way of examining reality and language arose in France in the 1950s, structuralism, a term coined in 1929 by the Russian Formalist Roman Jakobson. Structuralism asserts an overall unity and significance to every form of communication and social behavior.

Grounded in **structural linguistics** (the science of language), structuralism uses the techniques, methodologies, and vocabulary of linguistics, offering a scientific view of how we achieve meaning not only in literary works but also in every cultural act.

To understand structuralism, we must trace its historical roots to the linguistic writings and theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss professor and linguist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is his scientific investigations of language and language theory that provide the basis for structuralism's unique approach to literary analysis.

STRUCTURALISM: ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Pre-Saussurean Linguistics

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, **philology,** not **linguistics,** was the science of language. Its practitioners, known as **philologists,** described, compared, and analyzed the languages of the world

to discover similarities and relationships. Their approach to language study was **diachronic**—that is, they traced language change throughout long expanses of time, discovering, for example, how a particular phenomenon, such as a word or sound, in one language had changed **etymologically** or **phonologically** over several centuries and whether a similar change could be noted in other languages. Using a cause-and-effect relationship as the basis for their research, the philologists' main emphasis was the historical development of languages.

Such an emphasis reflected the nineteenth-century philologists' theoretical assumptions concerning the nature of language. Language, they believed, mirrored the structure of the world it imitated and, therefore, had no structure of its own. Known as the **mimetic theory** of language, this linguistic hypothesis asserts that words (either spoken or written) are symbols for things in the world, each word having its own **referent**—the object, concept, or idea that is represented and/or symbolized by that word. According to this theory, the symbol (a word) equals a thing:

Symbol (word) = Thing

Saussure's Linguistic Revolution

In the first decade of the 1900s, a Swiss philologist and teacher, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), began questioning these long-held ideas and, by so doing, triggered a reformation in language study. Through his research and innovative theories, Saussure changed the direction and subject matter of linguistic studies. His *Course in General Linguistics,* a compilation of his 1906–1911 lecture notes published posthumously by his students in 1916, is one of the most influential works of modern linguistics and forms the basis for structuralist literary theory and practical criticism. Through the efforts of this pioneer of modern linguistics, nineteenth-century philology evolved into the more multifaceted science of twentieth-century linguistics.

Saussure began his linguistic revolution by affirming the validity and necessity of the diachronic approach to language study used by such nineteenth-century philologists as the Grimm brothers and Karl Verner. Using this diachronic approach, these linguists discovered the principles governing consonantal pronunciation changes that occurred in Indo-European languages (the language group to which English belongs) over many centuries. While not abandoning a diachronic examination of language, Saussure introduced the **synchronic** approach, a method that focuses on any given language at one particular time—a single moment—and that emphasizes the whole state of a particular language at that time. Attention is on how the language and its parts function, not on tracing the historical development of a single element, as would occur in a diachronic analysis. By highlighting the activity of the

language system and how it operates rather than its evolution, Saussure drew attention to the nature and composition of language and its constituent parts. For example, along with examining the phonological antecedents of the English sound *b*, as in the word *boy* (a diachronic analysis), Saussure opened a new avenue of investigation, asking how the *b* sound is related to other sounds in use at the same time by speakers of Modern English (a synchronic analysis). This new concern necessitated a rethinking of language theory and a reevaluation of the aims of language research, and it finally resulted in Saussure's articulating the basic principles of modern linguistics.

Unlike many of his contemporary linguists, Saussure rejected the mimetic theory of language structure. In its place, he asserted that language is primarily determined by its own internally structured and highly systematized rules. These rules govern all aspects of a language, including the sounds its speakers will identify as meaningful, the grouping of various combinations of these sounds into words, and the process whereby these words may be arranged to produce meaningful communication within a given language.

The Structure of Language

According to Saussure, all languages are governed by their own internal rules that do not mirror or imitate the structure of the world. Emphasizing the systematized nature of language, Saussure asserts that all languages are composed of basic units called **emes.** The task of a linguist is to identify these units (sometimes called *paradigms* or *models*) and/or to identify their relationships among symbols—like the letters of the alphabet, for example—in a given language. This task becomes especially difficult when the emes in the linguist's native language and those in an unfamiliar language under investigation differ. According to Saussure, the basic building block or unit of language is the **phoneme**—the smallest meaningful (significant) sound in a language. The number of phonemes differs from language to language, with the least number of total phonemes for any one language being around eleven (Rotokas, a language spoken by approximately four thousand people in Bougainville, an island east of New Guinea) and the most being 112, found in several tonal languages. American English, for example, consists of approximately forty-three to forty-five phonemes, depending on the specific dialect of American English being spoken. Although native speakers of American English are capable of producing phonemes found in other languages, it is these forty-five distinct sounds that serve as the building blocks of American English. For example, the first sound heard in the word *pin* is the /p/ phoneme, the second /I/, and the last /n/. A phoneme is identified in writing by enclosing the **grapheme**—the written symbol that represents the phoneme's sound—in virgules or diagonal lines.

Although each phoneme makes a distinct sound that is meaningful and recognizable to speakers of a particular language, in actuality a phoneme is composed of a family of nearly identical speech sounds called **allophones.** For instance, in the word *pit*, the first phoneme is /p/, and in the word *spin*, the second phoneme is also /p/. Although the /p/ appears in both words, its pronunciation is slightly different. To validate this statement, simply hold the palm of your hand about two inches from your mouth and pronounce the word *pit* followed immediately by the word *spin*. You will quickly note the difference. These slightly different pronunciations of the same phoneme are simply two different allophones of the phoneme /p/.

Telling the difference among sounds, knowing when any alternation in the pronunciation of a phoneme changes the meaning of a group of phonemes (i.e., a word), or knowing when a simple variation in a phoneme's pronunciation is linguistically insignificant (an allophone) can, at times, be difficult. For example, in English the letter *t* represents the sound /t/, but is there one distinct pronunciation for this sound whenever and wherever it appears in an English word? Is the *t* in the word *tip*, for instance, pronounced the same as the *t* in *stop*? Obviously not—the first *t* is **aspirated,** or pronounced with a greater force of air, more than the *t* in *stop*. In either word, however, a speaker of English could still identify the /t/ as a phoneme or a distinct sound. If we replace the *t* in *tip* with a *d*, we now have *dip*, the difference between the two words being the sounds /t/ and /d/. Upon further analysis, we find that these sounds are pronounced in the same location in the mouth but with one difference: whereas /d/ is **voiced** or pronounced with the vocal cords vibrating, /t/ is **unvoiced,** with the vocal cords remaining basically still. This difference between the sounds /t/ and /d/ allows us to say that /t/ and /d/ are phonemes or distinct sounds in English. Whether the eme is a sound or a minimal unit of grammar such as the adding of an s in English to form most plurals or any other distinct category of a language, Saussure's basic premise operates: within each eme, distinctions depend on differences.

How phonemes and allophones arrange themselves to produce meaningful speech in any language is not arbitrary but is governed by a prescribed set of rules developed through time by the speakers of a language. For example, in Modern American English (1755 to the present), no English word can end with the two phonemes /m/ and /b/. In Middle English (1100–1500), these phonemes could combine to form the two terminal sounds of a word, resulting, for example, in the word *lamb*, where the /m/ and /b/ were both pronounced. Over time, the rules of spoken English have changed so that when *lamb* appears in Modern English, /b/ has lost its phonemic value. The study of the rules governing the meaningful units of sound in a linguistic system is called **phonology,** and the study of the production of these sounds is known as **phonetics.**

In addition to phonemes, another major building block of language is the **morpheme,** the smallest part of a word that has lexical or grammatical significance. **Lexical** refers to the base or root meaning of a word, whereas

grammatical refers to those elements of language that express relationships among words or groups of words, such as the **inflections** {-ed}, {-s}, and {-ing} that carry tense, number, gender, and so on. (Note that in print, morphemes are placed in braces.) Similar to the phoneme, the number of lexical and grammatical morphemes varies from language to language. In American English, the number of lexical morphemes far outdistances the relative handful of grammatical morphemes (ten or so). For instance, in the word *reaper*, {reap} is a lexical morpheme, meaning "to ripple flax" and {-er} is a grammatical morpheme, meaning "one who." All words must have a lexical morpheme (hence their great number), but not every word need have a grammatical morpheme. How the various lexical and grammatical morphemes combine to form words is highly rule-governed and is known in modern linguistics as the study of **morphology.**

Another major building block in the structure of language is the actual arrangement of words in a sentence, a language's **syntax.** Just as the placement of phonemes and morphemes in individual words is a rule-governed activity, so is the arrangement of words in a sentence. For example, although native speakers of English would understand the sentence "John threw the ball into the air," such speakers would have difficulty ascertaining the meaning of "Threw air the into ball the John." Why? Native speakers of English have mastered which strings of morphemes are permitted by syntactic rules and which are not. Those that do not conform to these rules do not form English sentences and are called **ungrammatical.** Those that do conform to the established syntactic structures are called **sentences** or **grammatical sentences.** In most English sentences, for example, the subject ("John") precedes the verb ("threw"), followed by the complement ("the ball into the air"). Although this structure can at times be modified, such changes must follow tightly prescribed rules of syntax if a speaker of English is to be understood.

Having established the basic building blocks of a sentence—phonemes, morphemes, words, and syntax—language also provides us with one additional body of rules to govern the various interpretations or shades of meaning such combinations of words can evoke: **semantics.** Unlike morphemes (the meanings of which can be found in any good dictionary) and unlike the word stock of a language—its **lexicon**—the **semantic features** (the properties of words that show facets of meaning) are not so easily defined. Consider, for example, the following sentences:

"Giuseppe is a nut."

"I found a letter on South Washington Street."

"Get a grip, Rusty."

To understand each of these sentences, a speaker or reader needs to understand the semantic features that govern an English sentence because each of the above sentences has several possible interpretations. In the first sentence, the speaker must grasp the concept of **metaphor;** in the second, lexical

ambiguity; and in the third, idiomatic structures. Unless these semantic features are consciously or unconsciously known and understood by the reader or listener, problems of interpretation may arise. As with the other building blocks of language, an understanding of semantics is necessary for clear communication in any language.

Langue and Parole

By age five or six, native speakers of English or any other language have consciously and unconsciously mastered their language's complex system of rules or its **grammar**—their language's phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—which enables them to participate in language communication. In effect, these young native speakers have mastered their language's **descriptive grammar**—that is, the actual use of a language by its speakers without reference to established norms of correctness or "good" or "bad" usage. They have not, however, mastered such advanced elements as all the semantic features of their language, nor have they mastered its **prescriptive grammar:** the prescribed rules of English usage often invented, propagated, and enforced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century purists who believed that there were certain constructions that all educated people should know and employ, such as using the nominative form of a pronoun after an intransitive linking verb as in the sentence "It is I." What these five- or six-year-old native speakers of a language have learned Saussure dubs langue, the structure of the language that is mastered and shared by all its speakers.

Although langue emphasizes the social aspect of language and an understanding of the overall language system, Saussure calls an individual's actual speech utterances **parole**—that is, linguistic features such as loudness or softness that are overlaid on language's structure, its langue. For example, two speakers can utter the same sentence, such as "I see a rat." One speaker shouts the words while another whispers them. Both utterances are examples of parole and how individuals personalize language. Speakers can generate countless examples of individual utterances (parole), but these will all be governed by the language's system, its langue. It is the task of the linguist, Saussure believes, to infer a language's langue from the analysis of many instances of parole. In other words, for Saussure, the proper study of linguistics is the system (langue), not the individual utterances of its speakers (parole).

Saussure's Redefinition of a Word

Having established that languages are systems that operate according to verifiable rules and that they need to be investigated both diachronically and

synchronically, Saussure then reexamined philology's definition of a word. Rejecting the long-held belief that a word is a symbol that equals a thing (its referent), Saussure proposed that words are **signs** made up of two parts: the **signifier** (a written or spoken mark) and a **signified** (a concept):

$$\text{Sign} = \frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{Signified}}$$

For example, when we hear the sound *ball,* the sound is the signifier and the concept of a ball that comes to our minds is the signified. Like the two sides of a sheet of paper, the linguistic sign is the union of these two elements. As oxygen combines with hydrogen to form water, Saussure says, so the signifier joins with the signified to form a sign that has properties unlike those of its parts. Accordingly for Saussure, a word represents a sign, not a referent in the objective world. Unlike previous generations of philologists who believed that we perceive things (word = thing) and then translate them into units or meaning, Saussure revolutionizes linguistics by asserting that we perceive signs.

Furthermore, the linguistic sign, declares Saussure, is arbitrary: the relationship between the signifier *(ball)* and the signified (the concept of *ball*) is a matter of convention. The speakers of a language have simply agreed that the written or spoken sounds or marks represented by *ball* will equal the concept *ball.* With few exceptions, proclaims Saussure, there is no natural link between the signifier and the signified, nor is there any natural relationship between the linguistic sign and what it represents.

If, as Saussure maintains, there is no natural link between the linguistic sign and the reality it represents, how do we know the difference between one sign and another? In other words, how does language create meaning? We know what a sign means, says Saussure, because it differs from all other signs. By comparing and contrasting one sign with other signs, we learn to distinguish each individual sign. Individual signs, then, can have meaning (or signify) only within their own langue.

For Saussure, meaning is therefore relational and a matter of difference. Within the system of sound markers that comprise our language, we know *ball,* for instance, because we differentiate it from *hall, tail,* and *pipe.* Likewise, we know the concept "bug" because it differs from the concepts "truck," "grass," and "kite." As Saussure declares, "In language there are only differences."

Because signs are arbitrary, conventional, and differential, Saussure concludes that the proper study of language is not an examination of isolated entities, but the system of relationships among them. He asserts, for example, that individual words cannot have meaning by themselves. Because language is a system of rules governing sounds, words, and other components, individual words obtain their meanings only within that system. To know language and how it functions, Saussure declares, we must study the system

(langue), not individual utterances (parole) that operate according to the rules of langue.

For Saussure, language is the primary sign system whereby we structure our world. Language's structure, he believes, is not unlike that of any other sign system of social behavior, such as fashion, table manners, and sports. Like language, all such expressions of social behavior generate meaning through a system of signs. Saussure proposed a new science called **semiology** to study how we create meaning through these signs in all our social behavioral systems. Since language was the chief and most characteristic of all these systems, Saussure declared, it was to be the main branch of semiology. The investigation of all other sign systems would be patterned after language because like language's signs, the meanings of all signs are arbitrary, conventional, and differential.

Although semiology never became the important new science Saussure envisioned, a similar science was being proposed in America almost simultaneously by philosopher and teacher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Called **semiotics,** this science borrowed linguistic methods used by Saussure and applied them to all meaningful cultural phenomena. Meaning in society, this science of signs declares, can be systematically studied, both in studying how this meaning occurs and in understanding the structures that allow it to operate. Distinguishing among the various kinds of signs, semiotics continues to develop today as a particular field of study. Because it uses structuralist methods borrowed from Saussure, *semiotics* and *structuralism* are terms often used interchangeably, although the former denotes a distinct field of study, and the latter is more an approach and method of analysis.

ASSUMPTIONS OF STRUCTURALISM

Borrowing the linguistic vocabulary, theory, and methods from Saussure and to a smaller degree from Peirce, structuralists—their studies being variously called structuralism, semiotics, **stylistics,** and narratology to name a few—believe that codes, signs, and rules govern all human social and cultural practices, including communication. Whether that communication is the language of fashion, sports, education, friendships, or literature, each is a systematized combination of codes (signs) governed by rules. Structuralists want to discover these codes, which they believe give meaning to all our social and cultural customs and behavior. Hence, they declare that the proper study of meaning—and, therefore, reality—is an investigation of the system behind these practices, not the individual practices themselves. Their aim is to discover how all the parts fit together and function.

Structuralists find meaning in the relationship among the various components of a system. When applied to literature, this principle becomes

revolutionary. For structuralists, the proper study of literature now involves an inquiry into the conditions surrounding the act of interpretation itself (how literature conveys meaning), not an in-depth investigation of an individual work. Since an individual work can express only those values and beliefs of the system of which it is a part, structuralists emphasize the system (langue) whereby texts relate to each other, not an examination of an isolated text (parole). They believe that a study of the system of rules that govern literary interpretation becomes the critic's primary task.

Such a belief presupposes that the structure of literature is similar to the structure of language. Like language, say the structuralists, literature is a self-enclosed system of rules that is composed of language. Literature, like language, needs no outside referent except its own rule-governed, but socially constrained, system. Before structuralism, literary theorists discussed the literary conventions—that is, the various genres or types of literature, such as the novel, the short story, or poetry. Each genre, it was believed, had its own conventions or acknowledged and acceptable way of reflecting and interpreting life. For example, in poetry, a poet could write in nonsentences, using symbols and other forms of figurative language to state a theme or to make a point. For these prestructuralist theorists, the proper study of literature was an examination of these conventions and of how either individual texts used applicable conventions to make meaning or how readers used these same conventions to interpret the text. Structuralists, however, seek out the system of codes that they believe conveys a text's meaning. For them, how a text conveys meaning rather than what meaning is conveyed is at the center of their interpretive methodology—that is, how a symbol or a metaphor, for example, imparts meaning is of special interest. For instance, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," most readers assume that the darkness of the forest equates with evil and that images of light represent safety. Of particular interest to the structuralist is *how* (not *that*) darkness comes to represent evil. A structuralist would ask why darkness more frequently than not represents evil in any text and what sign system or code is operating that allows readers to interpret darkness as evil intertextually or in all or most texts they read. To structuralists, how a symbol or any other literary device functions is of chief importance, not how literary devices imitate reality or express feelings.

In addition to emphasizing the system of literature and not individual texts, structuralism claims it demystifies literature. By explaining literature as a system of signs encased in a cultural frame that allows that system to operate, say the structuralists, a literary work can no longer be considered a mystical or magical relationship between the author and the reader, a place where author and reader share emotions, ideas, and truth. A scientific and an objective analysis of how readers interpret texts, not a transcendental, intuitive, or transactional response to any one text, leads to meaning. Similarly, an author's intentions can no longer be equated to the text's overall meaning

because meaning is determined by the system that governs the writer, not an individual author's personal quirks. And no longer can the text be autonomous, an object whose meaning is contained solely within itself. All texts, declare structuralists, are part of the shared system of meaning that is intertextual, not text specific. In other words, all texts refer readers to other texts. Meaning, claim the structuralists, can be expressed only through this shared system of relations, not in an author's stated intentions or the reader's private or public experiences.

Declaring both isolated text and author to be of little importance, structuralism attempts to strip literature of its magical powers or so-called hidden meanings that can be discovered by only a small, elite group of highly trained specialists. Meaning can be found, it declares, by analyzing the system of rules that comprise literature itself.

METHODOLOGIES OF STRUCTURALISM

Like other approaches to textual analysis, structuralism follows neither one methodological strategy nor one set of ideological assumptions. Although most structuralists use many of Saussure's ideas in formulating their theoretical assumptions and foundations for their literary theories, how these assumptions are employed when applied to textual analysis varies greatly. A brief examination of five structuralists or subgroups will help highlight structuralism's varied approaches to textual analysis.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

One of the first scholar-researchers to implement Saussure's principles of linguistics to narrative discourse in the 1950s and 1960s was the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). Attracted to the rich symbols in myths, Lévi-Strauss spent years studying myths from around the world. Myth, he assumed, possessed a structure like language. Accordingly, each individual myth was an example of parole. What he wanted to discover was myth's langue, its overall structure that allows individual examples (parole) to function and have meaning. In his work "The Structural Study of Myths" (1955), Lévi-Strauss presents his structural analysis of why myths from different cultures worldwide seem similar. All myths' similarities reside, he asserts, at the level of structure.

After reading countless myths, Lévi-Strauss identified recurrent themes running through all of them. Such themes transcended culture and time, speaking directly to the minds and hearts of all people. These basic structures, which he called **mythemes**, are similar to the primary building blocks

of language, the phonemes. Like phonemes, mythemes find meaning in and through their relationships within the mythic structure. And like phonemes, such relationships often involve oppositions. For example, the /b/ and /p/ phonemes are similar in that they are pronounced by using the lips to suddenly stop a stream of air. They differ or oppose one another in only one aspect: whether the air passing through the windpipe does or does not vibrate (voiced and unvoiced, respectively) the vocal cords. During actual speech, vibrating vocal cords produce /b/, and nonvibrating, /p/. Similarly, a mytheme finds its meaning through opposition. Hating or loving one's parents, falling in love with someone who does or who does not love you, and cherishing or abandoning one's children all exemplify the dual or opposing nature of mythemes. The rules that govern how these mythemes may be combined constitute myth's structure or grammar. The meaning of any individual myth, then, depends on the interaction and order of the mythemes within the story. Out of this structural pattern develops the myth's meaning.

When applied to a specific literary work, the intertextuality of myth becomes evident. For example, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the title character overestimates the value and support of children when he trusts Regan and Goneril, his two eldest daughters, to take care of him in his old age. He also underestimates the value and support of children when he banishes his youngest and most-loved daughter, Cordelia. Like the binary opposition that occurs between the /b/ and /p/ phonemes, the binary opposition of underestimating versus overestimating love automatically occurs when reading *King Lear* because such mythemes have occurred in countless other texts and immediately ignite emotions within the reader.

Like our unconscious mastery of our language's langue, we also master myth's structure. Our ability to grasp this structure, says Lévi-Strauss, is innate. Like language, myths are simply another way we classify and organize our world.

Roland Barthes

Researching and writing in response to Lévi-Strauss was his contemporary, the eminent French structuralist Roland Barthes (1915–1980). Barthes' contribution to structuralist theory is best summed up in the title of his most famous text, *S/Z* (1970). In Honoré Balzac's *Sarrasine*, Barthes noted that the first *s* is pronounced as the *s* in *snake*, and the second as the z in *zoo*. Both phonemes, /s/ and /z/, respectively, are a **minimal pair**—that is, both are produced by using the same articulatory organs and in the same place in the mouth, the difference being that /s/ is unvoiced (no vibration of vocal cords) and /z/ is voiced (vibration of vocal cords when air is blowing through the breath channel). Like all minimal pairs—/p/and /b/, /t/ and /d/, and /k/ and /g/, for example—this pair operates in what Barthes

calls **binary opposition.** Even within a phoneme, binary opposition exists, for a phoneme is, as Saussure reminded us, a class of nearly identical sounds called allophones, which differ **phonetically**—that is, by slightly changing the pronunciation but not altering the recognizable phoneme. Borrowing and further developing Saussure's work, Barthes declares that all language is its own self-enclosed system based on binary operations (i.e., difference).

Barthes then applies his assumption that meaning develops through difference to all social contexts, including fashions, familial relations, dining, and literature, to name a few. When applied to literature, an individual text is simply a message—an example of parole—that must be interpreted by using the appropriate codes or signs or binary operations that form the basis of the entire system, the langue. Only through recognizing the codes or binary operations within the text, says Barthes, can the message encoded within the text be explained. For example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" most readers intuitively know that young Goodman Brown will come face-to-face with evil when he enters the forest. Why? Because one code or binary operation that we all seemingly know is that light implies good and dark evil. Brown thus enters the dark forest and leaves the light of his home, only to find the "false light" of evil emanating from the artificial light—the fires that light the baptismal service of those being baptized into Satan's legions. By finding other binary oppositions within the text and showing how these oppositions interrelate, the structuralist can then decode Hawthorne's text and explain its meaning.

Such a process abandons or dismisses the importance of the author, any historical or literary period, or particular textual elements or genres. Rather than discovering any element of truth within a text, this methodology shows the process of decoding a text in relationship to the codes provided by the structure of language itself.

Vladimir Propp and Narratology

Expanding Lévi-Strauss's linguistic model of myths, a group of structuralists called **narratologists** began another kind of structuralism: **structuralist narratology,** the science of narrative. Like Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, these structuralists illustrate how a story's meaning develops from its overall structure, its langue, rather than from each individual story's isolated theme. Narratology's overriding concern is the narrative structure of a text. What is the interrelationship of a narrative's constituent parts, ask narratologists, and how are these parts constructed to shape the narrative itself? What are the "rules" that govern the formation of plot? Of point of view? Of narrator? Of audience?

Like other critics, narratologists amend and borrow ideas from other reading strategies to help shape their ideas. Narratology borrows elements from both the French structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss and from Russian Formalist critics such as Vladimir Propp (1895–1970). In his influential text *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Propp investigates Russian fairy tales to decode their langue. According to his analysis, all folk or fairy tales are based on thirty-one fixed elements, or what Propp calls **narrative functions** or **narratemes,** that occur in a given sequence. Each function identifies predictable patterns that central characters, such as the hero, the villain, or the helper, enact to further the plot of the story. Any story may use any number of these elements, such as "accepting the call to adventure," "recognizing the hero," and "the punishing of the villain," among others, but each element occurs in its logical and proper sequence. Other critics, notably Paul Vehvilainen, have simplified Propp's thirty-one functions into a five-point system that, like Propp's, always occur in the same order:

1. A *lack* of something exists.
2. This lack forces the hero to go on a *quest* to eliminate this lack.
3. On the quest, the hero encounters a *magical helper.*
4. The hero is subjected to one or more *tests.*
5. After having passed the test(s), the hero receives a *reward.*

Like Propp's thirty-one narratemes, these simplified five basic functions can be applied to most fairy tales.

Applying Propp's narratological principles to specific literary works is both fun and simple. For example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," Goodman Brown, the protagonist, is given a task to do: meet someone in the forest after dark. Upon entering the forest, Brown soon encounters the villain, who attempts to take Brown deeper and deeper into the heart of the forest. Various helpers appear to propel the plot forward, until the protagonist's or hero's task is completed, at which time Goodman Brown seemingly frees himself from the clutches of evil.

Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette

Another narratologist, the Franco-Bulgarian theorist and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (1939–), declares that all stories are composed of grammatical units. For Todorov, the syntax of narrative—how the various grammatical elements of a story combine—is essential. By applying a rather intricate grammatical model to narrative—dividing the text into semantic, syntactic, and verbal aspects—Todorov believes he can discover the narrative's langue and establish a grammar of narrative. He begins by asserting

that the grammatical clause, and in turn, the subject and verb, is the basic interpretive unit of each sentence and can be linguistically analyzed and further dissected into a variety of grammatical categories to show how all narratives are structured. An individual text (parole) interests Todorov as a means to describe the overall properties of literature in general (langue).

Other narratologists such as the French theorist Gérard Genette (1930–) have also developed methods of analyzing a story's structure to uncover its meaning, each building upon the former work of another narratologist (and in some cases Russian Formalists) and adding an additional element or two. Genette is responsible for reintroducing a host of rhetorical terms into literary theory and criticism. For example, he believes that tropes, or figures of speech, require a reader's special attention. Genette's five-part work *Figures I–V* (a series written from 1967 to 2002) and particularly his text *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1979) has strongly influenced structuralism's vocabulary and methodology in both America and France.

Although these narratologists provide us with various approaches to texts, all furnish us with a **metalanguage**—words used to describe language—so we can understand *how* a text means, not *what* it means.

Jonathan Culler

By the mid-1970s, Jonathan Culler (1944–), professor of English and comparative literature at Cornell University, became the voice of structuralism in America and took structuralism in yet another direction. In his work *Structuralist Poetic: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (1975), Culler declares that abstract linguistic models used by narratologists tend to focus on parole, spending too much time analyzing individual stories, poems, and novels. What is needed, he believes, is a return to an investigation of langue, Saussure's main premise.

According to Culler, readers, when given a chance, somehow will make sense out of the most bizarre texts because readers possess what Culler calls **literary competence.** Through experiences with texts, Culler asserts, readers have internalized a set of rules that govern their acts of interpretation. Instead of analyzing individual interpretations of a work, we must spend our time, Culler insists, on analyzing the act of interpretation itself. We must shift the focus from the text to the reader. How, asks Culler, does interpretation take place in the first place? What system underlies the very act of reading that allows any other system to operate?

> Unlike other structuralists, Culler presents a theory of reading. What, he asks, is the internalized system of literary competence readers use to interpret a work? In other words, how do they read? What system guides them through the process of interpreting the work, of making sense of the spoken or printed word?

Culler maintains that every reader holds to three underlying assumptions when reading and interpreting texts:

1. A text will be unified.
2. A text will be thematically significant.
3. A text's significance can take the form of reflection.

Accordingly, Culler then seeks to establish the system, the langue, that undergirds the reading process. By focusing on the act of interpretation itself to discover literature's langue, Culler believes he is returning structuralism to its Saussurean roots.

A Model of Interpretation

Although structuralist theories abound, a core of structuralists believes that the primary signifying system is best found as a series of binary oppositions that the reader organizes, values, and uses to interpret the text. Each binary operation can be pictured as a fraction, the top half (the numerator) being what is more valued than its related bottom half (the denominator). Accordingly, in the binary operation light/dark, the reader has learned to value light over dark, and in the binary operation good/evil, the reader has similarly learned to value good over evil. How the reader maps out and organizes the various binary operations and their interrelationships found within the text but already existing in the mind of the reader determines for that particular reader the text's interpretation.

No matter what its methodology, structuralism emphasizes form and structure, not the actual content of a text. Although individual texts must be analyzed, structuralists are more interested in the rule-governed system that underlies texts rather than the texts themselves. *How* texts mean—not *what* texts mean—is their chief interest.

FROM STRUCTURALISM TO POSTSTRUCTURALISM: DECONSTRUCTION

Throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s, structuralism dominated European and American literary theory and criticism. While the application of structuralist principles varies from one theoretician to another, all believe that language is the primary means of **signification** (i.e., how we achieve meaning through linguistic signs and other symbols) and that language comprises its own rule-governed system to achieve such meaning. Although language is the primary sign system, it is not the only one. Fashions, sports,

dining, and other activities all have their own language or codes whereby the participants know what is to be expected of them in a particular situation. When dining at an elegant restaurant, for example, connoisseurs of fine dining know that it is inappropriate to drink from the finger bowl. Similarly, football fans know that during a game it is indeed both appropriate and customary for them to shout and scream to support their team.

From a structuralist perspective, such expectations highlight that all social and cultural practices are governed by rules or codes. Wishing to discover these rules, structuralists declare that the proper study of reality and meaning is the system behind such individual practices, not the individual practices themselves. Like attending a football game or dining at a fine restaurant, the act of reading is also a cultural and a social practice that contains its own codes. Meaning in a text resides in these codes that the reader has mastered before he or she even picks up an actual text. For the structuralist, the proper study of literature is an inquiry into the conditions surrounding the act of interpretation itself, not an investigation of an individual text.

In the mid-1960s, this structuralist assumption that meaning can be discovered through an examination of a text's structural codes was challenged by the maxim of **undecidability:** a text has many meanings and, therefore, no definitive interpretation. Rather than providing answers about the meaning of texts or a methodology for discovering how a text means, a new approach to reading, **deconstruction theory,** asks a different set of questions, endeavoring to show that what a text claims it says and what it actually says are discernibly different. By casting doubt on most previously held theories, deconstruction declares that a text has an almost infinite number of possible interpretations. Furthermore, declare some deconstructionists, the interpretations themselves are just as creative and may be as important as the text or texts being interpreted.

With the advent of deconstruction and its challenge to structuralism and other established theories, a paradigmatic shift occurs in literary theory and criticism. Before deconstruction, literary critics—New Critics, some reader-oriented theorists, structuralists, and others—found meaning *within* the literary text or the codes of the various sign systems within the world of the text and the reader. The most innovative of these theorists, the structuralists, provided new and exciting ways of discovering meaning, but nonetheless, these theorists maintained that meaning could be found. Underlying all the predeconstructionist suppositions about the world is a set of philosophical, ethical, and scientific assumptions we dub modernity that provided the bases for the beliefs held by Western culture for about three hundred years. With the emergence of deconstruction, these long-held beliefs were challenged by **poststructuralism,** a new basis for understanding and guiding humanity (its name denoting that it historically comes after or *post* structuralism). Often, historians, anthropologists, literary theorists, and other scholars use the term *postmodernism* synonymously with *deconstruction* and *poststructuralism,*

although the term *postmodernism* was coined in the 1930s and has broader historical implications outside the realm of literary theory than do the terms *poststructuralism* or *deconstruction*.

DECONSTRUCTION: ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Deconstruction: Its Beginnings

The term *deconstruction* first emerged on the American literary stage in 1966 when Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), a French philosopher and teacher, read his paper "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at a Johns Hopkins University symposium. (Derrida both borrows and amends the meaning of this word from a work titled *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927), written by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger.) In "Structure, Sign, and Play," (what many scholars believe to be the inaugural essay for deconstruction theory) Derrida questions and disputes the metaphysical assumptions held to be true by Western philosophy since the time of Plato, and inaugurates what many critics believe to be the most intricate and challenging method of textual analysis yet to appear.

Derrida himself would not want deconstruction construed as a critical theory, a school of criticism, a mode or method of literary criticism, or a philosophy. Nowhere in Derrida's writings does he state the encompassing tenets of his critical approach, nor does he ever present a codified body of deconstructive theory or a practical methodology. Although he develops his views and ideas throughout his canon, Derrida believes that he cannot develop a formalized statement of his "rules for reading, interpretation, and writing." Unlike a unified treatise, Derrida claims that his approach to reading and literary analysis is more a "strategic device" than a methodology, more a strategy or approach to literature than a school or theory of criticism. Such theories of criticism, he believes, must identify with a body of knowledge that adherents decree to be true or to contain truth. It is this assertion—that truth or a core of metaphysical ideals actually exists and can be believed, articulated, and supported—that Derrida wishes to dispute and "deconstruct." His device is deconstruction, a term Derrida defines as "a position one has with regard to something."

Because deconstruction uses previously formulated theories from other schools of criticism, coins many words for its newly established ideas, and challenges beliefs long held in Western culture, many students, teachers, and critics avoid studying its ideas, fearing the supposed complexity of its analytic apparatus. By organizing deconstruction and its assumptions into three workable areas of study rather than plunging directly into some of its complex terminology, we can begin to grasp this approach to textual analysis.

First, we will briefly examine what Derrida borrows and then amends from structuralism, the starting point for his deconstructive strategy. Next we will investigate the proposed radical changes Derrida makes in Western philosophy and metaphysics. Such changes, Derrida readily admits, turn Western metaphysics on its head. Finally, we must master the new terminology, coupled with the new philosophical assumptions and their corresponding methodological approaches to textual analysis, of deconstruction to understand and use this approach to interpreting a text.

Derrida's Starting Place: Structuralism

Derrida begins formulating his strategy of reading by critiquing Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. Derrida accepts Saussure's primary belief that language is a system of rules and that these rules govern every aspect of language. In addition, Derrida affirms Saussure's assumption that the **linguistic sign** (Saussure's linguistic replacement for the word *word*) is both arbitrary and conventional. For example, most languages have different words for the same concept. The English word *man*, for instance, is *homme* in French. And in English we know that the meaning of the word *pit* exists not because it possesses some innate acoustic quality, but because it differs from *hit*, *wit*, and *lit*. In other words, the linguistic sign is composed of two parts: the signifier, the spoken or written constituent such as the sound /t/ and the orthographic (written) symbol *t*, and the signified, the concept signaled by the signifier. It is this relationship between the signifier (e.g., the word *dog*) and the signified (the concept or the reality behind the word *dog*) that Saussure maintains is arbitrary and conventional. The linguistic sign is thus defined by differences that distinguish it from other signs, not by any innate properties.

Believing that our knowledge of the world is shaped by the language that represents it, Saussure is insistent about the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. In establishing this principle, he undermines the long-held belief that there is some natural link between the word and the thing it represents—that is, the word's referent. Saussure asserts that it is only *after* a signifier and the signified are linked that some kind of relationship exists between these two linguistic elements, although the relationship itself is both arbitrary and conventionalized. Ultimately, for Saussure meaning in language resides in a systematized combination of sounds that rely chiefly on the differences among these signs, not on any innate properties within the signs themselves. It is this concept that meaning in language is determined by the differences among the language signs that Derrida borrows from Saussure as a key building block in the formulation of deconstruction.

Derrida's Interpretation of Saussure's Sign

Derridean deconstruction begins with and emphatically affirms Saussure's decree that language is a system based on differences. Derrida agrees with Saussure that we can know the meaning of signifiers through and because of their relationships and their differences among themselves. Unlike Saussure, Derrida also applies this reasoning to the signified. Like the signifier, the signified can also be known only through its relationships and its differences among other signifieds. Furthermore, declares Derrida, the signified cannot orient or make permanent the meaning of the signifier, for the relationship between the signifier and the signified is both arbitrary and conventional. Accordingly, signifieds often function as signifiers. For example, in the sentence *I filled the glass with milk*, the spoken or written word *glass* is a signifier; its signified is the concept of a *container* that can be filled. However, in the sentence *The container was filled with glass*, the spoken or written word *container*, a signified in the previous sentence, is now a signifier, its signified being the concept of an object that can be filled.

ASSUMPTIONS OF DECONSTRUCTION

Transcendental Signified

Believing that signification is both arbitrary and conventional, Derrida now begins his process of turning Western philosophy on its head. He boldly asserts that the entire history of Western metaphysics from Plato to the present is founded on a classic, fundamental error. This great error is Western philosophy's searching for what Derrida calls a **transcendental signified**, an external point of reference upon which one may build a concept or philosophy. Once found, this transcendental signified would provide ultimate meaning since it would be the origin of origins, reflecting itself and, as Derrida says, providing a "reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign." It would, in essence, guarantee to those who believe in it that they do exist and have meaning. For example, if we posit that *I* or *self* is a transcendental signified, then the concept of *self* becomes the unifying principle upon which I structure my world. Objects, concepts, ideas, or even people take on meaning in my world only if I filter them through my unifying, ultimate signified: *self*.

Unlike other signifieds, the transcendental signified would have to be understood without comparing it to other signifieds or signifiers. In other words, its meaning would originate directly with itself, not differentially or relationally as does the meaning of all other signifieds or signifiers. Thus, a transcendental signified functions as or provides the *center* of meaning,

allowing those who believe in one or more of them to structure their ideas of reality around such centers of truth. By definition, a center of meaning could not subject itself to structural analysis because by so doing it would lose its place as a transcendental signified to another center. For example, if I declare the concept *self* to be my transcendental signified, then learn that my mind or self is composed of the id, the ego, and the superego, I could no longer hold the *self* or *I* to be my transcendental signified. In the process of discovering the three parts of my conscious and unconscious mind, I have both structurally analyzed and "decentered" *self*, thus negating it as a transcendental signified.

Logocentrism

According to Derrida, Western metaphysics has invented a variety of terms that can function as centers: *God, reason, origin, being, essence, truth, humanity, beginning, end,* and *self,* to name a few. Each can operate as a concept that is self-sufficient and self-originating and can serve as a transcendental signified. Derrida names this Western proclivity for desiring a center **logocentrism:** the belief that there is an ultimate reality or center of truth that can serve as the basis for all our thoughts and actions.

Derrida readily admits that we can never totally free ourselves from our logocentric habit of thinking and our inherited concept of the universe. To decenter any transcendental signified is to be caught up automatically in the terminology that allows that centering concept to operate. For example, if the concept *self* functions as my center and I then discover my unconscious self, I automatically place in motion what Derrida calls a "binary opposition" (two opposing concepts): the *self* and the *unconscious self.* By decentering and questioning the *self,* I cause the *unconscious self* to become the new center. By questioning the old center, I establish a new one.

Such logocentric thinking, declares Derrida, has its origin in Aristotle's principle of noncontradiction: A thing cannot both have a property and not have a property. Thanks to Aristotle, maintains Derrida, Western metaphysics has developed an "either-or" mentality or logic that inevitably leads to dualistic thinking and to the centering and decentering of transcendental signifieds. The process of logocentric thinking, asserts Derrida, is natural but problematic for Western readers.

Binary Oppositions

Since the establishing of one center of unity automatically means that another is decentered, Derrida concludes that Western metaphysics is based on a system of binary operations or conceptual oppositions (also called binary oppositions). For each center, an opposing center (e.g., God/humankind, for

example) exists. In addition, Western philosophy decrees that in each of these binary operations or opposing centers, one concept is superior and defines itself by its opposite or inferior center. We know *truth*, for instance, because we know *deception*; we know *good* because we know *bad*. Derrida objects to the creation of these hierarchal binaries as the basis for Western metaphysics.

Phonocentrism

Derrida believes that establishing such conceptually based binary oppositions as the basis for believing what is really real (one's worldview) is problematic at best. Instead, he wishes to dismantle or deconstruct the structure such binary oppositions have created. Derrida asserts that the binary oppositions on which Western metaphysics has been constructed since the time of Plato are structured so one element will always be **privileged** (be in a superior position) and the other **unprivileged** (in an inferior position). In this way of thinking, the first or top elements of the pairs in the following list of binary oppositions are privileged: man/woman, human/animal, soul/body, good/bad. Key for Derrida is his assertion that Western thought has long privileged speech over writing. This privileging of speech over writing Derrida calls **phonocentrism.**

In placing speech in the privileged position, phonocentrism treats writing as inferior. We value, says Derrida, a speaker's words more than the speaker's writing because words imply presence. Through the vehicle of spoken words, we supposedly learn directly what a speaker is trying to say. From this point of view, writing becomes a mere copy of speech, an attempt to capture the idea that was once spoken. Whereas speech implies presence, writing signifies absence, thereby placing into action another binary opposition: presence/absence.

Since phonocentrism is based on the assumption that speech conveys the meaning or direct ideas of a speaker better than writing (a mere copy of speech), phonocentrism assumes a logocentric way of thinking, that the self is the center of meaning and can best ascertain ideas directly from other selves through spoken words. Through speaking, the self declares its presence, its significance, and its being or existence.

Metaphysics of Presence

Accordingly, Derrida coins the phrase *metaphysics of presence* to encompass those ideas such as logocentrism, phonocentrism, the operation of binary oppositions, and other notions that Western thought posits in its conceptions of language and metaphysics. His objective is to demonstrate the shaky and

fragile foundations upon which such beliefs have been established. By deconstructing the basic premises of metaphysics of presence, Derrida believes that he gives us a strategy for reading that opens up a variety of new interpretations heretofore unseen by those who are bound by the restraints of Western thought.

METHODOLOGY

Acknowledging Binary Operations in Western Thought

The first stage in a deconstructive reading is to recognize the existence and the operation of binary oppositions in our thinking. According to Derrida, one of the most "violent hierarchies" derived from Platonic and Aristotelian thought is speech/writing, with speech being privileged. Consequently, speech is awarded presence, and writing is equated with absence. Because writing is the inferior of the two, writing becomes simply the symbols of speech, a secondhand representation of ideas.

Once any of these hierarchies is recognized and acknowledged, Derrida proposes that we can readily reverse its elements. Such a reversal is possible because truth is ever elusive; we can always decenter the center if any is found. By reversing the hierarchy, Derrida does not wish merely to substitute one hierarchy for another and involve himself in a negative mode. When the hierarchy is reversed, says Derrida, we will then be able to examine those values and beliefs that give rise to both the original hierarchy and the newly created one. When Derrida examines each value or belief in the hierarchy, he is putting these elements under a process he calls **erasure**—he is assuming, for the moment, that each of the signifiers is clear and definitive. He does realize that he is involving himself in a reading strategy because each value or belief is, according to Derrida, absent of any definitive meaning. Such an examination will reveal how the meaning of terms arises from the differences between them.

Arche-writing

In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida spends much time explaining why the speech/writing hierarchy can and must be reversed. **Grammatology** is Derrida's term for the science of writing and his investigation of the origin of language itself. In short, he argues for a redefinition of the term *writing* that will allow him to assert that writing is actually a precondition for and prior to speech. According to Derrida's metaphysical reasoning, language then becomes a special kind of writing that he calls **arche-writing** or **archi-écriture.**

Using traditional Western metaphysics that is grounded in phonocentrism, Derrida begins his reversal of the speech/writing hierarchy by noting that both language and writing share common characteristics. Both, for example, involve an encoding or inscription. In writing, this coding is obvious because the written symbols represent various phonemes. In language or speech, a similar encoding exists. As Saussure has already shown, there exists an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified (between the spoken word *cat*, for example, and the concept of cat itself). There is, then, no innate relationship between the spoken word and the concept, object, or idea it represents. Nevertheless, once a signifier and a signified join to form a sign, some kind of relationship then exists between these components of the sign. Accordingly, some kind of inscription or encoding has taken place between the spoken word *cat* (the signifier) and its concept (the signified).

For Derrida, both writing and language are means of signification, and each can be considered a signifying system. Traditional Western metaphysics and Saussurean linguistics equate speech (language) with presence because speech is accompanied by the presence of a living speaker. The presence of a speaker necessarily links sound and sense and leads to understanding—one usually comprehends rather well the spoken word. Writing, on the other hand, assumes the absence of a speaker. Such absence can produce misunderstanding because writing is a depersonalized medium that separates the actual utterance of the speaker and his or her audience. This absence can lead to misunderstanding of the signifying system.

All the more reason, Derrida asserts, that we broaden our understanding of writing. Writing, he declares, cannot be reduced to letters or other symbols inscribed on a page. Rather, it is directly related to what Saussure believed to be the basic element of language: difference. We know one phoneme or one word because each is different from another, and we know that there is no innate relationship between a signifier and its signified. The phoneme /b/, for example, could have easily become the symbol for the phoneme /d/, just as the coined word *bodt* could have become the English word *ball*. It is this freeplay or undecidability in any system of communication that Derrida calls writing. The quality of play with the various elements of signification in any system of communication totally eludes a speaker's awareness when using language, for the speaker falsely assumes a position of supposed master of his or her speech.

By equating writing with freeplay or the element of undecidability at the center of all systems of communication, Derrida declares that writing actually governs language, thereby negating the speech/writing hierarchy of Western metaphysics. Writing now becomes privileged and speech unprivileged because speech is a kind of writing called arche-writing.

Derrida then challenges Western philosophy's concept that human consciousness gives birth to language. Without language (or arche-writing),

argues Derrida, there can be no consciousness because consciousness presupposes language. Through arche-writing, we impose human consciousness upon the world.

Supplementation

The relationship between any binary hierarchy is always unstable and problematic. It is not Derrida's purpose simply to reverse all binary oppositions that exist in Western thought. Rather, Derrida wants to show the fragile basis for the establishment of such hierarchies and the possibility of inverting these hierarchies to gain new insights into language and life. Derrida uses the term **supplement** to refer to the unstable relationship between elements in a binary operation. For example, in the speech/writing opposition, writing supplements speech and in actuality takes the place of speech (arche-writing). **Supplementation,** Derrida asserts, exists in all binary oppositions. In the truth/deception hierarchy, for instance, Western thought would assert the supremacy of truth over deception, attributing to deception a mere supplementary role. The logocentric way of thinking asserts the purity of truth over deception. Upon examination, deception more frequently than not contains at least some truth, and who is to say, asks Derrida, when truth has been spoken, achieved, or even conceived? Purity of truth may simply not exist. In all human activity, Derrida concludes, supplementation operates.

Différance

By recognizing that supplementation necessarily occurs in all of Western metaphysics and by inverting the privileged and unprivileged elements, Derrida begins to develop his reading strategy. Once he "turns Western metaphysics on its head," he asserts his answer to logocentrism and other Western elements by coining a new word and concept: **différance.** The word itself is derived from the French word *différer,* meaning "to defer, postpone, or delay," and "to differ, to be different from." Derrida deliberately coins his word to be ambiguous, taking on both meanings simultaneously. And in French, the word is a pun because it exists only in writing. In speech there is no way to tell the difference between the French word *différence* and Derrida's coined word *différance.*

Understanding what Derrida means by différance is one of the basic keys to understanding deconstruction. Basically, *différance* is Derrida's "What if?" question. What if no transcendental signified exists? What if there is no presence in whom we can find ultimate truth? What if all our knowledge does not arise from self-identity? What if there is no essence, being, or inherently unifying element in the universe? What then?

The presence of such a transcendental signified would immediately establish the binary operation presence/absence. Since Western metaphysics holds that presence is supreme or privileged and absence unprivileged, Derrida suggests that we temporarily reverse this hierarchy, making it now absence/presence. With such a reversal, we can no longer posit a transcendental signified. No longer is there an absolute standard or coherent unity from which knowledge proceeds and develops. All human knowledge and all self-identity must now spring from difference, not sameness, from absence, not presence.

When a reversal of this pivotal binary operation occurs, two dramatic results follow: First, human knowledge becomes referential; that is, we can know something only because it differs from some other bit of knowledge, not because we can compare this knowledge to any absolute or coherent unity (a transcendental signified). Human knowledge must now be based on difference. We know something because it differs from something else to which it is related. By the reversal, nothing can be studied or learned in isolation because all knowledge becomes context related. Second, we must also forgo closure—that is, since no transcendental signified exists, all interpretations concerning life, self-identity, and knowledge are possible, probable, and legitimate.

But what is the significance of *différance* when reading texts? If we, like Derrida, assert that *différance* operates in language and also in writing (Derrida sometimes equates *différance* and arche-writing), what are the implications for textual analysis? The most obvious answer is that texts lack presence. As soon as we do away with the transcendental signified and reverse the presence/absence binary operation, texts can no longer have presence. In isolation, texts cannot possess meaning. Because all meaning and knowledge is now based on difference, no text can simply mean one thing. Texts become intertextual. The meaning of a text cannot be ascertained by examining only that particular text; instead, a text's meaning *evolves* from that derived from the interrelatedness of one text to an interrelatedness of many texts. Like language itself, texts are caught in a dynamic, context-related interchange. Never can we state a text's definitive meaning because it has no "one" correct or definitive interpretation. No longer can we declare one interpretation to be right and another wrong because meaning in a text is always illusive, dynamic, and transitory.

The search, then, for the text's "correct" meaning or the author's so-called intentions becomes meaningless. Since meaning is derived from differences in a dynamic, context-related, ongoing process, all texts have multiple meanings or interpretations. If we assert, as does Derrida, that no transcendental signified exists, then there can exist no absolute or pure meaning conveyed supposedly by authorial intent or professorial dictates. Meaning evolves as we, the readers, interact with the text, with both the readers and the text providing social and cultural context.

DECONSTRUCTIVE SUPPOSITIONS FOR TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

A deconstructionist begins textual analysis by assuming that a text has multiple interpretations and that a text allows itself to be reread and thus reinterpreted countless times. Denying the New Critical stance that a text possesses a special ontological status and has one and only one correct interpretation, deconstructionists assert that the great joy of textual analysis resides in discovering new interpretations each time a text is read and reread. Ultimately, a text's meaning is undecidable because each reading or rereading elicits different interpretations.

When beginning the interpretive process, deconstructionists seek to override their own logocentric and inherited ways of viewing a text. Such revolutionary thinking decrees that they find the binary oppositions at work in the text itself. These binary oppositions, they believe, represent established and accepted ideologies that more frequently than not posit the existence of transcendental signifieds. These binary operations, then, restrict meaning because they already assume a fixed interpretation of reality. They assume, for instance, the existence of truth and falsehood, reason and insanity, good and bad. Realizing that these hierarchies presuppose a fixed and a biased way of viewing the world, deconstructionists search for the binary oppositions operating in the text and reverse them. By reversing these hierarchies, deconstructionists wish to challenge the fixed views assumed by such hierarchies and the values associated with such rigid beliefs.

The technique of identifying the binary operations that exist in a text allows deconstructionists to expose the preconceived assumptions upon which most of us base our interpretations. We all, for example, declare some activity, being, or object to be good or bad, valuable or worthless, significant or insignificant. These kinds of values or ideas automatically operate when we write or read any text. In the reversal of hierarchies that form the basis of our interpretations, deconstructionists wish to free us from the constraints of our prejudiced beliefs. Such freedom, they hope, will allow us to see a text from exciting new perspectives that we have never before recognized.

These various perspectives cannot be simultaneously perceived by the reader or even the writer of a text. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," for example, many readers believe that the fifty-year-old character who shepherds Goodman Brown through his night's visit in the forest is Satan and, therefore, necessarily an evil character. Brown's own interpretation of this character seems to support this view. According to deconstructionist ideas, at least two binary operations are at work here: good/evil and God/Satan. But what if we reverse these hierarchies? Then

the spectral figure may not be Satan and may not be evil! Such a new perspective will dramatically change our interpretation of the text.

Deconstructionists say that we cannot simultaneously see both of these perspectives in the story. To discover where the new hierarchy Satan/God or evil/good will lead us in our interpretation, we must suspend our first interpretation. We do not, however, forget it because it is locked in our minds. We simply shift our allegiance to another perspective.

The process of oscillating between interpretations, levels, or perspectives allows us to see the impossibility of ever choosing a correct interpretation because from Derrida's perspective, meaning is an ongoing activity that is always in progress, always based on *différance*. By asking what will happen if we reverse the hierarchies that frame our preconceived ways of thinking, we open ourselves to a never-ending process of interpretation, one that decrees that no hierarchy or binary operation is right and no other is wrong.

Deconstruction: A New Reading Strategy

Deconstructionists do not want to set up a new philosophy, a new literary theory of analysis, or a new school of literary criticism. Instead, they present a new reading strategy, one that allows us to make choices concerning the various levels of interpretation we see operating in a text. All levels, they maintain, have validity. Deconstructionists also believe that their approach to reading frees the reader from ideological allegiances that restrict the comprehension of meaning in a text.

Because meaning, they believe, emerges through interpretation, even the author does not control a text's interpretation. Although writers may have clearly stated intentions concerning their texts, such statements should be given little credence. Like language itself, texts have no outside referents or transcendental signifieds. What an author thinks he or she says or means in a text may be quite different from what is actually written. Deconstructionists, therefore, look for places in the text where the author **misspeaks** or loses control of language and says what was supposedly not meant to be said. These slips of language often occur in questions, figurative language, and strong declarations. For example, suppose we read the following words: "Important Seniors Meeting." Although the author thinks that readers will interpret these words to mean that it is important that all seniors be present at this particular meeting, the author may have misspoken; these words can actually mean that only important seniors should attend this meeting. By examining such slips and the binary operations that govern them, deconstructionists are able to demonstrate the undecidability of a text's meaning.

At first glance, a deconstructionist reading strategy may appear to be linear—that is, having a clearly delineated beginning, middle, and end. If this is so, then to apply this strategy to a text, we must do the following:

- Discover the binary operations that govern a text.
- Comment on the values, concepts, and ideas beyond these operations.
- Reverse these present binary operations.
- Dismantle previously held worldviews.
- Accept the possibility of various perspectives or levels of meaning in a text based on the new binary inversions.
- Allow meaning of the text to be undecidable.

Although all these elements do operate in a deconstructionist reading, they may not operate in this exact sequence. Since we all tend toward logocentrism when reading, we may not notice some logocentric binary operations functioning in the text until we have reversed some other obvious binary oppositions and are interpreting the text on multiple levels. In addition, we must never declare such a reading to be completed or finished because the process of meaning is ongoing, never allowing us to pledge allegiance to any one view.

Such a reading strategy disturbs most readers and critics because it is not a neat, completed package, whereby if we follow step A through to step Z we arrive at *the* reading of the text. Because texts have no external referents, their meanings depend on the close interactions of the text, the reader, and social and cultural elements both within the reader and the text, as does every reading or interpretive process. Denying the organic unity of a text, deconstructionists declare the freeplay of language in a text. Since language itself is reflexive, not mimetic, we can never stop finding meaning in any given text, whether we have read such a text once or a hundred times.

Overall, deconstruction solicits an ongoing relationship between the interpreter (the critic) and the text. By examining the text alone, deconstructionists hope to ask a set of questions that will continually challenge the ideological positions of power and authority that dominate literary criticism. Furthermore, in the process of discovering meaning in a text, deconstructionists declare that criticism of a text is just as valuable as the text being read, thereby inverting the text/criticism hierarchy.

American Deconstructionists

After Derrida's introduction of deconstruction to his American audience in 1966, the philosopher found several sympathetic listeners who soon became loyal adherents and defenders of his new reading strategy: notably, the Romantic scholar Paul de Man (1919–1983) (*Blindness and Insight: Essays in*

the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, 1971), the rhetorical deconstructionist Hayden White (1928–) (*Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 1978), the sometimes terse metaphysical deconstructionist Geoffrey Hartman (1921–) (*Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*, 1980), the strong voice of Barbara Johnson (1947–2009) (*The Critical Difference*, 1980), and the phenomenological critic-turned-deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller (1928–) (*Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, 1982). These critics assured that deconstruction would have a voice and an established place in American literary theory. Although the voices of other poststructural theories, such as Cultural Poetics and Postcolonialism, are now strongly being heard and advocated, deconstruction's philosophical assumptions and practical reading strategies form the basis of many postmodern literary practices.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Structuralism

When examining any text through the lens of structuralism, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the tensions, the binary oppositions, highlighted in the text?
- Is each of these tensions minor or major?
- What do you believe is the major or pivotal tension in the work?
- Can you explain the intertextuality of all the discovered binaries?
- Does this work contain any mythemes? If so, what are they, and how do they help you discover the text's structure?

The following questions apply your understanding of structuralism to Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown":

- What are the various binary oppositions or operations? Which of these binaries control the story's structure? What is the chief binary?
- What mythemes are evident in Hawthorne's tale? How do these mythemes show the intertextuality of this particular text with other literary texts you have read?
- How do the various semantic features contained in "Young Goodman Brown" directly relate to the codes, signs, or binary oppositions you find in the text?
- Using "Young Goodman Brown," apply at least three different methods of structuralism to arrive at how this particular text achieves meaning. In the final analysis, is there a difference among the three methodologies in how the text achieves its meaning?
- Choose another sign system—sports, music, classroom etiquette—and explain the codes that generate meaning.

Deconstruction

When examining any text through the lens of deconstruction theory and practice, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the binary operations or oppositions that govern the text?
- What ideas, concepts, and values are being established by these binaries?
- By reversing the elements in each of the binaries, can you challenge the previously held value system posited by the original binary?
- After reversing one or more binaries in a given text, can you dismantle your original interpretation of that text?
- Can you cite three different interpretations for a text of your choosing by flipping a series of three major binaries contained in that text?

The following questions apply your understanding of deconstruction theory to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown":

- Write a one-page interpretation of Hawthorne's story. After you have completed your interpretation, cite the binary operations that function both within your chosen text and within your thinking to allow you to arrive at your perspective.
- Using "Young Goodman Brown," reverse one of the binary operations and reinterpret the text. When you are finished, reverse two additional binaries and reinterpret the story. What differences exist between the two interpretations?
- Using "Young Goodman Brown" as your text, demonstrate either how Hawthorne misspeaks or where the text involves itself in paradox, sometimes called **aporia.** Be specific. Be able to point to lines, figurative speech, or imaginative language to support your statements.
- Using the text of "Young Goodman Brown," cite at least four dramatically different interpretations, all based on deconstructive readings.

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

Structuralism

By the mid-1960s, structuralism became a dominant theory in both the United States and in Europe. Borrowing and blending elements of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics, the textual concerns of Russian Formalism, the psychoanalysis of both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the epistemological concerns of Michel Foucault, the Marxist concerns of the French theorist Louis Althusser, and the multiple ideas of the narratologists, structuralism seemingly embraced all disciplines and offered a unifying approach not only to literary theory but also to life itself. Applying its "objective" and "scientific" analyses to texts and culture, it provided a new lens through which to

see the world, a lens that promised to demystify literature and life. Its basic premise—that no element, situation, or text has significance in isolation but must be first integrated and then analyzed by examining the overall structure of which it is a part—asserts that all life, including literary texts, is constructed—that is, based on a series of interrelated systems. It is these systems and the study of them—rather than individual actions or an isolated text—that are ultimately important.

Overall, structuralism is less important today than it was in the 1960s. Other theories that take into account the cultural significance of both people and texts have outpaced structuralism for several reasons. First, structuralism's greatest strength—its study of the systems or codes that shape meaning—is also its greatest weakness. In highlighting the various systems of meaning, structuralism deemphasizes personhood and individual texts. Critics argue that structuralism is thus deterministic (favoring systems over events or an individual) and ahistorical. It does not account for human individuality or for any independent acts, nor does it address the dynamic aspects of cultures. Individual texts, assert structuralism's critics, do matter. The changing faces of culture that are simultaneously reflected in isolated texts are also important. Texts, like people, are at times illogical, breaking from tradition and systems of belief.

With the advent of postmodernism and its emphases on the incredulity of grand metanarratives and the slippery nature of language, structuralism with its logical, objective study of systems, structure, and language began to lose popularity. Although some structuralists—particularly the narratologists—continue to contribute to literary theory and criticism, literary theories grounded in the philosophy and methodology of postmodernism currently receive prime attention.

Deconstruction

Making its appearance on the literary stage in the latter half of the 1960s, deconstruction theory entered the academy at a time when questioning the status quo was both academically and culturally acceptable, becoming as some would argue, the norm. The first word of Derrida's inauguration speech for deconstruction's introduction in America—"Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" presented at Johns Hopkins University in 1966—is *perhaps*, a word that successfully encapsulates the basic idea underlying deconstruction theory. Perhaps, said Derrida, we cannot make either positive or negative definitive statements. Disavowing the existence of a transcendental signified, deconstruction questions Western humanity's proclivity toward logocentrism and its valuing of other elements and ideas encompassed by Derrida's concept of metaphysics of presence. Derrida dared to ask the what-if question: What if no transcendental signified exists? What

if there is no such entity as objective truth? What if, indeed, all is based upon difference and différance? And what if language is arbitrary and differential?

With the emergence of deconstruction theory and postmodernism began a questioning of the grand metanarratives on which humanity had previously structured its existence. All was now open to question. The exact meaning of a text could never be stated because texts have multiple meanings, and language itself is elusive and slippery. Indeed, all writers misspeak, revealing not what they thought they said, but almost what they were afraid to say. And all interpretation is really a form of play, with each participant handling slippery texts whose meanings are often elusive.

Although some critics thought Derrida's philosophy and literary theory would destroy the very foundations upon which Western philosophy rests, deconstruction theory did not do so. It did and still does provide an energetic and rigorous reading of texts, not only by questioning all previous readings but also by questioning the nature of reading itself. Some of its critics, however, point out both deconstruction's and postmodernism's seemingly internal inconsistencies. By questioning the validity of grand metanarratives (or positing an incredulity toward such narratives), deconstruction is itself essentially establishing a metanarrative, one based on incredulity and doubt. In questioning the validity and existence of objective truth, it creates its own yardstick by which its own concept of truth can be measured. In advocating its antitheoretical position, it establishes one of its own and involves itself in circular reasoning. And while advocating for intertextuality, it more frequently than not treats texts in isolation.

Overall, deconstruction's vocabulary and methodology have been appropriated by other disciplines and continue to elicit debate among literary theorists and educators alike. Some of its adherents have brought deconstruction's analysis into politics and cultural events and concerns. Although other schools of literary criticism have developed since the publication of Derrida's inaugurating presentation "Structure, Sign, and Play" at Johns Hopkins University, deconstruction theory remains a significant force as it has become embedded in a variety of contemporary literary theories and practices.

See **Readings on Literary Criticism** at the back of the text for the cornerstone essay on postmodernism, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," authored by its leading proponent, Jacques Derrida.

6

PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

Everywhere I go I find a poet has been there before me.

Attributed to Sigmund Freud

INTRODUCTION

Our dreams fascinate, perplex, and often disturb us. Filled with bizarre twists of fate, wild exploits, and highly sexual images, our dreams can bring us pleasure or terrorize us. Sometimes they cause us to question our feelings, to contemplate our unspoken desires, and even to doubt the nature of reality itself. Do dreams, we wonder, contain any degree of truth? Do they serve any useful function?

The German organic chemist Friedrich August Kekulé answers in the affirmative. For years, Kekulé investigated the molecular structure of benzene. One night he dreamed that he saw a string of atoms shaped like a snake swallowing its tale. Upon awakening, he drew this serpentine figure in his notebook and realized it was the graphic structure of the benzene ring he had been struggling to decipher. When reporting his findings at a scientific meeting in 1890, he stated, "Let us learn to dream, gentlemen, and then we may perhaps find the truth."

Giuseppe Tartini, an Italian violinist of the eighteenth century, similarly discovered the value of dreams. One night he dreamed the devil came to his bedside and offered to help him finish a rather difficult sonata in exchange for his soul. Tartini agreed, whereupon the devil picked up Tartini's violin and completed the unfinished work. On awakening, Tartini jotted down from memory what he had heard in his dream. Titled *The Devil's Trill Sonata,* this piece is Tartini's best-known composition.

Like numerous scientists and composers, many writers have claimed that they, too, have received some of their best ideas from their dreams.

Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, maintained that many of his ideas for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* came directly from his nightmares. Similarly, Dante, Goethe, Blake, Bunyan, and a host of others owed much of their writings, they claimed, to their world of dreams. Still others, such as Poe, DeQuincey, and Coleridge, borrowed from their drug-induced dreams the content of some of their most famous works.

That our dreams and those of others fascinate us cannot be denied. Whether it is their bizarre and often erotic content or their seemingly prophetic powers, dreams cause us to question and explore that part of our minds over which we have ostensibly little control, the unconscious.

Without question, the foremost investigator of the unconscious and its activities is the Viennese neurologist and psychologist Sigmund Freud. Beginning with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, Freud lays the foundation for a model of how our minds operate. Hidden from the workings of the conscious mind, the unconscious, he believes, plays a large part in how we act, think, and feel. According to Freud, the best avenue for discovering the content and the activity of the unconscious is through our dreams. In the interaction of the conscious and unconscious, argues Freud, we shape both ourselves and our world.

Developing both a body of theory and a practical methodology for his science of the mind, Freud became the leading pioneer of **psychoanalysis**, a method of treating emotional and psychological disorders. During psychoanalysis, Freud would have his patients talk freely in a patient-analyst setting about their early childhood experiences and dreams. When we apply these same methods to our interpretations of works of literature, we engage in psychoanalytic criticism.

Unlike some other schools of criticism, **psychoanalytic criticism** can exist side by side with any other critical method of interpretation. Because this approach attempts to explain the hows and whys of human actions without developing an **aesthetic theory**—a systematic, philosophical body of beliefs about how meaning occurs in literature and other art forms—Marxists, feminists, and New Historicists, for example, use psychoanalytic methods in their interpretations without violating their own hermeneutics. Psychoanalytic criticism may then best be called an approach to literary interpretation rather than a particular school of criticism.

Although Freud is unquestionably the founder of this approach to literary analysis, psychoanalytic criticism has continued to develop throughout the twentieth century. Carl Jung, Freud's rebellious student, borrowed some of Freud's ideas but rejected many others. Jung branched out into new theories and concerns and established **analytical psychology.** Using some of Jung's ideas, Northrop Frye—author of one of the most influential texts in literary criticism in the 1950s and '60s, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957)—developed symbolic or archetypal criticism in the mid-1950s that helped change the direction of twentieth-century literary analysis. In the

1960s, the French Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan revised and expanded Freud's theories in light of newly developed linguistic and literary principles, thereby revitalizing psychoanalytic criticism and ensuring its continued influence on literary criticism today. Many present-day feminist critics such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and E. Ann Kaplan turn to psychoanalytic criticism as well, using the ideas of Freud, Jung, Lacan, and others like them as the basis of their critical methodology.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Sigmund Freud

The theories and practice of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) provide the foundation for psychoanalytic criticism. While working with patients whom he diagnosed as hysterics, Freud theorized that the root of their problems was psychological, not physical. His patients, he believed, had suppressed incestuous desires that they had unconsciously refused to confront. Suffering from his own neurotic crisis in 1887, Freud underwent self-analysis. Results from his self-analysis, together with his research and analyses of patients, led Freud to posit that fantasies and wishful thinking and not only actual experiences play a large part in the onset of neuroses.

Models of the Human Psyche: Dynamic Model Throughout his lifetime, Freud developed various models of the human psyche, which became the changing bases of his psychoanalytic theory and his practice. Early in his career, he developed the **dynamic model,** asserting that our minds are a dichotomy consisting of the **conscious** (the rational) and the **unconscious** (the irrational). The conscious, Freud argued, perceives and records external reality and is the reasoning part of the mind. Unaware of the presence of the unconscious, we operate consciously, believing that our reasoning and analytic skills are solely responsible for our behavior. Freud is one of the first to suggest that it is the unconscious, not the conscious, that governs a large part of our actions.

This irrational part of our psyche, the unconscious, receives and stores our hidden desires, ambitions, fears, passions, and irrational thoughts. Freud, however, did not coin this term; this honor goes to Carl Gustav Carus. Carus and many of Freud's other contemporaries viewed the unconscious as a static system that simply collects and maintains our memories. Freud dramatically redefined the unconscious, believing it to be a dynamic system that not only contains our biographical memories but also stores our suppressed and unresolved conflicts. Freud believed that the unconscious houses humanity's two basic instincts: **eros,** or the **sexual instinct** (later referred to by

Freud as **libido**) and the **destructive** or **aggressive instinct**. Although these two instincts can work harmoniously, often they act as enemies, working against each other. Whatever the case, asserts Freud, these two basic instincts influence all we do.

For Freud, the unconscious is also the storehouse of disguised truths and desires that want to be revealed in and through the conscious. These disguised truths and desires will inevitably make themselves known through our so-called slips of the tongue or our actions. Freud calls such misspeakings or actions **parapraxes** or **Freudian slips.** Through seemingly innocuous actions, such as accidental slips of the tongue, failures of memory, the misplacing of objects, or the misreading of texts, Freud believes we bring to our conscious minds our unconscious wishes and intentions. It is especially in our dreams, our art, our literature, and our play that these parapraxes reveal our true intentions or desires.

Economic Model Freud's second model of the human psyche expands on but retains most of the ideas he had developed in the dynamic model. In both models, the conscious and the unconscious battle for control of a person's actions, and in both models, a person's unconscious desires will force their way to the consciousness. In the **economic model,** Freud introduces two new concepts that both describe and help govern the human psyche: the pleasure principle and the reality principle. According to Freud, the **pleasure principle** craves only pleasures, and it desires instantaneous satisfaction of instinctual drives, ignoring moral and sexual boundaries established by society. Freud calls an individual's instinctual and psychic energy **cathexes,** its chief aim being to maximize pleasure because the pleasure principle's goal is immediate relief from all pain or suffering. The pleasure principle is usually not allowed free rein in an individual's psyche because it is held in check by what Freud dubs the **anti-cathexes** or an anti-charge of energy governed by the **reality principle,** that part of the psyche that recognizes the need for societal standards and regulations on pleasure. Freud believed that both these principles are at war within the human psyche.

Typographical Models Over his long career, Freud developed yet another model of the human psyche known as the **typographical model.** In an earlier version of this model, Freud separated the human psyche into three parts: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The conscious is the mind's direct link to external reality, perceiving and reacting with the external environment and thereby allowing the mind to order its outside world. The **preconscious** is the storehouse of memories that the conscious part of the mind allows to be brought to consciousness without disguising these memories in some form. As in his previously devised models, Freud contends that the third part of the psyche, the unconscious, holds the repressed hungers, images, thoughts, and desires of human nature. Because these

desires are not housed in the preconscious, they cannot be directly summoned into the conscious state. These repressed impulses must, therefore, travel in disguised forms to the conscious part of the psyche and surface in their respective disguises in our dreams, our art, and in other unsuspecting ways in our lives.

But the most famous model of the human psyche is Freud's revised version of the typographical model, the **tripartite model,** sometimes referred to as the **structural model.** This model divides the psyche into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. The irrational, instinctual, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche Freud calls the **id.** Containing our secret desires, our darkest wishes, and our most intense fears, the id wishes only to fulfill the urges of the pleasure principle. In addition, it houses the libido, the source of all our psychosexual desires and all our psychic energy. Unchecked by any controlling will, the id operates on impulse, wanting immediate satisfaction for all its instinctual desires.

The second part of the psyche Freud names the **ego,** the rational, logical, waking part of the mind, although many of its activities remain in the unconscious. Whereas the id operates according to the pleasure principle, the ego operates in harmony with the reality principle. It is the ego's job to regulate the instinctual desires of the id and to allow these desires to be released in nondestructive ways.

The third part of the psyche, the **superego,** acts like an internal censor, causing us to make moral judgments in light of social pressures. In contrast to the id, the superego operates according to the morality principle and serves primarily to protect society and us from the id. Representing all of society's moral restrictions, the superego serves as a filtering agent, suppressing the desires and instincts forbidden by society and thrusting them back into the unconscious. Overall, the superego manifests itself through punishment. If allowed to operate at its own discretion, the superego will create an unconscious sense of guilt and fear.

It is left to the ego to mediate between the instinctual (especially sexual) desires of the id and the demands of social pressure issued by the superego. What the ego deems unacceptable, it suppresses and deposits in the unconscious, and what it has most frequently repressed in all of us is our sexual desires of early childhood.

Freud's Pre-Oedipal Developmental Phase In addition to his various models of the human psyche, Freud proposed several phases or stages of human development that he believed are important to the healthy growth of one's psyche. According to Freud, in our early childhood, all of us go through three overlapping phases: the oral, anal, and phallic stages. As infants, we experience the **oral phase:** When we suck our mother's breast to be fed, our sexuality (or libido) is activated. Through this activity our mouths develop into an erotogenic zone that will later cause us to enjoy sucking our thumbs

and, still later in life, kissing. In the second or **anal stage** (sometimes referred to as the **sadistic-anal phase**), the anus becomes an object of pleasure when children learn the delights of defecation and, simultaneously, realize that they are independent persons who are separate from their mothers. During this stage, the anus becomes an erotogenic zone because children become sadistic, expelling and destroying through defecation as a means of expressing both their anger and their excitement in discovering their independence from their mothers. By withholding feces, children also learn that they can control others. In the final phase, the **phallic stage,** a child's sexual desire or libido is directed toward the genitals when the child learns the pleasure that results from stimulating one's sexual organs.

At this point in a child's development, Freud asserts that the pleasure principle basically controls the child. Being self-centered, sadistic, and assertive, the child cares for nothing but his or her own pleasure. If a child, however, is to grow up as a normal adult, he or she must develop a sense of sexuality, a sense of his maleness or her femaleness. Freud maintains that this awareness can be achieved by a successful handling of either the Oedipus or the Electra complex.

The Oedipus, Castration, and Electra Complexes The formulation of the **Oedipus complex** is one of Freud's most significant contributions not only to psychoanalytic criticism but also to all literary criticism in general. Freud borrows the name from the play *Oedipus Rex,* written by the Greek dramatist Sophocles. In this play, Oedipus, the protagonist, is prophesied to kill his father and marry his mother. His attempts to defy the prophecy fail, and the foretold events occur as predicted. According to Freud, the essence of Oedipus's story becomes universal human experience, illustrating a formative stage in each individual's psychosexual development when the child transfers his love object from the breast (the oral phrase) to the mother.

Using Sophocles' plot as the basis for his Oedipus complex, Freud asserts in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (Twenty-first Lecture)* (1915–1917) that during the late infantile stage (somewhere between ages three and six), all infant males possess an erotic attachment to their mothers. Unconsciously, the infant desires to engage in sexual union with his mother, but he recognizes a rival for his mother's affection: the father. Already in the phallic stage and, therefore, sexually aware of his own erogenous organs, the child perceives the father's attention to the mother as sexual.

If a child's sexual development is to proceed normally, Freud maintains, each must then pass through the **castration complex.** From observing themselves, their mothers, and perhaps their sisters, little boys know they have a penis like their fathers, while their mothers and sisters do not. What prevents the male child from continuing to have incestuous desires for his mother is fear of castration by his father. The child, thus, represses his sexual desire, identifies with his father, and hopes someday to possess a woman as

his father now possesses his mother. Unconsciously, the boy has now successfully made the transition to manhood.

Whereas a boy must successfully negotiate the Oedipus complex to become a normal man, a girl must successfully negotiate the **Electra complex** if she is to make the transition from a girl to a normal woman. Like a boy, a young girl is also erotically attracted to her mother, and like a boy, she, too, recognizes a rival for her mother's affection: her father. Unconsciously the girl realizes that she is already castrated, as is her mother. Because she knows her father possesses that which she desires, a penis, she turns her desires to him and away from her mother. After the seduction of her father fails, she turns back toward the mother and identifies with her. Her transition into womanhood completed, the girl realizes that one day she, too, like her mother, will possess a man. Through her relationships with a man, her unfulfilled desire for a penis (**penis envy**) will be mitigated, and her sense of lack will be somewhat appeased.

The process of becoming a man or a woman, Freud maintained, may be long and difficult, but it is necessary. For within this process, the child passes from basing his or her life on the pleasure principle, under which all decisions are grounded in the immediate gratification of pleasure, to the reality principle, under which societal needs and the operation of the superego guide decisions. During this stage, Freud believed that a child's moral sensibility and conscience appear for the first time.

The Significance of Dreams According to Freud, even though the passage into manhood or womanhood may be successful, every adult has stored many painful memories of repressed sexual desires, anger, rage, and guilt in his or her unconscious. Because the conscious and the unconscious are part of the same psyche, the unconscious with its hidden desires and repressed wishes continues to affect the conscious in the form of inferiority feelings, guilt, irrational thoughts and feelings, and dreams and nightmares.

In his magnum opus, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud asserts that the unconscious will express its suppressed wishes and desires. Even though the conscious mind has repressed these desires and has forced them into the unconscious, such wishes may be too hard for the conscious psyche to handle without producing feelings of self-hatred or rage. The unconscious then redirects and reshapes these concealed wishes into acceptable social activities, presenting them in the form of images or symbols in our dreams and/or our writings. In the process, the psyche creates a window to the id by allowing these softened and socially acceptable desires to seep into the conscious state.

The psyche may create this window to the id in a variety of ways. Through the process of **displacement,** for example, the unconscious may switch a person's hatred for someone named Mr. Appleby onto a rotting apple in a dream. Or through **condensation,** the psyche may consolidate

one's anger toward a variety of people and objects into a simple sentence. Whatever the case, through symbols and images, but not directly, the unconscious continually asserts its influence over our motives and behavior.

When certain repressed feelings or ideas cannot be adequately released through dreams, jokes, or other methods, the ego must act and block any outward response. In so doing, the ego and id become involved in an internal battle Freud calls **neurosis.** From a fear of heights to a pounding headache, neurosis can assume many physical and psychological abnormalities. Freud asserts that it is the job of the psychoanalyst to identify these unresolved conflicts that give rise to a patient's neurosis. Through psychoanalytic therapy and dream analysis, the psychotherapist attempts to return the patient to a state of well-being or normalcy.

Literature and Psychoanalysis For Freud, the unresolved conflicts that give rise to any neurosis constitute the stuff of literature. A work of literature, he believes, is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind. Accordingly, literary works must then be treated like a dream, applying psychoanalytic techniques to texts to uncover the author's hidden motivations, repressed desires, and wishes.

Carl G. Jung

Freud's most famous pupil is Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss physician, psychiatrist, philosopher, and psychologist. Selecting Jung as his favorite student and "son," Freud appointed him his successor. Toward the end of their seven-year, teacher-disciple relationship (1912), however, Jung prophetically wrote to Freud, quoting from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil." A year later, the pupil broke away from his master and eventually became one of the leading forces in the psychoanalytic movement.

Jung's dissatisfaction with some elements of Freudian psychoanalysis arose from theoretical differences with Freud concerning the interpretation of dreams and the model of the human psyche. According to Freud, all human behavior, including dreams, is fundamentally sexual since it is driven by an individual's sensual or sexual energy, what Freud calls libido. Freud interpreted dreams almost exclusively in sexual terms, linking most of them to the Oedipus or Electra complex. Jung disagreed with Freud's basic premise that all human behavior is sexually driven; Jung argued that in our dreams, sexual imagery does appear but so do many other kinds of imagery. In 1912 Jung published his pivotal text, *Symbols of Transformation*, which ultimately led to his separation from Freud. In this work, Jung asserts that dreams include mythological images as well as sexual ones. Jung's ideas caused him to be banished from the psychoanalytic community for the next five years. During this time, he formulated

his own model of the human psyche, which would become his most important contribution to psychology and literary criticism.

In forming his model of the human psyche, Jung accepts Freud's assumption that the unconscious exists and that it plays a major role in our conscious decisions, but he rejects Freud's analysis of the contents of the unconscious. For Jung, the human psyche consists of three parts: the personal conscious, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The personal conscious and the personal unconscious comprise the individual psyche. The **personal conscious,** or waking state, is that image or thought of which we are aware at any given moment. Like a slide show, every moment of our lives provides us with a new slide. As we view one slide, the previous slide vanishes from our personal consciousness, for nothing can remain in the personal conscious. Although these vanished slides are forgotten by the personal conscious, they are stored and remembered by the **personal unconscious.** Jung maintains that all conscious thoughts begin in the personal unconscious. Since each person's moment-by-moment slide show is different, everyone's personal unconscious is necessarily unique.

In the depths of the psyche and blocked off from human consciousness lies the third part of Jung's model of the psyche: the **collective unconscious,** that part of the psyche that is more impersonal and universal than the personal conscious or the personal unconscious. This part of the psyche houses the cumulative knowledge, experiences, and images of the entire human species. According to Jung, people from all over the world respond to certain myths or stories in the same way, not because everyone knows and appreciates the same story, but because lying deep in our collective unconscious are the species' memories of humanity's past. According to Jung, this collective unconscious is "a second psychic system of collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals." This universal psychic aspect is an inherited receptacle of deep, powerful human themes and commonalities. These memories exist in the form of **archetypes,** which are patterns or images of repeated human experiences—such as birth, death, rebirth, the four seasons, and motherhood, to name a few—that express themselves in our stories, our dreams, our religions, and our fantasies. Archetypes are not ready-made ideas, but are predispositions, causing us to respond to stimuli in certain ways. In addition, they are inherited genetically (a psychic, not a biological, inheritance), making up an identical collective unconsciousness for all humankind. Jung believes that the archetypes "give form to countless typical experiences of our ancestors [and are] the psychic residue of innumerable experiences of the same type, of joys and sorrows that have been repeated countless times in our ancestral history." Occurring in literature in the form of recurrent plot patterns, images, or character types, the archetypes are capable of stirring up profound emotions that are similar in all readers because they awaken images stored in the collective unconscious and produce feelings or emotions over which the reader initially has little control.

Jung was the first to suggest that such archetypes directly affect the way we respond to external elements. For example, when we see a television commercial showing a two-year-old in diapers who is suddenly surrounded by a litter of puppies licking the child's face, feelings of contentment, warmth, and love seemingly overwhelm most of us. These somewhat uncontrollable emotions, Jung would claim, are the results of the stirring of an archetype.

Many anthropologists would argue that archetypes are inherited cultural responses, which are passed down from one generation to another in a particular social group. Eventually, such social phenomena become myths or stories that help give meaning and significance to people's lives. Jung would strongly disagree, asserting that myths are "symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche." Both myths and modern stories often portray the archetypal symbols over and over, proving their thematic importance. Through repetition of such symbols, the archetype—the **anima** (the feminine in the male), the **animus** (the masculine in the female), the mother, and rebirth, to name a few—may then be applied to the interpretive process to understand the underlying meanings of human stories and experiences. Because the unconscious mind is continually using symbols from the collective psychic pool to make sense of life, such symbols help us delve more deeply into the archetypes and commonalities of life. For Jung, stories and myths are the means by which archetypes evidence themselves not only in our dreams but also in the personal conscious.

Throughout the 1920s and until his death in 1961, Jung continued developing his methods of analytical psychology. When we apply his theories and methods to literature, we engage in **archetypal criticism.** Unquestionably, the foremost archetypal critic of the twentieth century is Northrop Frye.

Northrop Frye

With the publication of his work *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* in 1957, Northrop Frye (1912–1991) became the primary advocate of the principles of archetypal criticism. Although he never declares allegiance to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, Frye borrows Jung's ideas about myths and archetypes and develops a systematic approach to interpretation called archetypal or **mythic criticism.** Divorcing a text from its social history, Frye maintains that there exists an overall structure or mythic development that explains both the structure and the significance of all texts. All literature, he argues, is on a sliding scale, ranging from the most explicitly allegorical to the most antiallegorical and antiexplicit. The archetypal symbols found within literature help to emphasize and portray the allegory and "deeper" story every author is telling. The overall structural principles of literature, declares Frye, are to be derived from archetypal criticism because this kind

of criticism presupposes a larger context for literature as a whole. The most elemental form and structure in literature is myth, for myth possesses the deepest imagery and most abstract meaning of any kind of literature. Above all other forms of literature, myth is the most profoundly allegorical and is most directly related through symbols.

Frye believes that all of literature comprises one complete and whole story called the **monomyth.** This monomyth can best be diagramed as a circle containing four separate phases, with each phase corresponding to a season of the year and to peculiar cycles of human experiences. The **romance phase,** located at the top of the circle, is our summer story. In this story, all our wishes are fulfilled, and we can achieve total happiness. At the bottom of the circle is winter, or the **antiromance phase.** The opposite of summer, this phase tells the story of bondage, imprisonment, frustration, and fear. Midway between romance and antiromance and to the right of the middle of the circle is the **spring phase,** or comedy. This phase relates the story of our rise from antiromance and frustration to freedom and happiness. Correspondingly, across the circle is tragedy, or the **fall phase,** narrating our fall from the romance phase and from happiness and freedom to disaster. According to Frye, all stories can be placed somewhere on this diagram.

What Frye provides for us is a schematic of all possible kinds of stories. Such a structural framework furnishes the context whereby we can identify stories based on their particular genre, kinds of symbolization, themes, points of view, and other literary elements. In addition, Frye's schematic supplies the background and context for his form of literary criticism and allows us to compare and contrast stories on the basis of their relationships among themselves.

With the advent of archetypal criticism and Frye's schematics in the 1950s, few critics used Freudian analysis in their practical criticism. But in the 1960s, the French psychoanalyst, Neo-Freudian, and poststructuralist critic Jacques Lacan helped revive Freudian criticism and, through his work, rescued it from its overwhelmingly **phallocentric** or male-dominated position.

Jacques Lacan

Similar to Freud, Jacques Marie Émile Lacan (1901–1981) believes that the unconscious greatly affects our conscious behavior. Unlike Freud, who pictures the unconscious as a chaotic, unstructured, bubbling cauldron of dark passions, hidden desires, and suppressed wishes, Lacan asserts that the unconscious is structured, much like the structure of language. Like language, this highly structured part of the human psyche can be systematically analyzed. What we will learn from such an analysis, claims Lacan, is that all individuals are fragmented; no one is whole. The ideal concept of a wholly unified and psychologically complete individual is just that, an abstraction that is simply not attainable.

Lacan's Model of the Human Psyche Similar to Freud, Lacan devises a three-part model of the human psyche. In Freud's model, the interactions of the id, the ego, and the superego greatly determine our behavior. Underlying Lacan's model is the basic assumption that language shapes and ultimately structures our unconscious and conscious minds while also shaping our self-identity.

For Lacan, the human psyche consists of three parts, or *orders*: the imaginary order, the symbolic order, and the real order. As in Freud's tripartite model, each of the orders interacts with the others. From birth until somewhere around six months, we function primarily in the **imaginary order**, that is, in the part of the psyche that contains our wishes, our fantasies, and most important, our images. In this phase of our psychic development, we are joyfully united as one with our mother, receiving our food, our care, and all our comfort from her. In this preverbal state, we rely on images as a means of perceiving and interpreting the world. Consequently, our image of ourselves is always in flux because we are not able to differentiate where one image stops and another begins.

Somewhere between the age of six and eighteen months, we enter what Lacan calls the looking-glass or **mirror stage.** In this stage, we literally see ourselves in a mirror while metaphorically seeing ourselves in our mother's image. Observing this mirror image permits us to perceive images that have discrete boundaries, allowing us to become aware of ourselves as independent beings who are separate from our mothers. This mirror image of ourselves as a whole and complete being is an ideal, an illusion because unlike the actual mirror image, we are not in full control of ourselves. We cannot, for example, move our bodies as we want or eat when we so desire.

According to Lacan, during the mirror stage, we come to recognize certain objects as being separate from ourselves, what Lacan calls **objet petit a.** This term is usually translated "object (little) a," although Lacan wished the phrase to remain untranslated. These objects include eliminating bodily wastes, our mother's voice and breasts, and our own speech sounds. When these objects or sounds are not present, we yearn for them. Lacan says such objects become symbols of lack, for us and this sense of lack will continue to plague us for the rest of our lives.

While we are passing through the imaginary order, one great consuming passion dominates our existence: the desire for our mother. Mother, we believe, can fulfill all our wishes just as we can fulfill all of hers. But we, like our mothers before us, must learn that we are separate entities who can never be totally unified with our mothers. Lacan says that such total unity and wholeness are an illusion.

Once we learn that we are individual beings who are separate from our mothers, we are ready to enter Lacan's second developmental phase, the **symbolic order.** Whereas the mother dominates the imaginary order, the father dominates the symbolic order. In this phase, we learn language. Lacan

would argue that in actuality language masters us because Lacan believes that it is language that shapes our identity as separate beings and molds our psyches. Using linguistic principles formulated by the founder of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, Lacan declares that we differentiate between individual sounds and words on the basis of difference. We know the word *might*, for example, because it is different from *sight*, and we know *hill* because it differs from *bill*. Knowing and mastering this concept of difference enables us to enter and to pass through the symbolic order successfully.

Lacan contends that in the symbolic order we learn to differentiate between male and female. This process of learning gender identity is based on difference and loss. Whereas in the imaginary order we delighted in the presence of our mother, in the symbolic order, we learn that our father comes to represent cultural norms and laws. He stands between us and our mother, and it is he who enforces cultural rules by threatening to castrate us if we do not obey. Since the castration complex is obviously different for boys and girls, the process of completing the symbolic order successfully is different for each sex.

For Lacan, what sex we are is biologically determined, but our gender or our sexuality is culturally created. Society decrees, for example, that a little boy should play with cars and a little girl with dolls. It is the father, the power symbol, who enforces these cultural rules and ensures we follow them. Both sexes come to understand their own sexuality by observing what they are not, a boy noting that he does not do the things a young girl does and vice versa. Each must recognize that he or she will forever be a splintered self, never again being able to experience the wholeness and joy of being one with his or her mother in the imaginary order.

For the boy, entry into the symbolic order dictates that he must identify with and acknowledge the father as both the symbol of society's power and as the object that blocks the boy's desire for sexual union with his mother. For the girl, entry into the symbolic order also decrees that she, too, acknowledge the father or the male as the symbol of power in society. Like the boy, she wishes to return to the happy state of union with her mother in the imaginary order. Unlike the boy, however, she maintains more access than he to this pre-Oedipal stage as she grows up.

Lacan declares that entering the symbolic order is a form of castration for both sexes. In Lacan's view, castration is symbolic, not literal, and represents each person's loss of wholeness and his or her acceptance of society's rules. For the male, it means accepting the father, the power symbol who possesses a phallus or penis. Likewise, the female must not only accept the father figure as dominant but also accept her lack of a phallus. Similar to his differentiation between sex and gender, Lacan distinguishes between the penis, the actual biological organ, and the **phallus,** what becomes for Lacan, in poststructural terms, the transcendental signified, the object that gives meaning to all other objects. In other words, for Lacan, the phallus is the

ultimate symbol of power. Although neither males nor females can ever possess the phallus and can never be complete nor whole, males do have a penis, giving them a slight claim to such power.

Lacan and Textual Analysis At the heart of Lacan's theory and his understanding of the human psyche are lack and fragmentation. All of us have longings for love, for physical pleasure, and for countless objects, but nothing can fulfill our desire to return to the imaginary order and be at one with our mother. This fragmentation, or divided self, concerns Lacan when he examines a literary text. For Lacan, literary texts hold the possibility of capturing, at least for a moment, our desire to return to the imaginary order and to regain that sense of pure joy when we were once whole and united with our mothers.

In examining a text, Lacan also looks for elements of the third and most remote and unreachable part of the human psyche, the **real order.** On the one hand, the real order consists of the physical world, including the material universe and everything in it; on the other hand, the real order also symbolizes all that a person is not. Or as Lacan would say, the real order contains countless objet petit a, objects that continually function for us as symbols of primordial lack. Because these objects and, indeed, the entire physical universe are not and can never be parts of ourselves, we can never experience or really know them except through language. In addition, as Lacan contends, it is language that causes our fragmentation in the first place. In Lacan's theory, literature has the particular ability to capture **jouissance**—that is, to call up a brief moment of joy or terror or desire that somehow arises from deep within our unconscious psyche and reminds us of a time of perfect wholeness when we were incapable of differentiating among images from the real order. More frequently than not, these experiences are sexual, although other images and experiences such as birth or death can serve this function. Such moments of joy Lacan frequently finds in the writings of Poe, Shakespeare, and Joyce.

THE PRESENT STATE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

Thanks primarily to Lacan, psychoanalytic criticism has enjoyed new popularity. In particular, feminist critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 1979), Julia Kristeva (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1982; *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984), and Luce Irigaray (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 1984), and others continue to adapt both Freud's and Lacan's theoretical models to show the psychological conflicts and concerns encountered by female writers in a male-dominated world. Other critics

such as Félix Guattari (1930–1992) have continued to challenge both Freud's and Lacan's ideas, devising their own models of the human psyche. Although many present-day critics reject Freud's phallic-centered sexual theories preferring a less sexually centered system, some still embrace Freud's dream-work and the linguistic, symbolically interpretive methods of this original psychoanalyst.

ASSUMPTIONS

The foundation for most forms of psychoanalytic criticism belongs to Freud and his theories and techniques developed during his psychiatric practice. Whether any practicing psychoanalytic critic uses the ideas of Jung, Frye, Lacan, or any other psychoanalyst, all acknowledge Freud as the intellectual center of this form of criticism.

Central to psychoanalytic criticism is Freud's assumption that all artists, including authors, are neurotic. Unlike most other neurotics, the artist escapes many of the outward manifestations and results of neurosis, such as madness or self-destruction, by finding a pathway back to saneness and wholeness in the act of creating his or her art.

Freud maintains that an author's chief motivation for writing is to gratify some secret desire, some forbidden wish that probably developed during the author's infancy and was immediately suppressed and dumped in the unconscious. The outward manifestation of this suppressed wish becomes the literary work itself. Freud declares that the literary work is indeed the author's dream or fantasy. By using Freud's psychoanalytic techniques developed for dream therapy, psychoanalytic critics believe we can "unlock" the hidden meanings contained within the story and housed in symbols. Only then can we arrive at an accurate interpretation of the text.

Because Freud believes that the literary text is really an artist's dream or fantasy, the text can and must be analyzed like a dream. For Freud, such an understanding of a text means that we must assume that the dream is a disguised wish. All of our present wishes, Freud believed, originated in some way during infancy. As an infant, we longed to be both sensually and emotionally satisfied. The memory of these satisfied infantile desires provides the fertile ground for our present wishes to occur. All present wishes are, therefore, re-creations of a past infantile memory—especially elements of the Oedipal phase—brought to the surface of our unconscious and conscious states through sensations, emotions, and other present-day situations.

But the actual wish is often too strong and too forbidden to be acknowledged by the mind's censor, the ego. Accordingly, the ego distorts and hides the wish or **latent content** of the dream, thereby allowing the dreamer to remember a somewhat changed and oftentimes radically different dream. The

dreamer tells the dream analyst about this changed dream or what Freud calls the dream's **manifest content.** In turn, the dream analyst must strip back the various layers of the patient's conversation and carefully analyze the multiple layers of the dream. The analyst's job is much like that of an archaeologist who painstakingly uncovers a valued historical site layer by layer. Like the archaeologist, the analyst must peal back the various layers of a dream until the true wish is uncovered.

Like the dream analyst, the psychoanalytic critic believes that an author's story is a dream that, on the surface, reveals only the manifest content of the true tale. Hidden and censored throughout the story on various levels lies the latent content of the story, its real meaning or interpretation. More frequently than not, this latent content directly relates to some element and memory of the Oedipal phase of our development. By directly applying the techniques employed in Freudian dream analysis, the psychoanalytic critic believes the actual, uncensored wish can be brought to the surface, revealing the story's true meaning.

Psychoanalysts do not all agree with Freud's basic assumptions, as noted earlier in this chapter. For example, Jung believes that mythological as well as sexual images appear in our dreams, and Frye borrows this assumption from Jung and develops a schematic for interpreting all dreams and stories. Lacan, on the other hand, disavows Freud's assumption that the unconscious is a cauldron of boiling passions and announces that the unconscious is as highly structured as language itself. By analyzing this structure, Lacan declares that no one can achieve wholeness because we are all and will always remain fragmented individuals who are seeking completeness. Nevertheless, all of these theorists with their accompanying theories relate in some way to Freud's presuppositions.

METHODOLOGIES

First introduced to literary studies in the 1920s and 1930s, Freud's psychoanalytic criticism still survives today. Although its methods have been challenged, revised, and supplemented, psychoanalytic criticism provides a stimulating approach to literary analysis that decrees that we humans are complex yet somewhat understandable creatures who often fail to note the influence of the unconscious on both our motivations and our everyday actions.

For several decades after its introduction, psychoanalytic criticism focused mainly on the author. Known as **psychobiography,** this method of analysis begins by amassing biographical information about an author through biographies, personal letters, lectures, and any other document related in some way to the author. Using these data and the author's canon (or collected works), psychoanalytic critics believed they could theoretically

construct the author's personality, with all its idiosyncrasies, internal and external conflicts, and more important, neuroses. In turn, such a devised theory, they declared, could illuminate an author's individual works, giving rise to the latent content in the author's texts. By gaining an in-depth understanding of the author, these critics assumed they would be better able to interpret an author's canon. Of particular interest to them were the lives and works of such writers as Edgar Allan Poe, William Blake, and Leonardo da Vinci, to name a few.

In the 1950s, psychoanalytic critics turned their attention away from psychobiography to character analysis, studying the various aspects of characters' minds found in an author's canon. Such a view gave rise to a more complex understanding of a literary work. Individual characters within a text now became the focus. Believing that the author had in mind a particular personality for his or her characters, such critics also noted that readers develop their own conceptions of each character's personality. A character's motivations and actions, then, became more complex than simply attributing them to the author's ideas. How individual readers interpreted characters now became an integral part of the text's interpretation. Whereas the author creates a character, a reader re-creates the same character, bringing to the text and to an individual character all the reader's experiences and knowledge. The character simultaneously becomes the creation of the author and of the reader. To interpret the story, psychoanalytic analyses of both the author and the reader are, therefore, necessary.

Today many psychoanalytic critics realize that the reader plays a major role in interpreting a work. Understanding ourselves from a Freudian point of view as well as the context in which we live is considered essential if we are to interpret a text.

One of the most controversial psychoanalytic techniques used today involves applying Freud's key assumption—that all human behavior is sexually driven—directly to a text. In the hands of novice critics, who are often ill- or misinformed about Freud's psychoanalytic techniques, everything in a text more frequently than not becomes a sexual image. For these critics, every concave image, such as a flower, a cup, a cave, or a vase, is a **yonic symbol** (female), and any image whose length exceeds its diameter, such as a tower, a sword, a knife, or a pen, becomes a **phallic symbol** (male). Consequently, a text containing a dance, a boat floating into a cave, or a pen being placed within a cup is interpreted as a symbol of sexual intercourse. From this perspective, all images and actions within a text must be traced to the author's id because everything in a text is ultimately the hidden wishes of the author's libido.

Another psychoanalytic approach is archetypal criticism, first developed by Jung then later by Frye. In this form of analysis, critics examine a text to discover the various archetypes that they observe in the text itself. From Jung's view, these archetypes have the same meaning for all readers.

The color red, for example, signifies danger just as water symbolizes life. By showing where and how these archetypes appear in the text and whether they form recognizable patterns, the archetypal critic believes that he or she will be able to discover the text's meaning. To apply this method accurately, a critic must have a complete grasp of Jung's rather complex theories and terminology.

In some modern archetypal approaches to literature, critics focus on the mythic concepts within texts. One such critic is Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), a critic-scholar who has written extensively within the field of mythology and literature concerning the ways that archetypal symbols portray human experience. In his influential work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell focuses on the journey of the archetypal hero in myths and in all literature as a whole. He asserts that psychoanalysts such as "Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times." Accordingly, Campbell argues that the human psyche and modern literature directly relate to the ancient, primordial myths and themes. Because of this relationship, we must probe literature for such themes. By understanding the ancient stories and themes, seeing their relationship to modern stories, and applying archetypal psychoanalysis, Campbell believes that we may better understand not only our world but also each other, and even our own inner psyches. Other psychoanalysts such as David Leeming and James Hillman employ Jung's and Campbell's ideas and theories in their works, spanning psychology, mythology, and literature.

Another type of psychoanalytic criticism employed today is based on ideas developed by Jacques Lacan. A Lacanian critic attempts to uncover how a text symbolically represents elements of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic orders. By identifying the symbolic representations of these orders within the text, a Lacanian critic examines how each of these symbols demonstrates the fragmentary nature of the self. Such a demonstration, the critic believes, shows the reader that all individuals are in actuality splintered selves. The overall purpose of a Lacanian analysis is to teach us that a fully integrated and psychologically whole person does not exist and that we must all accept fragmentation.

Psychoanalytic criticism is also being employed by feminist critics. Using some of Freud's concerns but "rescuing" Freud from his male-dominated culture and understanding are psychoanalytic critics such as Julia Kristeva. Kristeva borrows and amends concepts from Freud, Lacan, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, and phenomenology and develops a new science, **semanalysis.** Elaborating on the Lacanian idea of the mirror stage, Kristeva posits that during a premirror stage (a stage that she argues Lacan ignores), a child experiences a lack or separation from the mother that shapes meaning or significance, moving from this lack or need to desire. An emotional force that is tied to our instincts thus develops, what Kristeva calls the **semiotique.**

The semiotique exists not in symbols as noted by Lacan, but in the prosody of language itself. This process of signification is an ongoing one that employs a variety of both Freudian, Lacanian, and linguistic concepts.

Whichever psychoanalytic method a critic may choose to use, he or she must master the psychoanalytic theories and practices of Freud and his pupils to borrow, amend, and devise an interpretation that is credible and clear. Although mastering such complex theories and their appropriate applications may be difficult, the result is a rewarding discovery of the truths that lie within each of us.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- Because psychoanalytic criticism is based on multiple models of the mind rather than on an aesthetic theory, this critical approach to textual analysis can use the methodology of a variety of schools of criticism. Explain how the critical methods of New Criticism, reader-oriented criticism, and deconstruction theory and practice can be used in a psychoanalytic reading of a text. What similarities do these schools of criticism have in common with psychoanalysis?
- Using Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," analyze the protagonist from each of the following perspectives: Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian.
- Using Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," identify the different images and structural patterns that occur in the text. Then, using your understanding of psychoanalytic criticism, explain the presence of these images and patterns and analyze how each relates to an overall psychoanalytic interpretation of the text itself.
- Investigate the life of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and apply the principles of psychobiography to his short story "Young Goodman Brown."

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

In the past several decades, much "Freud bashing" has occurred, growing from simply being an argument against Freud and his theories to a movement. Whereas Freud was once declared a genius, nowadays he is often dubbed a "very troubled man," with his technique of psychoanalysis being declared a pseudoscience by many psychologists, physicians, linguists, epistemologists, and not a few literary theorists and critics. Be that as it may, Freud remains a central figure in both general psychology and literature. Thanks largely to Freud, few, if any, question the influence of the human unconscious on our everyday actions. And thanks to Freud, we understand, at least in part, that our minds create more than we can grasp and that the search for meaning in our lives can be painful, but search we will. And thanks to Freud's theories and his founding of psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic

criticism continues to explore the workings of the human psyche through the writings of Jacques Lacan, Joseph Campbell, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and a host of others interested in the relationships among the human psyche, culture, society, politics, and the arts.

Although Freud's theories have provided for present-day scholars and theorists a springboard for a myriad of ways to examine the human psyche and the making of meaning, Freud has been criticized for multiple reasons. First, if one is to successfully write a psychoanalytic critical essay of a text, such a critic must master a seemingly insurmountable mountain of theoretical knowledge. Second, by emphasizing such an extensive body of theory before a text can be analyzed, some critics argue that psychoanalytic criticism detracts from what should be a critic's first concern: the text itself. Third, many critics believe that psychoanalytic criticism reduces a text to a collection of sexual and sensual urges, thereby denying the aesthetic qualities that are inherent in a literary work and should receive a critic's attention. Fourth, Freud is particularly masculine in his interpretation, asserting the predominance of the male, giving only a secondary nod to the female. His theories, critics assert, are sexually unbalanced. Although some may argue that Freud was a "male product" of his masculine times, it took the work of Lacan and other present-day psychoanalytic critics to "rescue" Freud from his masculine bias. Fifth, some argue that psychoanalysis is too simplistic in its attempt to understand the human psyche in all its complexities. Such arguments, however, can be made for most models of the human psyche because, after all, they are simply models. And last, many declare that as a science, psychoanalysis is not objective or scientific. Freud himself was unshakeable in declaring the scientific validity of his own work, but even he was concerned about the "narrative" quality of many of his case histories.

That Freud pioneered new avenues of exploration of the human psyche remains unquestioned. That literary theorists and critics continue to accept, reject, borrow, or amend his theories and their applications stands as a testament to Freud's continued importance, not only from a historical perspective but also from a practicing critic's point of view.

7

FEMINISM

To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)

INTRODUCTION

In the inaugural edition of one of the earliest American newspapers owned and operated by women, the *Woman's Chronicle* of Little Rock, Arkansas, Kate Cuningham, the editor, penned and published these words on Saturday, March 24, 1888:

> No one is so well calculated to think for woman kind as woman herself. In the province of administering to the wants of her sex, no one can be so well adapted as she. Her advancement is in no better way proven than by her progress in medicine and literature, to say nothing of the reform movements which she is steadily carrying on for the benefit of her sex.

More than one hundred years later, another Arkansas woman and the former first lady of both Arkansas and the United States of America, a U.S. Senator from New York state, and the secretary of state under the Obama administration, Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke these words in September 2005 at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China: "It is no longer acceptable to discuss women's rights as separate from human rights." That Secretary Clinton voiced these words more than a century after Cuningham's newspaper proclamation is indeed telling. Were not Cuningham's words embraced by Americans in the latter part of the 1800s? And why need Clinton be assuring women of the twenty-first century that their rights and the rights of all humanity—males and females alike—are the same? Are not twenty-first-century

women and men equal in all respects? Feminist studies, feminist theorists, and feminist critics all answer in one accord: No!

As one of the most significant developments in literary studies in the second half of the twentieth century, feminist literary criticism advocates equal rights for all women (indeed, all peoples) in all areas of life: socially, politically, professionally, personally, economically, aesthetically, and psychologically. Emerging to prominence in the 1960s, feminist criticism is one strand of feminist studies. Informed by feminist literary theory and scholarship, feminist criticism is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches to culture and literature that are of particular interest to women. Central to the diverse aims and methods of feminist criticism is its focus on **patriarchy,** the rule of society and culture by men. In her 1980 essay titled "Dancing through the Minefield"—one of the first works to articulate the theoretical assumptions of feminist theory and to survey its methodology—Annette Kolodny, a feminist critic, articulates feminist criticism's chief tenet:

> What unites and repeatedly invigorates feminist literary criticism . . . is neither dogma nor method but an acute and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed or (encoded) within our literary inheritance [and] the consequences of that encoding for women—as characters, as readers, and as writers.

These male structures of power embrace **phallocentrism,** the belief that identifies the phallus as the source of power in culture and literature, with its accompanying male-centered and male-dominated patriarchal assumptions. In her landmark essay "Feminist Literary Criticism" (1986), Toril Moi, professor of English and theater studies at Duke University and a leading feminist theorist and critic, defines feminist criticism as "a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism." According to Moi, one of feminist criticism's chief aims is to challenge and critique this patriarchal vision established in both culture and literature, denouncing and rejecting all phallocentric assumptions. Judith Fetterley, another leading feminist theorist and critic, agrees with Moi's definition. In the introduction to Fetterley's influential text *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978), Fetterley asserts that "feminist criticism is [also] a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read." According to Fetterley, the first act of a feminist critic is "to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us."

How has the male mind with its accompanying phallocentric beliefs been implanted in us? The answer lies, in large part, in the Western literary canon, whose literature, acclaimed writers, philosophers, and scholars are

mostly male. A brief historical survey of comments made and beliefs held by canonical male writers lends support to feminist criticism's belief that a patriarchal vision has been established in the Western literary canon:

Do not let a woman with a sexy rump deceive you with wheedling and coaxing words; she is after your barn. The man who trusts a woman trusts a deceiver.

Hesiod, poet, eighth century BCE

Plato thanks the gods for two blessings: that he had not been born a slave and that he had not been born a woman.

Plato (c.427–c.347 BCE)

Silence gives the proper grace to women.

Sophocles (497–406 BCE)

The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled. Woman "is matter, waiting to be formed by the active male principle . . . Man consequently plays a major part in reproduction; the woman is merely the passive incubator of his seed."

Aristotle (384–322 BCE)

Woman is really an "imperfect man . . . an incidental being . . . a botched male."

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Although a woman is a "beautiful handiwork of god," she does "not equal the glory and dignity of the male."

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Frailty, thy name is woman.

Hamlet by Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Most women have no character at all.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

Women, women! Cherished and deadly objects that nature has embellished to torture us . . . whose hatred and love are equally harmful, and whom we cannot either seek or flee with impunity.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1702–1778)

Mary Wollstonecraft is a "hyena in petticoats."

Horace Walpole, author of one of the earliest Gothic novels, *The Castle of Otranto* (1717–1797)

Nature intended women to be our slaves. . . . They are our property. . . . What a mad idea to demand equality for women!

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even any . . . recreation.

Robert Southey, Poet Laureate (1774–1843)

Woman is a slave whom we must be clever enough to set upon a throne.

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850)

Jane Austen's novels are "vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention . . . without genius, wit or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Women writers are a "damned mob of scribbling women" who only write anything worth reading if the devil is in them.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)

The woman author does not exist. She is a contradiction in terms. The role of the woman in letters is the same as in manufacturing; she is of use when genius is no longer required.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865)

Woman is natural, that is, abominable.

Charles-Pierre Baudelaire (1821–1867)

Jane Austen is entirely impossible to read. It seems a great pity that they allowed her to die a natural death.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

The very idea of womanhood is a storm of hair . . . with a greedy little mouth somewhere behind the mirage of beauty.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

An artist's most essential quality is "masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one's thoughts on paper . . . The male quality is the creative gift."

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

Feminism is a political mistake. Feminism is a mistake made by women's intellect, a mistake which her instinct will recognize.

Valentine de Saint-Point (1875–1953)

Educating a woman is like pouring honey over a fine Swiss watch. It stops working.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922–2007)

Feminist literary criticism challenges such patriarchal statements with their accompanying male-dominated, philosophical assumptions and such gender-biased criticism. Asserting that literature should be free from biases of race, class, or gender, feminist criticism provides a variety of theoretical frameworks and approaches to interpretation that values each member of society.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

According to feminist criticism, the roots of prejudice against women have long been embedded in Western culture. The ancient Greeks abetted gender discrimination, declaring the male to be the superior and the female the inferior. Women, they maintained, lure men away from seeking truth, preventing them from attaining their full potential. In the centuries that follow, other philosophers and scientists continue such gender discrimination. For example, in *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin (1809–1882) announces that women are a "characteristic of . . . a past and lower state of civilization." Such beings, he notes, are inferior to men, who are physically, intellectually, and artistically superior.

Century after century, male voices continue to articulate and determine the social role and cultural and personal significance of women. Some scholars believe that the first major work of feminist criticism challenging these male voices was that authored by Christine de Pizan (1365–c.1434) in the fourteenth century, *L'Epistre au Dieu d'amours* (1399). In this work, Pizan critiques Jean de Meun's biased representation of the nature of woman in his text *Roman de la Rose* (c.1230; c.1275). In another work, *Le Livre de la Cite des Dames* (1405), Pizan declares that God created both man and woman as equal beings.

Throughout the following centuries, other female voices articulated the right of women to be heard and acknowledged as scholars, artists, and writers. One such voice was that of Aphra Behn (1640–1689) in the seventeenth century. Behn, often accredited as the first English professional female

writer, was one of the most prolific dramatists, poets, and novelists of the Restoration, authoring works that highlight the amatory fiction of British literature. According to the twentieth-century feminist Virginia Woolf, "All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn . . . for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds." Unlike most writers of her time, Behn used her fiction to bring to the forefront and analyze women's sexual desires directed toward both males and females. Innovative in the use of such narrative techniques as voice, visual cues, and frankness of subject matter, Behn published dramas (*The Amorous Prince*, 1671), poetry (*On Desire*, 1688), and novels (*Oroonoko*, 1688) that helped pave the way for the British Romantic movement. Today her words provide cultural studies scholars and many others with an abundance of texts that scrutinize what it means to be human.

In the late 1700s, another powerful, artistic female voice arose in opposition to the continued patriarchal beliefs and statements housed in society and the Western canon. Influenced by the French revolution and believing that women along with men should have a voice in the public arena, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), the first major published work that acknowledges an awareness of women's struggles for equal rights. Women, she maintains, must define for themselves what it means to be a woman. Women themselves must take the lead and articulate who they are and what role they will play in society by rejecting the patriarchal assumption that women are inferior to men.

It was not until the Progressive Era of the early 1900s, however, that major concerns of feminist criticism took root in literature and criticism. During this time, women gained the right to vote and became prominent activists in the social issues of the day, such as health care, education, politics, and literature, but equality with men in these arenas still remained outside their grasp.

Virginia Woolf

In 1919 the British scholar and teacher Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) developed and enlarged Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, laying the foundation for present-day feminist criticism in her powerful work *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In this text Woolf declares that men have treated and continue to treat women as inferiors. Males define what it means to be female and determine who controls the political, economic, social, and literary structures. Agreeing with Samuel T. Coleridge, one of the foremost nineteenth-century literary critics, that great minds possess both male and female characteristics, Woolf hypothesizes the existence of Shakespeare's sister, one who is equally as gifted a writer as Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare's sister's sex, however, prevents her from having "a room of her own." Because she is female, she

cannot obtain an education or find profitable employment. And because she cannot economically afford a room of her own, her innate artistic talents will never flourish. Being able to afford her own room would symbolize the solitude and autonomy needed to seclude herself from the world and its social constraints to find time to think and write. In Woolf's text, Shakespeare's sister dies alone without any acknowledgment of her personal genius. Even her grave plot does not bear her name; she is buried in an unmarked grave because she is female.

Such a loss of artistic talent and personal worth, argues Woolf, is the result of society's opinion of women: they are seen as intellectually inferior to men. Women, Woolf declares, must reject the social construct of femaleness and establish and define for themselves their own identity. To do so, they must challenge the prevailing, false cultural notions about their sexual identity and develop a female discourse that will accurately portray their relationship "to the world of reality and not to the world of men." If women accept this challenge, Woolf believes that Shakespeare's sister can live once again in and through women living today, even those who may be "washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed" right now. Societal and world calamities such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II in the 1940s, however, changed the focus of humankind's attention and delayed the advancement of these feminist ideals.

Simone de Beauvoir

After World War II and the 1949 publication of *The Second Sex* by the French writer Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), feminist concerns once again are heard. Heralded as the foundational work of twentieth-century feminism, Beauvoir's text asserts that French society (and Western societies in general) are **patriarchal**, controlled by males. Like Woolf before her, Beauvoir believes that the male defines what it means to be human, including what it means to be female. Since the female is not male, Beauvoir maintains, she becomes the **Other**, an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the dominant male. Being subordinate to the male, the female discovers that she is a secondary or nonexistent player in the major social institutions of her culture, such as the church, government, and educational systems. Beauvoir believes that women must break the bonds of their patriarchal society and define themselves if they wish to become a significant human being in their own right, and they must defy male classification as the Other. Women must ask themselves, "What is a woman?" Beauvoir insists that a woman's answer must not be "mankind," for such a term once again allows males to define women. Beauvoir rejects this generic label, believing that such labeling assumes that "humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him."

Beauvoir insists that women must see themselves as autonomous beings. Women, she maintains, must reject the societal construct that men are the subject or the absolute and women are the Other. Embedded in this erroneous statement is the assumption that males have the power to control the dominant discourse and the power to define cultural terms and roles. Accordingly, women must define themselves, articulate their own social constructs of what it means to be a woman, and reject being labeled as the Other.

Kate Millett

With the advent of the 1960s and with its political activism and social concerns, feminist issues found new voices, such as Mary Ellmann (*Thinking about Women*, 1968) and Kate Millett. With Millett's publication of *Sexual Politics* in 1970, a new wave of feminism begins. Millett is one of the first to challenge the ideological characteristics of both the male and the female. She asserts that a female is born but a woman is created. In other words, one's sex is determined at birth, but one's gender is a social construct created by cultural norms. Consciously or unconsciously, women and men conform to the societal constructs established by society. Boys, for example, should be aggressive, self-assertive, and domineering, whereas girls should be passive, meek, and humble. Such cultural expectations are transmitted through media, including television, movies, songs, and literature. Conforming to these prescribed sex roles dictated by society is what Millett calls **sexual politics**, or the operations of power relations in society. In the West institutional power rests with males, forcing the subordination of women. Women, Millett maintains, must disenfranchise the power center of their culture: male dominance. By so doing, women will be able to establish female social conventions as defined by females, not males, and in the process, they themselves will shape and articulate female discourse, literary studies, and feminist theory.

FEMINISM IN THE 1960s, '70s, and '80s

In 1963 two works helped bring feminist concerns once again into the public arena: *American Women*, edited by Frances Bagley Kaplan and Margaret Mead, and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. *American Women* was the culminating work of two years of investigation by the President's Commission on the Status of Women, commissioned by President John F. Kennedy. This work details the great inequality between men and women in the workplace, in education, and in society as a whole. Armed with verifiable evidence of their inequality, women asserted political pressure in Congress

and state legislative houses across America for reforms. As women began to enter the political arena and articulate their concerns, a freelance writer, Betty Friedan (1921–2006), published *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan articulated two central questions of feminist criticism that soon became popular: "A woman has got to be able to say, and not feel guilty, '*Who am I*, and *What do I want out of life?*' She mustn't feel selfish and neurotic if she wants goals of her own, outside of husband and children." By 1966, Friedan was elected president of the newly formed National Organization for Women (NOW) whose platform argued for equal opportunity for women "under the law," including educational and employment reforms; the right of choice concerning abortion; and a host of other social, political, and personal issues.

During this time and throughout the 1970s, feminist theorists and critics began to examine the traditional literary canon, discovering copious examples of male dominance and prejudice that supported Beauvoir's and Millett's assertion that males consider the female "the Other." Stereotypes of women abounded in the canon: Women were sex maniacs, goddesses of beauty, mindless entities, or old spinsters. In addition, although Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, and many other male authors found their way into the established canon, few female authors achieved such status. Those who did appear, such as Mary E. Wilkins Freeman or Sarah Orne Jewett, were referred to as "local color writers," implying their secondary or minor position in the canon. Similarly, the roles of female, fictionalized characters were often limited to minor characters whose chief traits reinforced the male's stereotypical image of women. Female theorists, critics, and scholars such as Woolf and de Beauvoir were simply ignored, their writings seldom, if ever, referred to by the male crafters of the literary canon.

Feminist theorists and critics of this era declared that male authors who created and enjoyed such a place of prominence within the canon had assumed that their ideal readers were all males. Women reading such works could easily be duped into reading as a man reads. In addition, because most of the university professors were men, more frequently than not female students were being trained to read literature as if they, too, were men. Hence, the feminists critics of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s announced the existence of a female ideal reader who was affronted by the male prejudices abounding in the canon. Questions now arose concerning the male *and* female qualities of literary form, style, voice, theme, and other aesthetic elements of texts.

Throughout the 1970s, books that defined women's writings in feminine terms flourished. Having successfully highlighted the importance of gender, feminist theorists uncovered and rediscovered a body of works authored by females that their male counterparts had decreed inferior and unworthy to be part of the canon. In America, for example, Kate Chopin's late-nineteenth-century novel *The Awakening* (1899) served as the archetypal, rediscovered feminist text of this period, whereas in England Doris Lessing's *The Golden*

Notebook (1962) and in France, Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969) fulfilled these roles. Throughout the universities and in the reading populace, many readers now turned their attention to historical and current works authored by women. Simultaneously, works that helped define the feminine imagination, to categorize and explain female literary history, and to articulate a female aesthetic became the focus of feminist critics.

Feminist concerns were supported in print by the establishment of the Feminist Press in 1972 and journals such as *Signs*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *Feminist Studies*, to name a few. Texts such as Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975); Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards's *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (1977); Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978); Nina Baym's *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (1978); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's edited work *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (1979); and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (1979) helped shape the ongoing concerns and direction of feminist theory and criticism, providing public venues for these discussions.

Elaine Showalter

A leading voice of feminist criticism throughout the late 1970s and through the next several decades is that of Elaine Showalter. In *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), Showalter chronicles three historical phases of female writing: the **feminine phase** (1840–1880), the **feminist phase** (1880–1920), and the **female phase** (1920–present). During the "feminine" phase, writers such as Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and George Sand accepted the prevailing social constructs that defined women. Accordingly, these authors wrote under male pseudonyms so their works, like their male counterparts', would first be published and recognized for their intellectual and artistic achievements. During the "feminist" or second phase, female writers helped dramatize the plight of the "slighted" woman, depicting the harsh and often cruel treatment of female characters at the hands of their more powerful male creations. In the third or "female" phase, female writers have rejected both the feminine social constructs prominent during the "feminine" phase and the secondary or minor position of female characters that dominated the "feminist" phase. Showalter observes that feminist theorists and critics presently concern themselves with developing a peculiarly female understanding of the female experience in art, including a feminine analysis of literary forms and techniques. Such a task necessarily includes the uncovering of **misogyny** in texts, a term Showalter uses to describe the male hatred of women.

Showalter believes that female writers were deliberately excluded from the literary canon by male professors who first established the canon itself. Writers such as Susan Warner (*The Wide, Wide World*, 1850), Emma D. E. N. Southworth (*The Hidden Hand*, 1859), and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (*A New England Nun and Other Stories*, 1891; *Pembroke*, 1894), by far the most popular authors of the second half of the nineteenth century in American fiction, were not deemed worthy to be included in the canon. Such exclusion, says Showalter, must cease. In her influential essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1997), Showalter asserts that feminist theorists must "construct a female framework for analysis of women's literature to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt to male models and theories," a process she names **gynocriticism.** Through gynocriticism, Showalter exposes the false cultural assumptions and characteristics of women as depicted in canonical literature. Showalter coins the word **gynocritics**—a classification she gives to those critics who "construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt to male models and theories." Gynocritics and gynocriticism provide us with four models that address the nature of women's writing: the biological, the linguistic, the psychoanalytic, and the cultural.

Each of Showalter's models is sequential, subsuming and developing the preceding model or models. The **biological model** emphasizes how the female body marks itself on a text by providing a host of literary images along with a personal, intimate tone. The **linguistic model** addresses the need for a female discourse, investigating the differences between how women and men use language. This model asserts that women create and write in a language distinct to their gender and addresses the ways in which this female language can be used in their writings. The **psychoanalytic model** analyzes the female psyche and demonstrates how such an analysis affects the writing process, emphasizing the flux and fluidity of female writing as opposed to male writing's rigidity and structure. The last of Showalter's models, the **cultural model**, investigates how society shapes women's goals, responses, and points of view.

Geographical Strains of Feminism

During the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, no one critical theory of writing dominated feminist criticism because feminist theory and criticism highlighted the personal, allowing for diverse theories and approaches to textual analysis. Historically, geography played a significant role in determining the major interests of the various voices of feminist criticism, with three somewhat distinct, geographical strains of feminism having emerged: American, British, and French. These geographical divisions no longer serve as distinct theoretical

or practical boundaries but do remain important as historical markers in feminism's development. According to Showalter, American feminism at this time was essentially textual, stressing repression of texts authored by females; British feminism was essentially Marxist, stressing oppression; and French feminism was essentially psychoanalytic, stressing repression. The aim of all groups was similar: to rescue women from being considered "the Other."

American For American feminism, Kolodny announced feminism's major concern: the restoration and inclusion of the writings of female writers to the literary canon. Believing that literary history is itself a fiction, Kolodny restores a realistic history of women so that they themselves can tell "herstory." In order to tell and write herstory, female writers must find a means to gain their voice in the midst of the dominating male voices seeking society's attention. In *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) and *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860* (1984), Kolodny uses feminist-psychoanalytic theories and methodologies to assert that the American colonists attributed to the land feminine characteristics to soften and allay their fears concerning the land's unknown but potential terrors. Whereas some males viewed the American frontier as a new Eden, female colonists often saw it as a home and a "familial human community." In a later work, *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century* (1998), Kolodny provides evidence that women are still "outsiders" at American universities and on college campuses. She also documents the rising antifeminist and anti-intellectual harassment occurring against women in higher education.

Similar to Kolodny, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (1979), declare that the male voice has, for too long, been dominant. Because males have had the power of the pen and the press, they have been allowed not only to define but also to create images of women as they so chose in their texts. Gilbert and Gubar maintain that this male power has caused what they call "anxiety of authorship" in women, causing them to fear both the act of literary creation itself and writing. Some female writers believe that literary creation will isolate them from society, perhaps destroying them. Gilbert and Gubar's solution is that women develop a "woman's sentence" that can encourage literary autonomy. By inventing such a construction, a woman can sentence male authors to isolation, to fear, and to literary banishment from the canon, just as for centuries males have been sentencing women. By formulating a woman's sentence, say Gilbert and Gubar, female writers will free themselves from being defined by men.

A woman's sentence, argue Gilbert and Gubar, will also free women from being reduced to the stereotypical images that appear in literature. They identify two such principal images: "the angel in the house" and the "madwoman

in the attic." When depicted as the angel in the house, a woman supposedly realizes that her physical and material comforts are gifts from her husband. Her goals in life are to please her husband, attend to his every comfort, and obey him. Through these supposedly selfless acts, she finds utmost contentment by serving both him and her children. When a female writer and her characters reject such a role, male critics dub her a "monster," the madwoman in the attic who is also "obviously" sexually fallen.

Gilbert and Gubar assert that either of these images—the angel or the madwoman—are unrealistic representations of women in society. The first image canonizes the female, placing her simultaneously above and outside her socially constructed world, while the second image denigrates and demonizes the female, banishing her to the world of myths and the demonic while disavowing her rightful place in both literature and society. The message is clear: If you are not an angel, then you are a monster. These stereotypical, male-created images of women in literature, declare Gilbert and Gubar, must be uncovered, examined, debunked, and transcended if women are to achieve literary autonomy.

British Whereas American feminism emphasized repression, British feminism stressed oppression. Leaning toward Marxist theory, British feminism saw art, literature, and life as inseparable. Some British feminists, although not all, viewed reading, writing, and publishing as facets of material reality. Being part of this material reality, literature, like one's job and one's social activities, is part of a great whole, with each part affecting the others. How a female is depicted in literature directly affects how women will be treated in real life. Particularly in the West, patriarchal society exploits women not only through literature but also economically and socially. The traditional Western family structure, assert these feminist critics, subordinates women, causing them to be economically dependent. The West's literature reflects such dependency. British feminism of this era challenges the economic and social status of women, both in society and as depicted in the arts, especially in texts. For these critics, the goal of feminist criticism is to change society, not simply critique it.

French French feminism, the third geographical division of feminism, stressed female oppression both in life and art, highlighting the repression of women. French feminism is closely associated with the theoretical and practical applications of psychoanalysis and the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. At first, the association with psychoanalysis may be a bit puzzling because Freud and his patriarchal theories seemingly dominate psychoanalysis. Believing that the phallus is power, Freud viewed women as incomplete males who possess penis envy, desiring to gain the male phallus and obtain power. In several ways, the French psychoanalytic critic Jacques Lacan rescues psychoanalysis from Freud's misogynistic theories. Lacan

argues that language ultimately shapes and structures our conscious and unconscious minds, thereby shaping our self-identity, not the phallus. Language as it is structured and understood, Lacan maintains, ultimately denies women the power of literature and writing.

Lacan posits that the human psyche consists of three parts, or what he calls orders: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. Each of these orders interacts with the others. From birth to six months or so, we primarily function in the imaginary order, a preverbal state that contains our wishes, our fantasies, and our physical images. In this state we are basically genderless because we are not yet capable of differentiating ourselves from our mothers. As soon as we have successfully navigated the Oedipal crisis, we pass from using a biological language to a socialized language and into the second of the Lacanian orders: the symbolic order. In this Lacanian phase, the male becomes dominant, particularly in the discourse of language. The female, on the other hand, is socialized into using a subordinated language. In this order, the father is the dominant image (the Law), with both the male and the female fearing castration by the father. For the boy, this fear of castration means obeying and becoming like the father, while simultaneously repressing the imaginary order that is most closely associated with the female body. The imaginary order, with its pre-Oedipal boy desires, becomes a direct threat to the male in the third Lacanian order, the real order, or the actual world as perceived by the individual. For the girl, entrance into the symbolic order means submission to law of the father. Such submission brings subservience to males. Being socialized through the discourse of language, the girl becomes a second-class citizen. Because language, for Lacan, is a psychological, not a biological, construct, he believes that women can learn the dominant discourse of both the symbolic and the real orders and become tools of social, political, and personal change.

French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous borrow and amend elements of Freud's and Lacan's theories to develop their own forms of feminist criticism. In works such as *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980), and *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (European Perspectives)* (1982), Kristeva posits that the imaginary order is characterized by a continuous flow of fluidity or rhythm, which she calls **chora.** On entering the Lacanian symbolic order, both males and females are separated from chora and repress the feelings of fluidity and rhythm. Similar to a Freudian slip in which an unconscious thought breaks through the conscious mind, the chora, at times, breaks through into the real order and disturbs the male-dominant discourse. And in later works such as *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva's concept of "motherhood" has informed much of her writing because she asks what she believes to be the central though complex question of feminist theory: "How can an enquiry into the nature of motherhood lead to a better understanding of the part played in love by the woman?" Kristeva argues that women must

eventually "deal" with men, another woman, or perhaps a child. How will the rejection or acceptance of motherhood shape women?

Cixous explores a different mode of discourse that arises from Lacan's symbolic order. Cixous maintains that words such as "feminine," "masculine," "femininity," and even "man" and "woman" should be exorcised from language. In works such as the "Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), Cixous declares that there exists a particular kind of female writing she calls **l'écriture féminine,** envisioned in terms of bisexuality. L'écriture féminine can best be understood, Cixous asserts, as "the ideal harmony, reached by few, which would be genital, assembling everything and being capable of generosity, of spending." This kind of female writing is the province of metaphor, not limited to written words but also "writing by the voice." Characterized by fluidity, such feminine discourse, when fully explored, says Cixous, will transform the social and cultural structures within literature by freeing both women and men from phallocentrism.

PRESENT-DAY FEMINIST CRITICISMS

Because contemporary feminist criticism is not composed of a single ideology, many subcategories or approaches have developed, each creating its own sphere of concern while often intersecting not only with other forms of feminist criticism but also with other schools of literary criticism, such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, and deconstruction. Some scholars categorize feminist criticism into four groups: **Anglo-American feminisms** (e.g., Virginia Woolf, Judith Fetterley, Annette Kolodny, Nina Baym, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar); **poststructuralist feminisms** (e.g., Luce Irigaray, Catherine Clément, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Joan Scott); **materialist feminisms** (e.g., Juliet Mitchell, Michèle Barrett, Jacqueline Rose, Rosalind Coward, Toril Moi, Catherine Belsey, Katie King, and Donna Haraway); and **postmodern feminisms,** usually dating from 1990 to the present (e.g., Jane Gallop, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss, Chandra Mohanty, Uma Narayan, Mary Daly, and Gloria Anzaldúa).

Other critics divide feminist criticism into a variety of subcategories, ranging in number from nine to more than thirty, including Amazon feminism, cultural feminism, ecofeminism, material feminism, separatism, and postcolonial feminism, to cite a few. **Amazon feminism** is dedicated to female images—either fictional or real—in literature and art that emphasize the physiques of female athletes and physical equality of both males and females. Opposed to gender roles and discrimination against women based on the false assumptions that females are physically weak and passive, Amazon feminism argues that no mention of gender need arise, for example, when

discussing such topics as occupations. Whereas some people are not physically capable of being a firefighter, others are likewise not capable of driving a snowplow. Gender is not an issue because there are no characteristics, they assert, that are peculiarly masculine or feminine.

Sometimes referred to as radical feminism, **cultural feminism** asserts that personality and biological differences exist between men and women. According to cultural feminists such as Elizabeth Gould Davis (*The First Sex*, 1971), the main tenet of cultural feminism states that women are inherently and biologically "kinder and gentler" than men. Such women's ways should be celebrated because in the eyes of many cultural feminists, women's ways are better than men's.

Ecofeminism (sometimes spelled eco-feminism) assumes that patriarchal societies are relatively new and that society's original condition (dubbed the feminist Eden) was matriarchal. Patriarchal societies, say ecofeminists, are detrimental to women, children, and nature. Whereas a patriarchal society dominates both women and nature, plundering and destroying our planet, a matriarchal society protects the environment, natural resources, and animal life and especially cares for women and children.

Authored by Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes* (1981) highlights the concerns of material feminism. Developing in the latter part of the nineteenth century, material feminism aims to improve the material condition of women by unburdening them of "traditional" female tasks such as housework, cooking, ironing clothes, and other domestic responsibilities. **Separatist feminism,** however, advocates separation from men, either total or partial. Although some separatists may be lesbians, it is inaccurate to assume that all separatists are lesbians. Separatists assume that women must first see themselves in a different context—separating themselves from men, at least for a while—before they can discover who they are as individuals. Such a separation, they maintain, is the necessary first step to achieving personal growth and individuality.

Sometimes known as **third-world feminism, postcolonial feminism** shares many of its basic principles with postcolonialism (see Chapter 10). Like postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism rejects the phallocentric, patriarchal system established by white males and recognizes that it is engaged in a political and social struggle against male dominance. These theorists and critics liken women to colonized subjects who are defined by the "male gaze" and are thus reduced to stereotypes and subjected to the long-lasting social and economic effects of colonialism. In particular, postcolonial feminists object to using the term *woman*, believing that such usage defines females by only their sex.

No matter what subcategory and theory feminist critics may espouse, they assert that they are on a journey of self-discovery that will lead them to a better understanding of themselves, their society, and the world at large. Seeking to understand themselves first as individuals, they believe that they

will then be equipped to develop their own individual talents and fully participate in all aspects of their culture, including the arts.

ASSUMPTIONS

To onlookers, feminist theory and practice appear to be diffuse, a loosely connected body of criticism that is more divided than unified, more prone to internal disagreements than to unity among its adherents. Feminist criticism cannot claim nor indeed wants to claim any ultimate spokesperson because feminists believe in the personal and advocate for many different voices to be heard and respected. Not to be understood as homogeneous, feminist criticism should, in actuality, be dubbed feminist criticisms. Behind all these voices, theories, and practices, however, rests an essential set of principles.

The core belief of feminist theory and criticism asserts that all people—women and men—are politically, socially, and economically equal. Although diverse in its social theories, values, and politics, feminist criticism chiefly advocates for the rights of women. Its adherents are women (and some men) who are involved in a journey of self-discovery, asking themselves such questions as who they are, how they arrived at their present situation, and where they are going. In their search, they value the person, validating and giving significance to the individual as opposed to the group. Their search at times is political because their aim is to discover and change both themselves and the world in which they live, a world that must learn to validate all individuals, all cultures, and all subcultures as creative, aesthetic, and rational people who can contribute to their societies and their world. Such a revisionist stance seeks to understand the place of women in society and to analyze every aspect that affects women as citizens and as writers in a male-dominated world. In this patriarchal world, man more frequently than not defines what it means to be human. Woman has become the Other, the "not-male." Man is the subject, the one who defines meaning. Woman is the object, having her existence defined and determined by the male. The man is the significant (or privileged, using Derrida's term) binary in the male/female relationship whereas the woman is the subordinate (or unprivileged).

By defining the female in relation to the male and claiming simultaneously the superiority of the male, Western society and many other cultures are, for the most part, patriarchal, decreeing that the female, by nature, is inferior. As soon as Western culture both consciously or unconsciously assimilated this belief into its social structures and allowed it to permeate all levels of society, females became an oppressed people, inferiors who must be suppressed lest humankind fail to reach its maximum potential.

Feminist theorists and critics want to correct such erroneous ways of thinking. Women, they declare, are individuals, people in their own right;

they are not incomplete or inferior to men. Despite how frequently literature and society have fictionalized and stereotyped females as angels, barmaids, bitches, whores, brainless housewives, or old maids, women must define themselves and articulate their roles, their values, their aspirations, and their place in society.

To do so, say feminist critics, women must analyze and challenge the established literary canon that has shaped such images of female inferiority and subordination. Women must also contest the long-held patriarchal assumptions about their sex and gender, and they must marshal a variety of resources to assert, clarify, and finally implement their beliefs and values. Through a reexamination of the established literature in all disciplines, by defining and validating what it means to be a woman, and by establishing and creating feminist literary theories and criticisms, women can secure autonomy and power, legitimatizing their responses to any text; to their own writing; and to their political, economic, and social positions in their culture.

METHODOLOGY

Because feminist theory and criticisms are polyphonic, a variety of feminist approaches to textual analysis exists. Some feminist critics debunk male superiority by exposing stereotypes of women in all literary periods. Women, they assert, cannot be simply depicted and classified as either angels or demons, saints or whores, or brainless housewives or eccentric spinsters. Such bipolar characterizations must be continually identified and challenged.

Other feminist critics continue to scrutinize the American, the English, or the non-Western literary canon, rediscovering works written by women. Still other feminist critics reread the canonical works of male authors from a female point of view. Such an analysis develops a uniquely female consciousness based on female experience rather than relying on the traditional male theories of reading, writing, and critiquing. Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism with its multifaceted approach helps feminist critics in such an analysis.

Some feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray use the methodologies of philosophy and psychoanalysis to overturn patriarchy with its accompanying phallocentrism. These critics' aim is to expose the multiple ways that patriarchal discourses empower males while disenfranchising women. And critics such as Julia Kristeva and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak employ the methodologies of linguistics, Marxism, deconstruction, and subaltern studies to overturn and to provide an alternative for patriarchal discourse.

In similar fashion, critics such as Monique Wittig and Hélène Cixous propose a completely new, nonphallocentric discourse. Wittig challenges not only patriarchal assumptions in culture but also the very structure of language itself, experimenting and hoping to eliminate pronouns and nouns, for example, that reflect gender, a process she calls the **lesbianization of language.** Cixous' feminist methodology embraces the creation of a female language,

l'écriture féminine, to open phallocentric discourse to both sexes. Providing models to challenge the dominant discourse is also a chief concern for both postcolonial feminists and women of color feminists.

To use the various approaches to feminist criticisms, an in-depth understanding of each of the various theoretical positions and methodologies is essential, but unfortunately such a study is beyond the scope of this text.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Whatever method of feminist criticisms we choose to apply to a text, we can begin such textual analysis by asking the following questions as they relate to Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown." Be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

- Is the author male or female?
- Is the text narrated by a male or female?
- What types of roles do women have in the text?
- Are the female characters the protagonists or secondary and minor characters?
- Do any stereotypical characterizations of women appear?
- What are the attitudes toward women held by the male characters?
- What is the author's attitude toward women in society?
- How does the author's culture influence her or his attitude?
- Is feminine imagery used? If so, what is the significance of such imagery?
- Do the female characters speak differently than do the male characters? Compare the frequency of speech for the male characters to that of the female characters.

By applying any or all of these questions to a text, we can begin our journey in feminist criticism and simultaneously help ourselves to better understand ourselves as individuals and the world in which we live.

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

At the beginning of this chapter are a variety of quotations pronounced by males concerning females; now let us listen to the voices of females:

> *You have to make more noise than anybody else, you have to make yourself more obtrusive than anybody else, you have to fill all the papers more than anybody else, in fact you have to be there all the time and see that they do not snow you under, if you are really going to get your reform realized.*
>
> Emmeline Pankhurst, British suffragist (1858–1928)

Feminism, like Boston, is a state of mind. It is the state of mind of women who realize that their whole position in the social order is antiquated, as a woman cooking over an open fire with heavy iron pots would know that her entire housekeeping was out of date.

Feminism never harmed anybody unless it was some feminists. The danger is that the study and contemplation of "ourselves" may become so absorbing that it builds by slow degrees a high wall that shuts out the great world of thought.

Rheta Childe Dorr, journalist (1866–1948)

Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.

Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler

I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.

Rebecca West (1913)

Feminism is an entire world view or gestalt, not just a laundry list of women's issues.

Charlotte Bunch, editor, author (1944–)

It is important to remember that feminism is no longer a group of organizations or leaders. It is the expectations that parents have for their daughters, and their sons too. It is the way we talk about and treat one another. It is who makes the money and who makes the compromises and who makes the dinner. It is a state of mind. It is the way of life we live now.

Anna Quindlen, journalist, novelist (1945–)

Feminism is a political term and it must be recognized as such: it is political in women's terms. What are these terms? Essentially it means making connections: between personal power and economic power, between domestic oppression and labor exploitation, between plants and chemicals, feelings and theories; it means making connections between our inside worlds and the outside world.

Anica Vesel Mander (1945–) and Anne K. Rush (1945-)

Feminism is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels—sex, race, and class, to name a few—and a commitment to reorganizing US society, so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.

bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (1983)

Feminism asks the world to recognize at long last that women aren't decorative ornaments, worthy vessels of a special-interest group. They are half (in fact, now more than half) of the national population, and just as deserving of rights and opportunities, just as capable of participating in the world's events, as the other half. Feminism's agenda is basic: It asks that women not be forced to choose between public justice and private happiness. It asks that women be free to define themselves instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men.

Susan Faludi, *Backlash* (1991)

Feminism is an ongoing project, a process, undertaken on a daily basis by millions of women of all ages, classes, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and sexual preferences. Feminism is constantly being reinvented, and reinvented through determination and compromise, so that women try, as best they can, to have love and support as well as power and autonomy.

Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* (1994)

The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet.

Adrienne Rich, poet (1929–)

Disturbingly, for many people, Adrienne Rich's words encapsulate the essence of feminist criticism: it is feared, it is problematic, and it has the ability and the transformative power to reshape our world. A branch of feminist studies grounded in feminist theory and scholarship, feminist criticism is a heterogeneous grouping of scholars, writers, linguists, philosophers, scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, educators, and peoples from all professions and walks of life who believe that both women and men are equal. As a social movement, feminist criticism highlights the various ways women, in particular, have been oppressed, suppressed, and repressed. It asks new questions of old texts. It develops and uncovers a female tradition in writing. It analyzes women writers and their works from female perspectives. It attempts to redefine literary concepts and the dominant discourse—language itself—in terms of gender. It disavows the privileged position of males in a predominantly patriarchal society. It questions basic assumptions about gender, gender difference, and sexuality. And it demands that we become resisting readers to the established male hierarchies upon which our culture and our literature have been shaped.

Critics of feminist criticism often view it as a collection of theorists and critics who cannot decide what they really believe. Its critics assert that one group of feminist criticism defines "female" and "male" one way, while another develops conflicting and sometimes contradictory definitions. Even

within feminist criticism itself, the various subcategories criticize each other. Postcolonist feminists, for example, harshly critique Western forms of criticism. Psychoanalytic feminist critics often view their cultures and society differently from materialistic or Marxist critics. Because of such differences, critics avow that the multiple voices of feminist criticism(s) cannot sustain a unified ideology.

Feminist criticism's conservative critics advocate that the goal of feminist criticism is to destroy traditional values and gender roles. Males and females, argue these critics, are naturally and biologically different. From these critics' point of view, feminist criticism is rooted in error and has become, for them, the enemy. Some even blame their own lack of success in business or any other area in the public arena on the rise of feminism and maintain that the chief aim of feminists is "to look for stuff to get mad about." And many of these critics argue that it is now males who are the oppressed.

Whether such criticism is real or imagined, present-day feminist critics believe that discrimination against women still exists not only in America but worldwide—discrimination in the workplace, in the home, in the church, in government, and in society as a whole. Issues such as the glass ceiling, human trafficking, slavery, and prostitution continue to plague society. To such injustices, feminist critics will continue to add their voices of protest.

8

MARXISM

Art is always and everywhere the secret confession as well as the undying monuments [sic] of its time.

Adolph Bernhard Marx, *The Music of the Nineteenth Century*, 1855

INTRODUCTION

With the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, many heard the death knell pronouncing loudly the demise of **Marxism** and its accompanying political and ideological structures. Down came the Berlin Wall, down came the Iron Curtain, and supposedly down came Marxism as an alternative form of government to capitalism and as an acceptable worldview. Many capitalists rejoiced because Marxism had apparently fallen. Seemingly, Marxists had only the glorious memories of the earlier decades of the twentieth century in which to rejoice—a time when Stalin ruled Russia, when Marxist theory dominated both English and American writings, and when college campuses in both the East and the West were led and taught by intellectuals who committed themselves to Marxist ideology. Many now believed that such ideology was finally dead!

Performing only a limited Internet search under the keyword "Marxism" results in a listing of more than 7 million sites with titles such as "Learning What Marxism Is About," "In Defence of Marxism," "Marxist Media Theory," "Women and Marxism," "Marxism, Philosophy, and Economics," "Living Marxism," and "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Marx's Philosophy," proving that Marxist theories and criticism are not only alive but also may even be prospering. Announcements for newly published texts advocating sympathy for and support of Marxist ideology in all academic disciplines appear regularly. College courses in Marxist political theory, sociology, literature, and literary theory abound. Perhaps the death knell for Marxism was struck prematurely.

What is it that fascinates intellectuals, politicians, and others about Marxism? Why did it not disappear with the death of communism in the East? The answer lies in some of the core principles of Marxist thought:

- Reality itself can be defined and understood.
- Society shapes our consciousness.
- Social and economic conditions directly influence how and what we believe and value.
- The world as we know it can be changed from a place of bigotry, hatred, and conflict due to class struggle into a classless society in which wealth, opportunity, and education are accessible for everyone.

By articulating a coherent, clear, and comprehensive worldview and a plan of action for implementation of its ideas, Marxism asserts that it provides answers to many of the complex questions about how life is and ought to be experienced while simultaneously challenging other ideologies to provide their pragmatic answers for these same concerns.

The selfsame problems that gave rise to Marxism exist today. Despite its glory decades of the early 1900s and its present-day seemingly embattled position, Marxism declares that it offers a comprehensive, positive view of human life and history that demonstrates how humanity can save itself from a meaningless life of alienation and despair. A worldview that affords a bright promise for the future and a transformation of society will not vanish with the knocking down of a wall or the collapse of the former USSR. Borrowing Mark Twain's phraseology, "Announcements of Marxism's death have been greatly exaggerated."

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Unlike many schools of literary criticism, Marxism did not begin as an alternative, theoretical approach to literary analysis. Before many twentieth-century writers and critics embraced the principles of Marxism and used these ideas in their theories and criticisms, Marxism had flourished in the nineteenth century as a pragmatic view of history that offered the working classes an opportunity to change their world and their individual lives. By providing both a philosophical system and a plan of action to initiate change in society, Marxism delineated a social, political, economic, and cultural understanding of the nature of reality, society, and the individual, not a literary theory. These and other similar ideas have become the basis of what we know today as socialism and communism.

Marxist literary theory has its roots in the nineteenth-century writings of the German social critic and philosopher Karl Heinrich Marx (1818–1883). Most critics believe that Marx himself said little about the relationship of his ideas to literary theory. Surprisingly, however, in the standard German edition of the collected works of Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), Marx's friend, compatriot, and oftentimes coauthor, and Marx, these critic-philosophers' comments on literature and art fill almost two volumes. Because neither volume clearly articulates a literary theory or methodology of criticism, Marxist literary criticism does not develop until the twentieth century. Using Marx's philosophical assumptions, twentieth-century critics formulated a variety of Marxist approaches to textual analysis that focus on the study of the relationship between a text and the society that reads it. At the core of all these diverse approaches are Marx and his philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality itself.

Marx and Engels articulate their views on the nature of reality in two works: *The German Ideology* (1845) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). In *The German Ideology*, they develop what has become known as **dialectical materialism**, a core belief of Marxism. Originally the word **dialectic** was used by the Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates to describe a form of logical argumentation involving conflicting ideas, propositions, or both. In the nineteenth century, the German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) redefines the term as a process whereby a **thesis** is presented, followed by a counterstatement, the **antithesis.** What develops from the ensuing debate is a new idea called the **synthesis.** Engels and Marx adapt Hegel's concept of synthesis in formulating dialectical materialism—that is, their understanding of how workers can lead a class war and establish a new social order. Both Engels and Marx assert that "consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness." A person's consciousness is not shaped by any spiritual entity; through daily living and interacting with others, humans define themselves. To Engels and Marx, our ideas and concepts about who we are and who we are becoming are fashioned in everyday interactions and in the language of real life. Such concepts are not derived from some Platonic essence or any other spiritual reality. In asserting their materialistic view of humanity, Engels and Marx argue that the economic means of production within a society—what they call the **base**—both engenders and controls all human institutions and ideologies—the **superstructure**—including all social and legal institutions, all political and educational systems, all religions, and all art. These ideologies and institutions develop as a direct result of the economic means of production, not the other way around.

Accordingly, all societies are progressing toward communism. Believing progress is reactionary or revolutionary, Marx and Engels assert that as a society progresses in its economic mode of production from a feudal system to a more market-based economy, the actual process for producing, distributing, and consuming goods becomes more complex. Thus, each individual's

work within the economic system becomes differentiated. This differentiation inevitably divides people into different social classes. Eventually, maintains Marx, the desires and expectations of the various social classes clash. Such clashes, or class conflicts, lead to a radical change in the economic base of society from a feudal system of power based on inherited wealth and status to a capitalist system based on the ownership of private property. This shift entails innumerable changes in a society's laws, customs, and religions. According to Marx and Engels, four historical periods developed as a result of these forces: feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism. Marx and Engels believe that socialism is not a true historical period but a transitional stage between capitalism and society's ultimate goal, communism. When society reaches this goal—what Marx and Engels call **the worker's paradise**—then and only then will benevolent self-rule be established.

In their coauthored text *The Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels maintain that the **capitalists,** or the **bourgeoisie,** have successfully enslaved the working class, or the **proletariat,** through economic policies and production of goods. The proletariat must revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of its economic and political power and place the ownership of all property in the hands of the government, who will then fairly distribute the people's wealth.

In a later work, *Das Kapital* (1867), authored by Marx himself, Marx enunciates the view of history that has become the basis for twentieth- and twenty-first-century Marxism, socialism, and communism: History and a corresponding understanding of people and their actions and beliefs are determined by economic conditions. Marx maintains that an intricate web of social relationships emerges when any group of people engage in the production of goods. A few, for example, will be the employers, but many more will be the employees. The employers (the bourgeoisie) have the economic power and thereby gain social and political control of their society. Eventually, this upper class will control the dominant discourse and formalize and articulate their beliefs, their values, and their arts to develop their ideology. Coined by the French rationalist philosopher Destutt de Tracy in the late eighteenth century, the word ***ideology*** referred to the "science of ideas" as opposed to metaphysics. Marx borrows this term and uses it pejoratively to refer to the bourgeoisie's ruling ideas, customs, and practices. Consciously and unconsciously, the ruling class will force its ideology on the proletariat, also called the **wage slaves.** In effect, the bourgeoisie will develop and control the superstructure. In such a system, the rich become richer, while the poor become poorer and more and more oppressed. Not surprisingly, the bourgeoisie's ideology effectively works to perpetuate the system upon which it was founded. By controlling material relationships, the bourgeoisie control a society's ideology. The average worker, however, assumes that the material relationships are the expression of the ruling ideas. Marx calls this negative sense of ideology **false consciousness,** which

describes the ways in which the dominant social class shapes and controls each person's self-definition and class consciousness. From Marx's point of view, the working classes fail to see who they really are in such a society: an exploited, oppressed class of people.

In a capitalist society, Marx believes that such an ideology leads to fragmentation and alienation of individuals, particularly those of the proletariat. As a direct result of division of labor within the capitalist society, workers no longer have contact with the entire process of producing, distributing, and consuming material goods. Instead, individuals are cut off from the full value of their work as well as from each other, each performing discrete functional roles assigned to them by the bourgeoisie. To rid society of this situation, Marx believes that the government must own all industries and control the economic production of a country to protect the people from the oppression of the bourgeoisie.

Taken together, *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* develop a theory of history, economics, politics, sociology, and metaphysics. In these writings, little is mentioned of literature, literary theory, or practical analysis of how to arrive at an interpretation of a text. The link between the Marxism of its founders and literary theory resides in Marx's concept of history and the sociological leanings of Marxism itself. Marx believed that the history of a people is directly based on the production of goods and the social relationships that develop from this situation. He also assumed that the totality of a people's experience—social interactions, employment, and other day-to-day activities—is directly responsible for the shaping and the development of an individual's personal consciousness. Marx, thus, highlights his belief that our place in society and our social interaction determine our consciousness or who we really are.

During Marx's lifetime, the acceptable literary approach to textual analysis was grounded in sociological assumptions similar to those held by Marx. Marx, then, had no difficulty accepting his literary peers' methodology (hermeneutics) for interpreting a text. Known today as the **traditional historical approach,** this methodology declares that critics should place a work in its historical setting, paying attention to the author's life, the time period in which the work was written, and the cultural milieu of both the text and the author—all of these concerns being related to sociological issues. To these criteria, Marx adds another: the economic means of production. This fourth factor addresses, for example, who decides what texts should be published, when a text should be published, or how a text is to be distributed. Such concerns require an understanding of the social forces at work at the time a text is written or is being interpreted. In addition, they force the critic to investigate the intricate web of social relationships not only within the text itself but also outside the text and within the world of the author. In adding this sociological dimension, Marxism expands the traditional, historical approach to literary analysis by dealing with sociological

issues that concern both the characters in a work of fiction as well as the authors and the readers. This added dimension, Marx believed, links literature and society and shows how literature reflects society and how literary texts can reveal truths about our social interactions.

Russia and Marxism

Thanks to Georgy V. Plekhanov's Russian translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx's theories soon gained wide exposure and prominence. Plekhanov (1857–1918), author of such works as *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (1908) and *Art and Social Life* (1912), is the founder of the Russian Social Democratic Party and is considered by some scholars to be the founder of Russian Marxism. In his writings, Plekhanov argues that great historical figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte appear in history only when an intricate web of social conditions coalesce, directly facilitating their development. Every gifted person who affects society is a product of such social relations. Artists, asserts Plekhanov, best serve society and promote social betterment when their art and societal concerns intersect. For Plekhanov, the then-prospering "art for art's sake" movement signaled a disturbing rift between artists and their social environment. Emphasizing an artist's important role in society, Russian Marxism and the Russian leadership at the beginning of the twentieth century insisted that writers should also play a political role. Embracing Marx's theories, Russia became the first country to promote Marxist principles as both aesthetic and literary guidelines.

Even before the Russian Revolution of 1917, Communist Party leaders insisted that literature promote the standards set forth by the party. For example, in 1905, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) wrote *Party Organization and Party Literature,* a work in which he directly links good literature with the working-class movement. In this work, Lenin claims that literature "must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, a 'cog and screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism." Lenin's work defends all kinds of literature, holding to the supposition that something can be gleaned from any kind of writing. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Lenin amends his literary theory and criticism, arguing that the party could not accept or support literary works that blatantly defied established party policies.

Soon after the Russian Revolution, the revolutionary Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) authored *Literature and Revolution* (1924), the first of his many pivotal texts. Trotsky is considered the founder of Marxist literary criticism. Advocating a tolerance for open, critical dialogue, Trotsky contends that the content of a literary work need not be revolutionary. To force all poets to write about only factory chimneys or revolts against capitalism, he believed, was absurd. The party, declares Trotsky, can offer direct leadership in many areas, but not all. The party's leadership in art, he claimed, must be indirect, helping to protect but not dominating it. Furthermore, the party must give

what Trotsky called "its confidence" to those nonparty writers—whom he called "literary fellow-travelers"—who are sympathetic to the revolution.

The Soviet Union's next political leader, Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), was not as liberal as Lenin or Trotsky in his aesthetic judgments. In 1927, Stalin established the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) to guard against liberal cultural tendencies. This group, however, proved to be too tolerant for Stalin. Only six years later, in 1932, Stalin abolished all artists' unions and associations, and established the Soviet Writers' Union, a group that he himself headed. The union decreed that all literature must glorify party actions and decisions. In addition, literature must exhibit revolutionary progress and teach the spirit of socialism that revolves around Soviet heroes. Such aesthetic commandments quickly stifled many Russian writers because the union allowed only "politically correct" works to be published. Not surprisingly, Stalin soon banished Trotsky, with the result that increasingly most Russian critics and writers succumbed to Stalin's guidelines rather than follow Trotsky's public (and dangerous) example. It was left to critics outside Russia to explore and develop other Marxist approaches to literary criticism.

Georg Lukács

The first major branch of Marxist theory to appear outside Russia was developed by the Hungarian Georg Lukács (1885–1971). Lukács and his followers borrowed and amended the techniques of Russian Formalism, believing that a detailed analysis of symbols, images, and other literary devices within a text would reveal class conflict and expose the direct relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. Known as **reflection theory,** this approach to literary analysis declares that a text directly reflects a society's consciousness. Reflection theorists such as Lukács are necessarily didactic, emphasizing the negative effects of capitalism such as alienation. Known today as **vulgar Marxism,** reflectionists support a form of Marxism in which a one-way relationship exists between the base and the superstructure. For these theorists, literature is part of the superstructure and directly reflects the economic base. By giving a text a close reading, these critics believe they can reveal the reality of the text and the author's **Weltanschauung,** or worldview. It is the critic's task to show how the characters within the text are typical of their historical, socioeconomic setting and the author's worldview.

The Frankfurt School

Closely allied to Lukács and reflection theory, another group of theorists emerged in Germany, **the Frankfurt school,** a neo-Marxist group devoted to developing Western Marxist principles. Included in this group are Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), Walter Benjamin

(1892–1940), and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), among others. Agreeing with Lukács that literature reveals a culture's alienation and fragmentation, the Frankfurt school critics assert that a text is like any other commodity produced by capitalism. The **market**—that is, how well a commodity sells—ultimately determines which texts are published and when. There can exist, then, no purely aesthetic activity that relates directly to human consciousness. That a text reveals a culture's fragmentation, not its wholeness, is for Benjamin and others a useful bit of knowledge for promoting socialist ideals. Having stripped literature of what Benjamin calls its "quasi-religious aura," a Frankfurt school critic is able to resist the bourgeois ideology embedded within a text and avoids mindlessly acquiescing to the inane images, thinking, and desires depicted in some literary works.

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), a close friend of Benjamin's, applies this new way of thinking directly to the theater. According to Brecht, dramatists use the theater to express their ideas, but the theater actually controls them. Instead of blindly accepting bourgeois conventionality as established through dramatic conventions, dramatists must revolt and seize the modes of production. Applying this principle to what became known as the **epic theater,** Brecht advocates an abandonment of the Aristotelian premise of unity of time, place, and action, including the assumption that the audience should be made to believe that what they are seeing is real. During the drama's performance, Brecht seeks to abolish the audience's normal expectations, hoping to create what he calls the **alienation effect.** For instance, in his dramas he frequently interrupts the play with a direct appeal to the audience via a song or speech to keep the audience constantly aware of the moral and social issues to which they are being exposed in the drama. Disavowing Aristotle's concept of catharsis, Brecht argues that the audience must be forced into action and into making decisions, not allowed to revel in emotions. In the hands of Brecht, the epic theater becomes a tool for exposing the bourgeois ideology that had permeated the arts.

Antonio Gramsci

Unlike Georg Lukács and his followers, who assert that the superstructure reflects the economic base, the Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) declares that a complex relationship exists between the base and the superstructure. How, Gramsci asks, is the bourgeoisie able to control and maintain its dominance over the proletariat? His answer: the bourgeoisie establish and maintain what he calls **hegemony**—that is, the assumptions, values and meanings that shape meaning and define reality for the majority of people in a given culture. Because the bourgeoisie actually control the economic base and establish all the elements that comprise the superstructure—music, literature, art, and so forth—they gain the spontaneous accolades of the working class. The working

people themselves give their consent to the bourgeoisie and adopt bourgeois values and beliefs. As sustainers of the economic base, the dominant class enjoys the prestige of the masses and controls the ideology—a term often used synonymously with hegemony—that shapes individual consciousness. This shaping of a people's ideologies is, according to Gramsci, a kind of deception whereby the majority of people forget or abandon their own interests and desires and accept the dominant values and beliefs as their own.

If literature, however, is only a part of the superstructure, then all literature actually concerns itself with the bourgeoisie. In effect, literature becomes a tool of the privileged class, preventing its use in further Marxist revolutions. Why write and study literature if it is only a reflection of the superstructure, which is, in itself, the reflection of bourgeois ideas established in the economic base? Although Gramsci ponders such questions, it is one of his followers who provides the answer.

Louis Althusser

In seeking an answer to the question of why anyone should write and study literature, Louis Althusser (1918–1990) rejects a basic assumption of reflection theory: namely, that the superstructure directly reflects the base. His answer, known today as **production theory,** asserts that literature should not be strictly relegated to the superstructure. In his works, especially *For Marx* (1965) and *Reading "Capital"* (1970), Althusser argues that the superstructure can and does influence the base. Art, then, can and does inspire revolution.

Althusser believes that the dominant hegemony, or prevailing ideology, forms the attitudes of people through a process he calls **interpellation** or **hailing the subject,** which is ideology's power to give individuals identity by the structures and prevailing forces of society. A society's worldview is craftily shaped by a complex network of messages sent to each individual through the elements contained in the superstructure, including the arts. Although the dominant class can use military and police force to repress the working class to maintain its dominance and achieve interpellation, it more frequently than not chooses to use the **ideological state apparatus,** or the hegemony. In effect, it is the dominant class's hegemony that prevents the insurrection of the working class.

The dominant class's hegemony is never complete. Such incompleteness suggests that alternative hegemonies exist and are competing with the dominant hegemony for supremacy. If the dominant class's interpellation or hailing the subject fails, then another hegemony can triumph and revolution can occur. Such a revolution can begin if working-class people write their own literature—dramas, poems, and novels—compose their own music, and paint their own paintings. If they do so, the working class can establish an alternate hegemony to challenge the bourgeoisie's hegemony. It is not

through guns or battles or the shedding of blood, but through artistic expression of their own cultural activities that the working classes can successfully revolt against and usurp the hegemony of the dominant class.

After Althusser, a number of post-Althusserian critics, including Pierre Macherey and Raymond Williams, develop various neo-Marxist concepts and theories. A former student of Althusser, Pierre Macherey (1938–) is a pioneer French Marxist critic, developing Marxist theories by using the concepts of poststructuralism. In his most significant work, *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), Macherey challenges the traditional way readers read texts. Most readers consider a text as an isolated, factual entity to be read, described, and critiqued through the methodologies of literary criticism. Macherey declares that reading is actually a form of production and produces many meanings, not simply one. A gap exists, he asserts, between what we as readers and critics say about a text and what the work itself is saying, each being separate discourses. Furthermore, the author's text is not precisely the text being explicated by the critic. What authors mean to say and what they actually write and say are different. The various meanings of their texts continuously escape writers, for they themselves do not recognize the multiple ideologies at work in themselves and in their texts. What Macherey calls an **attentive reading** of texts reveals these ideologies operating in any given text, ideologies that often work directly against what authors assume they are writing.

Another post-Althusserian Marxist critic, Raymond Williams (1921–1988) develops Marxist ideology and theory in **cultural studies,** a late twentieth-century school of criticism whose name was not yet coined nor its tenets codified when Williams began his innovative criticism. In works such as the post–World War II journal *Politics and Letters* and his critique of literary traditions and forms commencing with the British Romantics to mid-twentieth-century literature in *Culture and Society 1780–1950,* Williams evidences his chief interest: the relationship between ideology and culture. Literature and all cultural forms are intricately intertwined. Authorial ideology, cultural and social institutions, and aesthetic forms as related to the different genres are all manifestly involved in a complex series of relationships that shape and develop each other. Emphasizing the symbolic nature of these relationships, Williams demonstrates how culture and the arts weave their way into the lived experience of a person's everyday life.

MARXIST THEORISTS TODAY

Since the 1960s, American literary critic Fredric Jameson (1934–) and British critic Terry Eagleton (1943–) have dominated Marxist criticism. Jameson develops **dialectical criticism.** In *Marxism and Form* (1971), a text revered by American Marxists, Jameson asserts that all critics must be aware of their own

ideology when analyzing a text, possessing what he calls **dialectical self-awareness.** In a later work, *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson merges psychoanalytic and Marxist theories. Borrowing Freud's idea of a repressed unconscious, Jameson discovers a **political unconscious,** the repressed conditions of exploitation and oppression. The function of literary analysis, Jameson believes, is to uncover the political unconscious present in a text.

In 1991 Jameson continues Marxist theory and criticism's evolution with the publication of *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* In this work, Jameson argues that cultural logic itself encodes in every object in society the classical Marxist dialectic of base and superstructure. To read and understand Jameson's text is no easy task because his complex and sometimes abstruse sentence structure embodies his postmodern, critical methodology, one that attempts through a Marxist lens to reconfigure present-day political and world systems.

Perhaps the most influential contemporary Marxist critic is the British scholar Terry Eagleton (1943–), author of numerous works, including *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2008), and *On Evil* (2010). Believing that literature is neither a product of pure inspiration nor the product of the author's feelings, Eagleton holds that literature is a product of an ideology, which is itself a product of history. This ideology is a result of the actual social interactions that occur between people in definite times and locations. One of the critic's tasks is to reconstruct an author's ideology and his or her ideological milieu.

Throughout his long and prestigious career, Eagleton, like most critics, develops, changes, and redirects his own literary theory. At times he employs a variety of critical approaches to texts, including the scientific approach of Louis Althusser, the psychoanalytic ideas of Lacan, and the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida. All his diverse approaches to textual analyses attack bourgeois hegemony and advocate revolution against its values.

From the mid-1970s to the present, Marxism continues to challenge what it deems the bourgeois concerns of its literary counterparts through the voices of a variety of Marxist critics, including Renée Balibar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Toril Moi, and Donna Landry. Critical movements and theories such as structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, New Historicism, cultural materialism, and postcolonialism have all examined Marxism's basic tenets and share some of its social, political, and revolutionary nature. Like Marxism, these contemporary schools of criticism want to change the way we think about literature and life. Present-day Marxism borrows from these contemporary schools of criticism and has now evolved into an array of differing theories, so much so that there no longer exists a single school of Marxist thought. Common to all these Marxist positions, however, is the assumption that Marx, no matter how he is interpreted, believes that change for the good in society is possible if we will but stop and examine our culture through the eyes of its methods of economic production.

ASSUMPTIONS

Marxism is not primarily a literary theory that can be used to interpret texts. Unlike other schools of criticism, it is a cultural theory that embodies a set of social, economic, and political ideas that its followers believe will enable them to interpret and, more important, change their world. Although a variety of Marxist theories exist, most Marxists posit a few core ideas.

Ultimate reality, declares Marxism, is material, not spiritual. Our existence precedes our consciousness or our essence. What we know is that human beings exist and live in social groups. All our actions and responses to such activities as eating, working, and playing are related in some way to our culture and society. In order to understand ourselves and our world, we must first acknowledge the interrelatedness of all our actions. If, for example, we want to know who we are and how we should live, we must stop trying to find answers by looking solely to religion or philosophy and begin by examining all aspects of our daily activities within our own culture. Upon examining our daily routines, including our beliefs and values, we will discover that it is our cultural and our social circumstances that determine who we are. What we believe, what we value, and even what we think are a direct result of our culture and our society, not our religion, our supposed philosophy of life, or our worldview.

Nothing, Marxism asserts, exists in isolation, including our social life. Everything exists in a dynamic historical process, what Engels and Marx call relations or **Verhältnisse,** that is, nothing exists in isolation or just "is." Everything is interrelated and exists in a dynamic relationship (**Vermittlung**) with a variety of social forces. For example, when we speak about the "worker," we must also speak about the employer, economics, social class, social conflict, morality, values, and a host of other concerns. Everything, claims Marxism, is in a state of becoming, of being transformed. Nothing exists in static isolation.

When we examine our society, declares Marxism, we discover that its structure is built on a series of ongoing conflicts between social classes. The chief reason for these conflicts is the varying ways the members of society work and use their economic resources. The methods of economic production and the social relationships they engender form the economic structure of society, the base. In America, for example, the capitalists exploit the working classes, determining for them their salaries and their working conditions, among many other elements of their lives. From this base arises the superstructure, or a multitude of social and legal institutions, political and educational systems, religious beliefs, values, and a body of art and literature that the one dominant, social class (e.g., the capitalists in America) uses to keep in check members of the working classes.

The exact relationship between the base and the superstructure, however, is not easily defined. Some Marxists believe that the base directly affects the

superstructure and determines its existence. Other Marxists declare that the elements in the superstructure have a reality of their own, with each element affecting the other elements of the superstructure while simultaneously affecting the base. Whatever the position held by Marxist theorists, most agree that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is a complex one and will continue to remain a contentious point in Marxist criticism.

The relationship between the base and the superstructure becomes clearer when we consider the capitalistic United States. Marxism maintains that in the United States the capitalists hold the economic purse strings, and because they do, they control the base, making the capitalists the center of power. The capitalists decree what beliefs are acceptable, what values are to be held, and what laws are to be formed. In other words, the capitalists, not the working classes, control society's ideology (its hegemony) and its social consciousness. It is they who determine the acceptable standards of behavior and thoughts in their society.

Consciously and unconsciously, this social elite inevitably forces its ideas on the working classes. Almost without their knowing it, the working classes have become trapped in an economic system that decrees how much money they will earn, when they will take vacations, how they will spend their leisure time, what entertainment they will enjoy, and even what they believe concerning the nature of humanity itself.

Marxism addresses its rallying cry to the working classes. All working peoples can free themselves from the chains of social, economic, and political oppression if they will recognize that they are presently not free agents, but individuals controlled by an intricate social web dominated by a self-declared, self-empowered, and self-perpetuating social elite.

Because this social elite shapes a society's superstructure and its ideology, the bourgeoisie control its literature because literature is one of the many elements contained within the superstructure. From this perspective, literature, like any other element of the superstructure, becomes involved in a social process whereby the bourgeoisie indoctrinate the working classes with their self-proclaimed, acceptable ideology as reflected in bourgeois literature. What becomes natural and acceptable behavior in society is now pictured in its literature and, in essence, controlled by the bourgeoisie, who also control the economic means of production.

Because literature is part of a society's superstructure, its relationship to the other elements of the superstructure and the base becomes the central focus in varying Marxist literary theories. If, for example, a Marxist holds to the reflection theory, then such a theorist posits that the economic base directly determines the literature. For this critic, literature will mirror the economic base. On the other hand, if a Marxist theorist believes that elements of the superstructure have realities of their own and affect each other and also affect the base, a text may be responsible for altering not only other elements within the superstructure but also the base. Even the critics who give allegiance to this

position hold differing opinions concerning the definition of a text and its relationship to other elements of the superstructure and to the base.

Although Marxists assert that a text must be interpreted in light of its culture, how they define a text and its weblike social relationships provides us with an array of Marxist literary theories and differing methods of analyses. There exists, then, not one Marxist theory of literature, but many, each endeavoring to change society.

METHODOLOGY

As an approach to literary analysis, Marxism's methodology is a dynamic process that maintains that a proper critique (*proper* defined as that which agrees with socialistic or Marxist beliefs) of a text cannot exist in isolation from the cultural situation in which the text evolved. Necessarily, Marxists argue, the study of literature and the study of society are intricately bound. Such a relationship demands that a Marxist approach to texts must deal with more than the conventional literary themes, matters of style, plot, or characterization, and the usual emphasis on figures of speech and other literary devices used by other approaches to literary analysis. Marxism claims that it moves beyond these literary elements and uncovers the author's world and his or her worldview. By placing the text in its historical context and by analyzing the author's view of life, Marxist critics arrive at one of their chief concerns: ideology. The ideology expressed by the author, as evidenced through his or her fictional world, and how this ideology interacts with the reader's personal ideology are what interests these critics. Studying the literary or aesthetic qualities of a text must include the dynamic relationship of that text to history and the economic means of production and consumption that helped create the text and the ideologies of the author and the readers.

This kind of an ideological and political investigation exposes class conflict, revealing the dominant class and its accompanying ideology being imposed either consciously or unconsciously upon the proletariat. It also reveals the workers' detachment not only from that which they produce but also from society and from each other, a process called alienation, revealing what Marxists dub **fragmentation,** a fractured and fragmented society. The task of the critic is to uncover and denounce this antiproletariat ideology and show how such an ideology entraps the working classes and oppresses them in every area of their lives. Most important, through such an analysis Marxist critics wish to reveal to the working classes how they may end their oppression by the bourgeoisie through a commitment to socialism.

A Marxist critic may begin such an analysis by elucidating how an author's text reflects the writer's ideology through an examination of the

fictional world's characters, settings, society, or any other aspect of the text. From this starting point, the critic may launch an investigation into that particular author's social class and its effects on the author's society. Or the critic may choose to begin by examining the history and the culture of the times reflected in the text and how the author either correctly or incorrectly pictures this historical period.

Whatever method the critic chooses, a Marxist approach exposes the dominant class, demonstrates how the bourgeoisie's ideology controls and oppresses the working class, and highlights those elements of society most affected by such oppression. Such an analysis, hopes the Marxist critic, will lead to action, social change, revolution, and the eventual rise of socialism.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

To gain a working understanding of a Marxist approach to literary analysis, read carefully Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" and ask the following questions concerning this text. In so doing, you will see the Marxist concerns that are evidenced or simply ignored in the text by its author. In addition, the following questions will provide you with a working framework for a close analysis of any text through the lens of Marxism and for demonstrating Marxism's concern for the interactive relationship between literature and society.

- What class structures are established in the text?
- What characters or groups control the economic means of production?
- What class conflicts are exhibited?
- What characters are oppressed, and to what social classes do they belong?
- What characters are the oppressors?
- What is the hegemony established in the text?
- What social conflicts are ignored? Highlighted?
- Who represents the status quo?
- Does the work suggest a solution to society's class conflicts?
- What is the dominant ideology revealed in the text?
- Did the main character support or defy the dominant ideology?
- Is the narrator a member of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat?
- Whose story gets told in the text? Whose story does not get told?
- When and where was the text published?
- Is the author's stated intention for writing the work known or public?
- What were the economic issues surrounding the publication of the text?
- Who is the audience?
- Who is the ideal reader? Virtual reader? Real reader?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

Like psychoanalytical and feminist criticism, Marxist criticism concerns itself not only with what a text says but also with what it does not say. According to Terry Eagleton, one of Marxism's most prominent contemporary critics, the task of Marxist criticism "is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making about which it is necessarily silent." Texts, like all elements of social life, cannot be analyzed in isolation because they exist as part of a complex web of social forces and structures, not isolated entities. Texts must be understood as part of the dynamic, ever-evolving historical processes of social relations. Included within these social relations are the ongoing, ever-present societal conflicts and clashes, the struggles between the have-nots and the haves. Maintaining their positions of power by controlling a society's hegemony and, thereby, creating false consciousness, capitalists suppress the working classes, coercing them to accept the capitalists' vision of reality. Literary criticism's objective is to reveal the class struggle evidenced in texts either through what a text says or by its silence, the silence of oppression. From a Marxist perspective, all texts are ideological, and the ideologies contained within them must be exposed to challenge the prevailing social order.

Although Marxism's internal consistency and the sheer breadth of its critique are impressive, critics of Marxist theories abound. Whereas Marx and his adherents call their beliefs a theory and a form of criticism, others dub it a philosophy of life that codifies a world view that is quasi-religious. Such a worldview, say some critics, demands a total commitment and devotion as does any religion. But this religion, they assert, is devoid of God, for it is thoroughly atheistic. The god of this religion is found in the mirror and in humankind's imagination. Rejecting spiritual values, the concept of the soul, immortality, and a belief in God, this religion, which goes under the name of theory and criticism, is materialistic. Ultimately, say these critics, an acceptance of Marxist principles denies human worth. Such an all-encompassing worldview, they argue, will lead to a form of totalitarianism that rests on a subjective understanding of reality, not objective, absolute truths.

Other critics assert that Marxist economic theory is simplistic and cannot provide either the correct lens or the correct solution for contemporary societies' economic ills. Clinging to its basic tenets, orthodox Marxism ignores the multifaceted nature of societies that contain a multiplicity of social groups, each possessing its own understanding of human nature and social institutions. And above all, Marxism either dismisses or simply ignores personal freedom, emphasizing in its place economic concerns.

However an individual critic views Marxism, its theories and criticisms continue to develop and shape our social and cultural institutions.

9

Cultural Poetics or New Historicism

New Historicism is not a repeatable methodology or a literary critical program . . . so we sincerely hope you will not be able to say what it all adds up to; if you could, we would have failed.

Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, *Practicing New Historicism*

INTRODUCTION

During the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, New Criticism was the dominant approach to literary analysis. At this time, René Wellek and Austin Warren's text *Theory of Literature* (1942) became the bible of hermeneutics, focusing the interpretive process on the text itself rather than on historical, authorial, or reader concerns.

A NEW-CRITICAL LECTURE

During this high tide of New Criticism, it would have been common to hear a college lecture like the following in a literature classroom:

> Today, class, we will review what we have learned about Elizabethan beliefs from our last lecture so we can apply this knowledge to our understanding of Act I of Shakespeare's *King Lear.* As you remember, the Elizabethans believed in the interconnectedness of all life. Having created everything, God imposed on creation a cosmic order. At all costs, this cosmic order was not to be upset. Any element of the created universe that portended change, such as a violent storm, eclipses of the sun or moon, or even disobedient children within the family structure, suggested chaos that could lead to anarchy and the destruction of the earth itself. Nothing must break any link in this Great Chain of Being, the name given to this created cosmic order. With God and the angels in

their place, with the king governing his obedient people in their places, and the animals being subdued and utilized by humankind in theirs, all would be right in the world and operate as ordained by God.

Having gained an understanding of the Elizabethan worldview, let's turn to Act I, Scene ii, lines 101–12 of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. You will recall that in this scene Edmund, the illegitimate son of the Duke of Gloucester, has persuaded the Duke that Edgar, the Duke's legitimate son and heir to the dukedom, wants his father dead so he may inherit the Duke's title, lands, and wealth. Believing his natural son has betrayed both Edmund (Edgar's half brother) and himself, the Duke, says, "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide . . ."

What we see in these lines is the Elizabethan worldview in operation. The Duke believes in the interrelatedness of the created cosmic order and the concept of the Great Chain of Being. The significance of the eclipses of the sun and moon rests in their representing change and chaos. Because the Duke believes that the macrocosm (the universe) directly affects the microcosm (the world of humanity on earth), he blames these natural occurrences (the eclipses) for interfering in familial relationships and destroying love between brothers, between father and daughters (King Lear having already banished his most beloved daughter, Cordelia), and between king and servant (Kent, King Lear's loyal courtier also having being expelled from the kingdom). The Duke views his world through the lens of a coherent Renaissance worldview.

OLD HISTORICISM

In such a Formalist lecture, the professor's method of literary analysis represents an example of both New Criticism and what is known today as the "old historicism." In this methodology, history serves as a background to literature. Of primary importance is the text, the art object itself. The historical background of the text is only secondarily important because it is the aesthetic object, the text, that mirrors the history of its times. The historical context serves only to shed light on the object of primary concern, the text.

Underlying this methodology is a view of history that declares that history, as written, is an accurate view of what really occurred. This view assumes that historians can write objectively about any given historical time period, person, event, or text and are able to definitively state the objective truth about that person, era, occurrence, or text. Through various means of historical analyses, historians discover the mindset, the worldview, or the beliefs of any group of people. For example, when the professor in our hypothetical lecture states the beliefs of the Elizabethans at the beginning of the lecture, he or she is articulating the Elizabethan worldview—the unified set of presuppositions or assumptions that all Elizabethans supposedly held

concerning the makeup of their world. By applying these assertions to the Elizabethan text *King Lear*, the professor believes he or she can formulate a more accurate interpretation of the drama than if the teacher did not know the play's historical context.

THE NEW HISTORICISM

That historians can articulate a unified and internally consistent worldview of any given people, country, or era and can reconstruct an accurate and objective picture of any historical event are key assumptions that **Cultural Poetics** or **New Historicism** challenges. Appearing as an alternate approach to textual interpretation in the 1970s and early 1980s, Cultural Poetics—often called New Historicism in America and **cultural materialism** in Great Britain—declares that all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past. History, asserts Cultural Poetics, can never provide us with *the* objective truth or give us a totally accurate picture of past events, persons, or eras nor the worldview of a group of people. Disavowing the old historicism's autonomous view of history, Cultural Poetics asserts that history is one of many discourses, or ways of seeing and thinking about the world. By highlighting and viewing history as one of many equally important discourses such as sociology and politics and by closely examining how all discourses (including that of textual analysis) affect a text's interpretation, Cultural Poetics claims that it provides its adherents with a practice of literary analysis that

- highlights the interrelatedness of all human activities.
- admits its own prejudices.
- gives a more complete understanding of a text than does the old historicism and other interpretive approaches.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

New Historicism finds its voice and historical roots in Renaissance scholarship. Such scholarship is especially fertile ground for its development because the Renaissance saw various shifts in Western epistemological assumptions. Marked by historical self-consciousness, this historical era offered New Historicism a repository of cultural dialogue about the relationship between history and literature. The English Renaissance's leading literary spokesperson, Shakespeare, blazed an innovative trail across the disciplines of history, literature, and politics, often blurring the distinctions among them. Perhaps the clearly delineated lines between history and literature are not so distinct

after all, decree the New Historicists. In literature can be found history and in history, much literature. Like Shakespeare, the emerging New Historicists seized on the idea that literature may not be that different from other cultural discourses or "voices," each voice contributing to and affecting the other discourses.

Although no one can give a comprehensive, uncontestable history of New Historicism's development, its distinctively American form begins to germinate in the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially with the publication of two pivotal works of Renaissance scholarship in 1980: Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* and Louis Montrose's essay "'Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes' and the Pastoral of Power." These works begin to clarify the concerns of Cultural Poetics that would develop through the 1980s and 1990s. Two years later, in 1982, Cultural Poetics coalesced into a critical "site" of literary theory with the publication of a new journal, *Genre*, edited by Greenblatt. In the journal's introduction to a collection of Renaissance essays, Greenblatt announced that a "new historicism" had emerged, thereby proclaiming that New Historicism had become a legitimate and respectable "voice" in the ongoing dialogue of literary theory.

The following year, 1983, Greenblatt and Svetlana Aplers, along with an editorial board based at the University of California at Berkeley, launched another journal, *Representations*, which soon became the chief publication for New Historicist scholars. In the inaugural issue, D. A. Miller, a leading New Historicist, published his essay "Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family and *Bleak House*." In this essay, he articulates two of New Historicism's major tenets: (1) Literary texts are embedded in social and political discourses, and (2) all literary texts are vehicles of power. In the next issue of *Representations*, another leading New Historicist, Louis A. Montrose, published his essay "Shaping Fantasies," reiterating and expanding on Miller's declaration that literary texts are seats of power. The same year *Representations* was issued, another major New Historical text, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries*, authored by Jonathan Goldberg, declared that different historical eras develop different "modes of power," with each epoch viewing reality differently, including conflicting concepts of truth.

Wishing to remain open to differing politics, theories, and ideologies, New Historicists share a similar set of concerns rather than a codified theory or school of criticism. Of key interest is their shared view that from the mid-1800s to the middle of the twentieth century, historical methods of literary analysis were erroneous. During this time, many scholars believed that history served as background information for textual analysis and that historians were objectively able to reproduce any historical period and state "how it really was." New Historicism refutes these assumptions of "old historicism" and formulates its own readings of history and interpretive analysis. Literature, it decrees, should be read in relation to culture, history, society, and

other factors that help determine a text's meaning. In 1987, Greenblatt published a pivotal essay in the ongoing development of New Historicism titled "Toward a Poetics of Culture." This essay highlights how New Historicists read and view literature in relation to culture and society. Using the ideas of two poststructuralist critics—Jean-François Lyotard and Frederic Jameson—Greenblatt asserts that art and society are interrelated, but no scholar can use one and only one theoretical stance (or school of criticism) to disentangle this complex web of interrelationships. New Historicism should, therefore, be viewed as a reading practice, says Greenblatt, not a school of criticism. When texts and their relationship to society are investigated, declares Greenblatt, an array of oftentimes conflicting social and literary patterns evolve that demonstrate how art affects society and how society affects art. In 1988, Greenblatt expands these ideas in his text *Shakespearean Negotiations*, in which he refers to his reading practice as "Cultural Poetics" rather than New Historicism, and for all practical purposes renames this site of literary theory. *Cultural Poetics*, he states, is a term that coalesces the concerns of this developing theoretical site better than does the term *New Historicism*.

According to Greenblatt and like-minded scholars, Cultural Poetics was shaped by the institutional character of American literary criticism, culture, and politics of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. In the 1960s, the dominating influence in literary criticism was New Criticism, with its accompanying theoretical assumptions and practical methodology. For example, during Greenblatt's graduate studies at Yale—a place he has since called the cathedral of High Church New Criticism—Greenblatt mastered New Critical principles. At Yale, New Critical scholars, writers, and critics such as T. S. Eliot, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren were revered, and their methodology was widely practiced.

Aided early in its development by the publication and wide use of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's textbook *Understanding Poetry* (1938), New Criticism presented scholars and teachers with a workable and teachable methodology for interpreting texts. From a theoretical perspective, New Criticism regards a literary text as an artifact with an existence of its own, independent of and not necessarily related to its author, its readers, the historical time it depicts, or the historical period in which it was written. A text's meaning emerges when readers scrutinize the text alone. According to the New Critics, such a close scrutiny results in perceiving a text as an organic whole, wherein all of its parts fit together and support one overarching theme. For the New Critics, a literary text is highly structured and contains its meaning within itself. To a critic-reader who examines the text on its own terms by applying a rigorous and systematic methodology, the text will reveal its meaning. Such an analysis, say the New Critics, is particularly rewarding because literature offers us a unique kind of knowledge and presents us with the deepest truths related to humanity, truths that science is unable to disclose.

What New Criticism did not provide for Greenblatt and other critics was an attempt to understand literature from a historical perspective. In a New Critical analysis, the text was what mattered, not its historical context. Considerations that any given text may be the result of historical phenomena were devalued or silenced. In addition, Greenblatt believed that questions concerning the nature and definition of literature were not encouraged. He and other critics wanted to discuss how literature was and is formed, whose interest it serves, and what the term *literature* really means. Do contemporary issues and the cultural milieu of the times operate together to create literature, they wondered, or is literature an art form that will always be with us?

Cultural Poetics develops as a result of New Criticism's dominance of literary criticism and its response, or lack thereof, to questions concerning the nature, the definition, and the function of literature. While Greenblatt was asking a different set of literary questions, a variety of New Critical theories and theorists appeared on the literary scene. Deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis began to challenge the assumptions of New Criticism. Rejecting New Criticism's claim that the meaning of a text can be found mainly in the text, poststructural theorists developed a variety of theoretical positions about the nature of the reading process, the part the reader plays in that process, and the definition of a text or the actual work of art. Among these literary voices arose Cultural Poetics.

After reading sociological and cultural studies authored by Michel Foucault and other poststructuralists, Greenblatt and associates both admired and emulated Foucault's tireless questioning of the nature of literature, history, culture, and society. Like Foucault, they refused to accept the traditional, well-worn answers. From the Marxist scholars—Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, and others—they also learned that history is shaped by the people who live it, and they accepted the Marxist idea of the interconnectedness of all life. Like Marx himself, Greenblatt and his like-minded peers believed that what we do with our hands and how we make our money do affect how and what we think. In addition, they devised a new definition of *culture,* embracing Williams's belief that culture is the combined forms of human experience expressed in art, politics, literature, and a host of other elements, each involved in a complex, interrelational struggle for power.

But unlike many of the poststructuralist theories—especially deconstruction—Cultural Poetics struggles to find a way out of undecidability, or aporia, about the nature of reality and the interpretation of a text. Although not denying that many factors affect the writing, the production, and the publication of texts, New Historicists seek to move beyond undecidability rather than simply assert that a text has many possible meanings. In so doing, they challenge the assumptions of the old historicism, which presupposed historians could actually write an objective history of any situation. In

addition, they redefine the meaning of a text and assert that all critics must acknowledge and openly declare their own biases.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, critics such as Catherine Gallagher, Jonathan Dollimore, Jerome McGann, and Greenblatt, to name a few, voiced their concerns that the study of literature and of its relationship to history has been too narrow. Viewing a text as culture in action, these critics blur the distinction between an artistic production and any other kind of social production or event. They want us to see that the publication of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" is a political act, while also noting that the ceremonies surrounding the inauguration of a U.S. president are an aesthetic event, with all the trappings of symbolism and structure found in a poem. These and similar examples that highlight their critical practices can be found in their chief public voice, the journal *Representations*.

It would be invalid to assume that consensus exists among those who espouse the concerns of Cultural Poetics. Like many other approaches of textual analysis, Cultural Poetics is best understood as a practice of literary interpretation that is still in process, one that is continually redefining and fine-tuning its purposes, its philosophy, and its practices while gaining new followers. Some of these adherents express confidence in Cultural Poetics as already being an organized critical school, while others see it as an elusive, abstract method of interpretation. For the sake of clarity, we will somewhat arbitrarily divide Cultural Poetics into two main branches: cultural materialism and New Historicism. Members of either group, however, continue to

- call for a reawakening of our historical consciousness.
- declare that history and literature must be seen as disciplines to be analyzed together.
- place all texts in their appropriate contexts.
- believe that while we are researching and learning about different societies that provide the historical context for various texts, we are simultaneously learning about ourselves, our own habits, and our own beliefs.

CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Cultural materialism, the British branch of Cultural Poetics, is Marxist in its theories and political and cultural in its aims. It finds its ideological roots in the writings of Marxist critics such as Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams. Believing that literature can serve as an agent of change, cultural materialists declare that a culture's hegemony is unstable. For literature to produce change, a critic must read the works of the established canon "against the grain," becoming "resisting readers." By so doing, critics expose the political unconscious of texts and debunk the social and political myths created by the bourgeoisie.

NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism is the name given to the American branch of Cultural Poetics. One of its originating voices, Stephen Greenblatt, along with many other scholars, believes that one's culture permeates both texts and critics. Because all of society is intricately interwoven, so are critics and texts, both to each other and in and to the culture in which they live and in which the texts are produced. Because all critics are influenced by their culture, New Historicists believe that none of us can escape public and private cultural influences. Each critic will formulate a unique interpretation for any given text. Like its British counterpart, New Historicism continues to be redefined and fine-tuned by its many practitioners, oftentimes providing conflicting and contradictory approaches to textual analysis.

ASSUMPTIONS

Like other poststructuralist practices, Cultural Poetics begins by challenging the long-held belief that a text is an autonomous work of art that contains all elements necessary to arrive at a supposedly correct interpretation. Disavowing the "old historical" assumption that a text simply reflects its historical context—the mimetic view of art and history—and that such historical information provides an interesting and sometimes useful backdrop for literary analysis, Cultural Poetics redirects our attention to a series of philosophical and practical concerns that highlight the complex interconnectedness of all human activities. It redefines both a text and history while simultaneously redefining the relationship between a text and history. Unlike the old historicism, New Historicism, or Cultural Poetics, asserts that an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object—a text or any work of art—and society and that all texts must be analyzed in their cultural context, not in isolation. We must know, it declares, the societal concerns of the author, of the historical times evidenced in the work, and of other cultural elements exhibited in the text before we can devise a valid interpretation. Such an approach to textual analysis questions the very act of how we can arrive at meaning for any human activity, whether it is a text, a social event, a long-held tradition, or a political act.

Michel Foucault

Cultural Poetics critics find the basis for their concerns as well as some of their assumptions in the writings of the twentieth-century French archaeologist,

historian, and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984). Foucault begins his rather complex and sometimes paradoxical theoretical structure by redefining the concept of history. Unlike many past historians, Foucault declares that history is not **linear** (i.e., it does not have a definite beginning, a middle, and an end), nor is it necessarily **teleological** (i.e., purposefully going forward toward some known end). In addition, history cannot be explained as a series of causes and effects controlled by some mysterious destiny or an all-powerful deity. For Foucault, history is the complex interrelationship of a variety of discourses, or the various ways—artistic, social, political, and so on—that people think and talk about their world. How these discourses interact in any given historical period is not random. Rather, their interaction is dependent on a unifying principle (or pattern) Foucault calls the **episteme**—that is, through language and thought, each period in history develops its own perceptions concerning the nature of reality (or what it defines as truth); sets up its own acceptable and unacceptable standards of behavior; establishes its own criteria for judging what it deems good or bad; and certifies what group of people develop, articulate, protect, and defend the yardstick whereby all established truths, values, and actions will be deemed acceptable.

To unearth the episteme of any given historical period, Foucault borrows techniques and terminology from archaeology. Just as an archaeologist must slowly and meticulously dig through various layers of earth to uncover the symbolic treasures of the past, historians must expose each layer of discourse that comes together to shape a people's episteme. And just as an archaeologist must date each finding and piece together the artifacts that define and help explain that culture, so must the historian piece together the various discourses and their interconnections among themselves and with nondiscursive practices—any cultural institution such as a form of government, for example—that will assist in articulating the episteme under investigation.

From this point of view, history is a form of power. Because each era or people develops its own episteme, the episteme actually controls how that era or group of people view reality. History, then, becomes the study and unearthing of a vast, complex web of interconnecting forces that ultimately determines what takes place in each culture or society.

Why or how epistemes change from one historical period to another is basically unclear. That they change seemingly without warning is certain. Such a change occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century—the shift from the Age of Reason to romanticism, for example—and initiated a new episteme. In this new historical era, different relationships developed among discourses that had not previously evolved or had existed and were deemed unacceptable in the previous historical period. Foucault asserts that the abrupt and often radical changes that cause breaks from one episteme to another are neither good nor bad, valid nor invalid. Like the discourses that

help produce them, different epistemes exist in their own right; they are neither moral nor immoral, but amoral.

According to Foucault, historians must realize that they are influenced and prejudiced by the episteme(s) in which they live. Because their thoughts, customs, habits, and other actions are colored by their epistemes, historians can never be totally objective about their own or any other historical period. To be a historian, Foucault asserts, means one must confront and articulate one's own set of biases before examining the various discourses or the material evidence of past events that comprise an episteme of any given period. Such an archaeological examination of the various discourses, Foucault believes, will not unearth a monological view of an episteme (i.e., one that presupposes a single, overarching, political vision or design). Instead, this kind of examination will reveal a set of inconsistent, irregular, and often contradictory discourses that will explain the development of that episteme, including which elements were accepted, changed, or rejected to form the "truth" as perceived by the people of that given era and, thereby, simultaneously establishing that era's acceptable standards.

Clifford Geertz

In addition to borrowing many ideas from Foucault, Cultural Poetics also uses theories and methodologies from the writings of the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926–2006). Geertz believes that there exists "no human nature independent of culture," *culture* being defined by Geertz as "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions," that govern behavior. Each person must be viewed as a cultural artifact. In addition, how each person views society is unique because there exists what Geertz calls an "information gap" between what our body tells us and what we have to know to function in society. This gap also exists in society because society cannot know everything that happens among all its people. Like individuals, society simply fills in the gaps with what it assumes to have taken place. And it is this information gap, within both people and society, that results in the subjectivity of history.

Cultural Poetics also adapts Geertz's anthropological methodology for describing culture, **thick description.** Coined by Geertz, thick description describes the seemingly insignificant details present in any cultural practice. By focusing on these details, one can then reveal the inherent contradictory forces at work within a culture. Borrowing this idea from Geertz, Cultural Poetics theorists declare that each separate discourse of a culture must be uncovered and analyzed in hopes of showing how all discourses interact with each other and with institutions, peoples, and other elements of culture. The interaction among the many different discourses

shapes a culture and interconnects all human activities, including the writing, reading, and interpretation of a text that the Cultural Poetics critic emphasizes.

Texts, History, and Interpretation

Because texts are simply one of many elements that help shape a culture, Cultural Poetics critics believe that all texts are really social documents that reflect but also, and more important, respond to their historical situation. Since any historical situation is an intricate web of often competing discourses, Cultural Poetics scholars center on history, declaring that any interpretation of a text would be incomplete if we do not consider the text's relationship to the discourses that helped fashion it and to which the text is a response. From this point of view, a text becomes a battleground of competing ideas among the author, society, customs, institutions, and social practices that are all eventually negotiated by the author and the reader and influenced by each contributor's episteme. By allowing history a prominent place in the interpretive process and by examining the various convoluted webs that interconnect the discourses found within a text and in its historical setting, we can successfully negotiate a text's meaning.

Cultural Poetics holds to the premise of the interconnectedness of all our actions. For a Cultural Poetics critic, everything we do is interrelated to and within a network of practices embedded in our culture. No act is insignificant; everything is important. In our search to attach meaning to our actions, Cultural Poetics critics believe that we can never be fully objective because we are all biased by cultural forces. Only by examining the complex latticework of these interlocking forces or discourses that empower and shape culture, and by realizing that no single discourse reveals the pathway to objective truth about ourselves or our world, can we begin to interpret either our world or a text.

The goal of a Cultural Poetics interpretive analysis is the formation and an understanding of a "poetics of culture," a process that sees life and its sundry activities as aesthetic endeavors or art, thereby allowing for a more metaphorical interpretation of reality than an analytic one. By embracing and practicing their form of literary analysis, Cultural Poetics critics maintain that we will discover not only the social world of the text but also the present-day social forces working on us as we negotiate meaning with printed material. Like history itself, our interaction with a text is a dynamic, ongoing process that will always be somewhat incomplete.

Because Cultural Poetics' history consists of a dynamic and sometimes tense relationship between rejecting established norms and concepts while positing and developing new ones, a review of the theoretical assumptions

that this site of literary theory rejects and accepts will help us in understanding its multiple methodologies.

WHAT CULTURAL POETICS REJECTS

- Monological interpretations of a given culture, people, or historical era can accurately demonstrate that culture's beliefs and values.
- A historian can establish the "norms" and the "truth" of any social order.
- A writer or a historian can be totally objective.
- Autonomous artifacts, including literary texts, can or do exist.
- Literature is shaped by only historic moments. History serves as a background for literary study.
- Only one correct interpretation of a text exists.

WHAT CULTURAL POETICS DOES AND ACCEPTS

- It intentionally smudges the line between history and literature, believing that texts (literature) and context (history) are the same and that literature has no history of its own but is ensconced in cultural history.
- It admits that definitive interpretations of a text are unattainable because relevant material concerning a given text or action is too diffused to be exhaustively gathered. We can thus never recover the original meaning of any event or text because we cannot hear all the voices that contributed to that event or collect and experience all the data surrounding that event's or text's creation.
- It recognizes that power affects literature as deeply as it does history; some narratives are unjustly stifled, being intentionally repressed, subordinated, and forgotten. When uncovered, these seemingly trivial stories or mini narratives have a surprisingly significant impact, impeding the creation of an overarching historical narrative.
- It believes that texts, like all forms of discourse, help shape and are shaped by social forces.
- It looks to single moments in history that may have influenced or been influenced by a literary text produced at the time, relying heavily on historical documents to discover these significant moments. History can no longer be considered simply "background" information for textual analysis but an essential element in the interpretive process.
- It believes that literature is shaped by historical moments while also shaping the individual reader of or listener to these texts.
- It believes that one of the most important elements in textual analysis is discovering how a text was formed—that is, investigating the historical and social moments surrounding a text's production, not its supposed interpretation.
- It believes that writers, like texts, are subjected to social biases, cultural influences and political agendas. No writer or critic can ever be entirely objective.

METHODOLOGY

Like other approaches to literary analysis, Cultural Poetics includes an array of techniques and strategies in its interpretive inquiries, with no one method being dubbed the correct form of investigation. No matter their methodology, Cultural Poetics scholars begin by assuming that language shapes and is shaped by the culture that uses it. By *language*, Cultural Poetics critics mean much more than spoken words. For them, language includes such discourses as literature, social actions, and any social relationship whereby a person or a group impose their ideas or actions on another.

Included in this definition of language is history. Like literature, writing, or other relationships that involve either a transfer or a relationship of power, history becomes a narrative discourse. As in literature or any other narrative discourse, history must be viewed as a language that can never be fully articulated or completely explained. From this perspective, history and literature are nearly synonymous, both being narrative discourses that interact with their historical situations, their authors, their readers, and their present-day cultures. Neither can claim a complete or an objective understanding of its content or historical situation because both are ongoing conversations with their creators, readers, and cultures.

Because Cultural Poetics critics view history, literature, and other social activities as forms of discourse, they strongly reject the old historicism, which sees history as necessary background material for the study of literature. They view a work of art or a text as they would any other social discourse that interacts with its culture to produce meaning. No longer is one discourse superior to another, but all are necessary components that shape and are shaped by society. Clear lines of distinction do not exist among literature, history, literary criticism, anthropology, art, the sciences, and other disciplines. Blurring the boundaries between disciplines, Cultural Poetics investigates all discourses that effect any social production. Since these practitioners believe that meaning evolves from the interaction of the variously interwoven social discourses, no hierarchy of discourses can exist. All discourses are necessary and must be investigated in the process of textual analysis. The interpretive process must also include questions about the methodological assumptions for discerning meaning for each discourse and for every practitioner because no single discourse or method or critic can reveal *the* truth about any social production in isolation from other discourses.

Since Cultural Poetics critics view an aesthetic work as a social production, a text's meaning as perceived through the lens of Cultural Poetics resides in the cultural system composed of the interlocking discourses of its author, the text, and its reader. To unlock textual meaning, a Cultural Poetics critic investigates the life of the author, the social rules and dictates found within a text, and all reflections of a work's historical situation. Since an actual person authors a text, his or her actions and beliefs reflect both individual concerns

and those of the author's society and are essential elements of the text itself. In addition, the standards of behavior, as reflected in a society's rules of decorum, must also be investigated because these behavioral codes simultaneously helped shape and were shaped by the text. The text must also be viewed as an artistic work that reflects these behavioral social codes. To begin to understand a text's significance and to realize the complex social structure of which it is a part, Cultural Poetics critics declare that all these areas of concern must be investigated. If one area is ignored, the risk of returning to the old historicism, with its lack of understanding about a text as a social production, is great. During the process of textual analysis, Cultural Poetics critics also question their own assumptions and methods as well, for they believe that they, too, are products of and act as shaping influences on their culture.

To avoid the old historicism's error of thinking that each historical period evidences a single, political worldview, Cultural Poetics avoids sweeping generalizations and seeks out the seemingly insignificant details and manifestations of culture frequently ignored by most historians or literary critics. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes these seemingly insignificant details as anecdotes that are "quoted raw, a note in a bottle." Anecdotes are well-preserved messages that most often come to us in their original state, unaltered by the ideologies of publishers or other institutions of preservation. As soon as they are gathered together, a collection of anecdotes will reveal "counterhistories" or alternative perspectives of an incident or era presented by voices that usually go unheard in a monolithic interpretation of history. Sometimes these stories present a blatantly rebellious attitude toward the powerful history-makers, recasting events from the author's perspective of marginalization. At other times, the stories uncovered are simply interested voices recording events that they see. Anecdotes such as personal diaries, for example, can and often do reveal power structures and relationships not found in traditional histories.

Because Cultural Poetics views history and literature as social discourses and battlegrounds for conflicting beliefs, actions, and customs, a text becomes "culture in action." By highlighting seemingly unusual junctures of anecdotal stories or insignificant happenings, such as a note written by Thomas Jefferson to one of his slaves or a phrase etched on a window pane by Nathaniel Hawthorne, these critics hope to bring to light those competing social codes and forces that mold a given society. Emphasizing a particular moment or incident rather than an overarching vision of society, a Cultural Poetics critic will often point out unconventional connections, for example, between Sophia Hawthorne's having a headache after reading her husband's first romance, *The Scarlet Letter*, and the ending of Hawthorne's second romance, *The House of the Seven Gables*, or between the climate and environs of Elmira, New York, and some locations, descriptions, and actions in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Cultural Poetics scholars

believe that an investigation into these and similar happenings will demonstrate the complex relationship that exists among all discourses and will show how narrative discourses such as history, literature, and other social productions interact with, define, and are, in turn, shaped by their culture. What we learn by applying these principles and methodologies is that there is not one voice, but many voices to be heard interpreting texts and our culture: our own, the voices of others, the voices of the past, the voices of the present, and the voices that will be in the future.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

When analyzing any text from a Cultural Poetics point of view, Stephen Greenblatt and other critics suggest we ask and investigate the following questions. As you read these questions, be prepared to provide answers based on your reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown." By so doing, you will be actively engaged in using Cultural Poetics as an interpretive tool.

- What kinds of behavior or models of practice does this work reinforce?
- Why might readers at a particular time and place find this work compelling?
- Are there differences between your values and the values implicit in the work you are reading?
- On what social understanding does the work depend?
- Whose freedom of thought or movement might be constrained implicitly or explicitly by this work?
- What are the larger social structures with which these particular acts of praise or blame might be connected?
- What authorial biographical facts are relevant to the text?
- What other cultural events occurred surrounding the original production of the text? How may these events be relevant to the text under investigation?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

In the preface to his 1989 text *The New Historicism*, H. Aram Vesser, the editor, was one of the first scholars to delineate the basic beliefs of Cultural Poetics:

- Every expressive act (including literature) is embedded in a network of material practices.
- Every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes.
- Literary and nonliterary texts circulate inseparably.

- No discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses inalterable human nature.
- A critical method and language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

Disavowing the tenets of the "old historicism," this New Historicism or Cultural Poetics seeks to uncover the multiple discourses that create a text and are shaped by the text. Believing that art (including literature) and society are interrelated, Cultural Poetics critics embrace the principles of different schools of criticism to unlock a text's power and influence, including the "close reading" principles of New Criticism and a variety of poststructuralist approaches, such as feminism and Marxism. Denying a monolithic or monological interpretation of any event, person, or historical era, Cultural Poetics seeks to discover the personal vignettes or "anecdotes" that are ignored, repressed, or suppressed by many critics. Such mini moments in history, they believe, will reveal the multiple counterhistories that have been marginalized by previous scholars and writers. These constructed narratives reveal the power structures in both the text and the cultures that produced them, unleashing the silenced voices that can help us reshape our concepts and interpretations of not only texts but also history, society, and ourselves.

Like other evolving, critical methodologies, Cultural Poetics has faced and continues to face some objections. First, because Cultural Poetics uses historical methods and artifacts of history, it is necessarily working from "inside" the system it is critiquing. Such subjectivity opens this interpretive method to accusations of undermining its own arguments. Second, by placing emphasis on anecdotal evidence, it has been accused of bad historiography. From one single thread of culture—one anecdote—Cultural Poetics critics often create rather significant philosophical, historical or political theories. Third, while valuing anecdotal evidence or artifacts and other forms of "local knowledge," Cultural Poetics then broadens such knowledge, making claims that reach far into a given culture. Fourth, Cultural Poetics believes that indeterminacy reigns in both literature and history, but simultaneously it holds a strongly deterministic attitude toward the effects of these discourses, making pronouncements concerning power in a given culture. And fifth, some critics argue that Cultural Poetics treats all artifacts—texts, social customs, and so forth—as literary texts and reduces historical documents and any other cultural form to solely literary terms.

As Cultural Poetics develops in the twenty-first century, the frequency and the various kinds of criticisms will undoubtedly continue. Without question, Cultural Poetics has impacted every area of literary studies, from Anglo-Saxon to twentieth century literature, especially influencing both American and British Romanticism. Through its multiple approaches to textual analysis, Cultural Poetics allows us to hear many of the silenced voices of the past, speaking once again loud and clear.

10

POSTCOLONIALISM

The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination.

Che Guevara, speech to the United Nations, December 11, 1964

The 1960s saw a revolutionary change in literary theory. Until this decade, New Criticism dominated literary theory and criticism, with its insistence that "the" one correct interpretation of a text could be discovered if critical readers follow the prescribed methodology asserted by the New Critics. Positing an autonomous text, New Critics paid little attention to a text's historical context or to the feelings, beliefs, and ideas of a text's readers. For New Critics, a text's meaning is inextricably bound to ambiguity, irony, and paradox found within the structure of the text itself. By analyzing the text alone, New Critics believe that an astute critic can identify a text's central paradox and explain how the text ultimately resolves that paradox while also supporting the text's overarching theme.

Into this seemingly self-assured system of hermeneutics marches philosopher and literary critic Jacques Derrida along with similar-thinking scholar-critics in the late 1960s. Unlike the New Critics, Derrida, the chief spokesperson for deconstruction, disputes a text's objective existence. Denying that a text is an autotelic artifact, he challenges the accepted definitions and assumptions of both the reading and the writing processes. In addition, he insists on questioning what parts not only the text but also the reader and the author play in the interpretive process. Because Derrida and other like-minded critics chronologically come after modernity and the reign of structuralism in literary theory, they are referred to as postmoderns or poststructuralists. Recently the term **postist critics** is being used to denote these postmodern thinkers.

These philosopher critics—Jonathan Culler, J. Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson, and Michel Foucault, to name a few—also question the language of

texts and of literary analysis. Unlike the New Critics, who believe that the language of literature is somehow different from the language of science and everyday conversation, these postmodernists insist that the language of texts is not distinct from the language used to analyze such writings. For them, language is a discourse. In other words, the discourse or culturally bound language of ideas used in literary analysis helps shape and form the text being analyzed. We cannot separate, they maintain, the text and the language used to critique it. For these critics, language helps create and shape what we call "objective reality."

Believing that objective reality can be created by language, many postmodernists assert that all reality is a social construct. From this point of view, no single or primary objective reality exists; instead, many realities exist. In disavowing a universal, objective reality, these critics believe that reality is perspectival, with each individual creating his or her subjective understanding of the nature of reality itself. How, then, do we come to agree upon public and social concerns, such as values, ethics, and the common good, if reality is different for each individual? The answer for these postmodern thinkers is that each society or culture contains within itself a dominant cultural group who determines that culture's ideology or, using the Marxist term, its hegemony—that is, its dominant values, its sense of right and wrong, and its sense of personal self-worth. All people in a given culture are consciously and unconsciously asked to conform to the prescribed hegemony.

What happens, however, when one's ideas, one's thinking, or one's personal background does not conform? What happens, for example, when the dominant culture consists of white, Anglo-Saxon males and one is a black female? Or how does one respond to a culture dominated by white males if one is a Native American? For people of color living in Africa or in the Americas, for Native Americans, for females, and for gays and lesbians, and a host of others, the traditional answer already has been articulated by the dominant class and its accompanying hegemony: *silence*. Live quietly, work quietly, think quietly. The message sent to these "Others" by the dominant culture has been clear and consistent—conform and be quiet; deny yourself, and all will be well.

But many have not been quiet. Writers and thinkers, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Judith Butler, to name a few, have dared to speak out and challenge the dominant cultures and the dictates these cultures decree. They continue to refuse silence and choose defiance, if necessary. They believe that an individual's view of life, of values, and of ethics really matters. They assert a different perspective, a vantage point not of the dominant culture, but one from which to view the world and its peoples: They speak for not one culture, but many; not one cultural perspective, but a host; not one interpretation of life, but countless.

Speaking for the oppressed, suppressed, and silenced, these critic-scholars—African, Australian, Native American, female, gay and lesbian,

among others—are making themselves heard among the cacophony of the insistent, dominant, and generally overpowering culture. Believing that they can affect cultural change, these writers refuse to conform to their culture's hegemony. In their struggle for empowerment, these critics are clearly articulating their beliefs at the contemporary literary table discussions concerning their understanding of reality, of society, and of personal self-worth.

This divergent group of literary scholars and critics is under the umbrella of cultural studies and includes an analysis of gender studies, African-American studies, postcolonial studies, and others. All are presenting their ideas and assumptions in the midst of a discussion that has long been controlled by the dominant few. In Great Britain the terms **cultural criticism** and cultural studies are often used interchangeably. In North America cultural criticism primarily focuses on textual analysis or other artistic forms, whereas cultural studies refers to a much broader, interdisciplinary study of literary and artistic forms analyzed in their social, economic, or political contexts. In this chapter, we will consider one of cultural studies' varying theories: postcolonialism. In Chapters 11, 12, and 13, we will then present three other theoretical stances: African-American criticism, gender studies, and ecocriticism, one of the latest but significant directions in literary studies. Each of these theories possesses unique concerns. Ecocriticism, for example, highlights the relationship between literature and the environment, while African-American criticism and gender studies emphasize that their individual and public histories do matter. They believe that their past and their present are intricately interwoven, and they declare that by denying and suppressing their past, they will be denying who they are. They desire to articulate their feelings, their concerns, and their assumptions about the nature of reality in their particular cultures without being treated as marginal, minor, or insignificant participants. Often referred to as **subaltern writers**—a term used by the Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci to refer to those classes who are not in control of a culture's ideology (hegemony)—these theorists-authors-critics provide new ways to see and understand the cultural forces at work in society, in literature, and in ourselves. Although the literary theory and accompanying criticism of each cultural studies approach is ongoing, an overview of the central tenets of the first of this group—postcolonialism—will enable us to understand its distinctive visions of literature's purposes in today's ever-changing world.

POSTCOLONIALISM: "THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK"

Postcolonialism (or **post-colonialism**—either spelling is acceptable, but each represents slightly different theoretical assumptions) consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in English in countries that were or still are

colonies of other countries. For the most part, postcolonial studies excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrate on writings from colonized or formerly colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other places that were once dominated by, but remained outside, the white, male, European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition. Early in its development, postcolonialism was referred to as "third world" or "Commonwealth" literature, terms present-day critics dub pejorative. What postcolonialism and postcolonial theorists do is to investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Rooted in colonial power and prejudice, postcolonialism develops from a four-thousand-year history of strained cultural relations between colonies in Africa and Asia and the Western world. Throughout this long history, the West became the colonizers, and many African and Asian countries and their peoples became the colonized. During the nineteenth century, Great Britain emerged as the largest colonizer and imperial power, quickly gaining control of almost one quarter of the earth's landmass. By the middle of the nineteenth century, terms such as *colonial interests* and the *British Empire* were widely used both in the media and in government policies and international politics. Many British people believed that Great Britain was destined to rule the world. Likewise, the assumption that Western Europeans and, in particular, the British people were biologically superior to any other race—a term for a class of people based on physical and/or cultural distinctions—remained relatively unquestioned.

Such beliefs directly affected the ways in which the colonizers treated the colonized. Using its political and economic strength, Great Britain, the chief imperialist power of the nineteenth century, dominated her colonies, making them produce and then give up their countries' raw materials in exchange for what material goods the colonized desired or were made to believe they desired by the colonizers. Forced labor of the colonized became the rule of the day, and thus the institution of slavery was commercialized. Often the colonizers justified their cruel treatment of the colonized by invoking European religious beliefs. From the perspective of many white Westerners, the peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Asia were "heathens," possessing pagan ways that must be Christianized. How one treats peoples who are so defined does not really matter, they maintained, because many Westerners subscribed to the colonialist ideology that all races other than white were inferior or subhuman. These subhumans or "savages" quickly became the inferior and equally "evil" Others, a philosophical concept called **alterity** whereby "the Others" are excluded from positions of power and viewed as both different and inferior.

By the early twentieth century, England's political, social, economic, and ideological domination of its colonies began to disappear, a process known as **decolonization.** By mid century, for example, India had gained her independence from British colonial rule. Many scholars believe that this event marks the beginning of postcolonialism or **third-world studies,** a term coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy. When India received her independence, the former British colony was divided into two nations, the India Union and Pakistan. This partitioning, what scholars dub the "Great Divide," led to ethnic conflict of enormous proportions between India, a new member of the British Commonwealth in 1947, and the mostly Muslim state of Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the struggle, igniting the outrage of a vast array of scholars, writers, and critics concerning the social, moral, political, and economic conditions of the aftereffects of colonialism in what were once called third-world countries.

The beginnings of postcolonialism's theoretical and social concerns can be traced to the 1950s. Along with India's independence, this decade witnessed the ending of France's long involvement in Indochina; the parting of the ways between the two leading figures in existential theory, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, over their differing views about Algeria; Fidel Castro's now-famous "History Shall Absolve Me" speech; and the publication of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

The following decades witnessed the publication of additional key texts that articulated the social, political, and economic conditions of various subaltern groups. In 1960, the Caribbean writer George Lamming published *The Pleasures of Exile,* a text in which Lamming critiques William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* from a postcolonial perspective. The next year Fanon published *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), a work that highlights the tensions or binary oppositions of white versus black, good versus evil, and rich versus poor, to cite a few. Other writers, philosophers, and critics such as Albert Memmi continued publishing texts such as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965, English version) that would soon become the cornerstone of postcolonial theory and writings. In particular, postcolonialism gained the attention of the West with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's monumental text *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989). With the publication of these two texts, the voices and the concerns of many subaltern cultures would soon be heard in both academic and social arenas.

The terms *postcolonial* and *postcolonialism* first appear in scholarly journals in the mid-1980s and as subtitles in texts such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's previously mentioned powerful work and in 1990 in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin's *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism.* By the early and mid-1990s, both terms had become firmly established in academic and popular discourse.

Similar to deconstruction and other postmodern approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism refers to a heterogeneous field of study in which even its spelling provides several alternatives: *post-colonialism*, *postcolonialism*, or *post/colonial*. When spelled with a hyphen (*post-colonialism*), the term implies a chronological order—that is, a change from a colonial to a postcolonial state. When spelled without the hyphen (*postcolonialism*), the term refers "to writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives," both before and after the period of colonization. According to some critics, the nonhyphenated spelling covers a wider critical field, including literature of former British colonies, than does the hyphenated spelling. The third orthographic variant of this term (*post/colonial*), argue some critics, is more relevant than the previous two spellings because it stresses the interrelatedness between an indeterminate number of literatures—be they Anglophone or not—that share a similar situation: the "entangled condition" that exists between colonial and post/colonial discourse and between coloniality and post/coloniality. Today the most common spelling of the three variants is *postcolonialism*.

Many of postcolonialism's adherents suggest there are two branches. The first views postcolonialism as a set of diverse methodologies that possess no unitary quality, as argued by Homi K. Bhabha and Arun P. Murkherjee. The second branch includes those critics such as Edward Said, Barbara Harlow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who view postcolonialism as a set of cultural strategies "centered in history." This latter group can also be subdivided into those who believe postcolonialism refers to that period after the colonized countries have gained their independence as opposed to those who regard postcolonialism as referring to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of colonization to the present moment.

Postcolonialism's concerns become evident when we examine the various topics discussed in one of its most prominent texts, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), edited by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. Its subjects include universality, difference, nationalism, postmodernism, representation and resistance, ethnicity, feminism, language, education, history, place, and production. As diverse as these topics are, they draw attention to postcolonialism's major concern: the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another. As postcolonial critics point out, to be colonized is "to be removed from history." In its interaction with the conquering culture, the colonized or indigenous culture is forced to go underground or to be obliterated.

Only after colonization occurs and the colonized people have had time to think and to write about their oppression and loss of cultural identity does postcolonial theory come into existence. Postcolonial theory is born out of the colonized peoples' frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future and their own identities. How the colonized respond to changes in language, curricular matters in education, race differences,

economic issues, morals, ethics, and many other concerns, including the act of writing itself, becomes the context for the evolving theories and practices of postcolonialism.

ASSUMPTIONS

Because different cultures that have been subverted, conquered, and often removed from history respond to the conquering culture in diverse ways, no single approach to postcolonial theory and practice is possible or even preferable. As Nicholas Harrison asserts in *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (2003), "Postcolonial theory is not an identifiable 'type' of theory in the same sense as deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis or feminism." Like many critical theorists, Harrison "sees no point in talking as if consensus about what postcolonial studies 'is' might eventually emerge." We can, however, highlight postcolonialism's major concerns. All postcolonialist critics believe the following:

- European colonialism did occur.
- The British Empire was at the center of this colonialism.
- The conquerors dominated not only the physical land but also the hegemony or ideology of the colonized peoples.
- The social, political, and economic effects of such colonization are still being felt today.

At the center of postcolonial theory exists an inherent tension among three categories of postcolonialists: (1) those who have been academically trained and are living in the West, (2) those who were raised in non-Western cultures but now reside in the West, and (3) those subaltern writers living and writing in non-Western cultures. For example, on the one hand, critics such as Fredric Jameson and Georg M. Gugelberger come from a European and American cultural, literary, and scholarly background. Another group that includes Spivak, Said, and Bhabha were raised in non-Western cultures but have or now reside, study, and write in the West. And still another group includes writers such as Aijaz Ahmad who live and work in subaltern cultures. Differing theoretical and practical criticism developed among these three groups. Out of this underlying tension among the groups, postcolonial theorists and critics have and will continue to discover problematic topics for exploration and debate.

Historically one of the earliest postcolonial theorists is Frantz Fanon (1925–1961). Born in the French colony of Martinique, Fanon fought with the French in World War II, remaining in France after the war to study medicine and psychiatry. Throughout his rather short career and life, Fanon provides postcolonialism with two influential texts: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and

The Wretched of the Earth (1961). In these and other works, Fanon uses psychoanalytic theory to examine the condition of blacks under French colonial rule. As a result of colonialism, Fanon asserts that both the colonized (e.g., the Other—that is, any person defined as "different from") and the colonizer suffer "psychic warping," oftentimes causing what Fanon describes as "a collapse of the ego." Fanon believes that as soon as the colonized (the blacks living in Martinique) were forced to speak the language of the colonizer (French), the colonized either accepted or were coerced into accepting the collective consciousness of the French, thereby identifying blackness with evil and sin and whiteness with purity and righteousness.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that an entirely new world must come into being to overcome the binary system in which black is evil and white is good. Fanon develops a Marxist-influenced postcolonial theory in which he calls for violent revolution, a type of revolution in which Fanon himself was involved when he became a participant and a spokesperson for the Algerian revolutionaries against France. He also develops in *The Wretched of the Earth* one of his major concerns: the problem of the "native bourgeoisie" who assume power after the colonial powers have either peacefully departed or been driven out. When such a situation occurs, the native proletariat, "the wretched of the earth," are left on their own, often in a worse situation than before the conquerors arrived. Throughout his writings, Fanon articulates key postcolonial concerns such as "Otherness," subject formation, and an emphasis on linguistic and psychoanalytic frameworks on which postcolonialism will develop in the decades to follow.

Another key text in the establishment of postcolonial theory is *Orientalism* (1978), authored by Edward Wadie Said (1935–2003). A Palestinian-American theorist and critic, Said was born in Jerusalem, where he lived with his family until the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, at which time his family became refugees in Egypt and then Lebanon. Educated at Princeton and Harvard Universities, Said taught at Johns Hopkins University, where, as a professor, he authored a variety of texts, including *Orientalism*, his most influential. In this work Said chastises the literary world for not investigating and taking seriously the study of colonization or imperialism. He then develops several concepts that are central to postcolonial theory. According to Said, nineteenth-century Europeans tried to justify their territorial conquests by propagating a manufactured belief called **Orientalism:** the creation of non-European stereotypes that suggested so-called Orientals were indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented. The European conquerors, Said notes, believed that they were accurately describing the inhabitants of their newly acquired lands in "the East." What they failed to realize, argues Said, is that all human knowledge can be viewed only through one's political, cultural, and ideological framework. No theory, either political or literary, can be totally objective. In effect, what the colonizers were revealing was their unconscious desires for power, wealth, and domination, not the nature of the colonized subjects.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said captures the basic thought behind colonization and imperialism: "'They're not like us,' and for that reason deserve to be ruled." The colonized, Said maintains, becomes the Other, the not me. Hence, the established binary opposition of "the West"/"the Other" must be abolished along with its intricate web of racial and religious prejudices. What must be rejected, Said declares, is the "vision" mentality of writers who want to describe the Orient from a panoramic view. This erroneous view of humanity creates a simplistic interpretation of human experience. It must be replaced by one based on "narrative," a historical view that emphasizes the variety of human experiences in all cultures. This narrative view does not deny differences, but presents them in an objective way. Scholarship, asserts Said, must be derived from firsthand experience of a particular region, giving voice and presence to the critics who live and write in these regions, not scholarship from "afar" or secondhand representation. Although such ideas helped shape the central issues of postcolonial theory, it was Said's use of French "high theory" along with Marxist ideology as a methodology to deconstruct and historically examine the roots of Orientalism that attracted the attention of the academic world and helped inspire a new direction in postcolonial thought.

Homi K. Bhabha (1949–), one of the leading postcolonial theorists and critics, builds on Said's concept of the Other and Orientalism. Born into a Parsi family in Mumbai, India, Bhabha received his undergraduate degree in India and his master's and doctoral degrees from Oxford University. Having taught at several prestigious universities, including Princeton, Dartmouth, and the University of Chicago, Bhabha is currently a professor at Harvard University. In works such as *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha emphasizes the concerns of the colonized. What of the individual who has been colonized? On the one hand, the colonized observes two somewhat distinct views of the world: that of the colonizer (the conqueror) and that of himself or herself, the colonized (the one who has been conquered). To what culture does this person belong? Seemingly, neither culture feels like home. This feeling of homelessness, of being caught between two clashing cultures, Bhabha calls **unhomeliness,** a concept referred to as **double consciousness** by some postcolonial theorists. This feeling or perception of abandonment by both cultures causes the colonial subject (the colonized) to become a psychological refugee. Because each psychological refugee uniquely blends his or her two cultures, no two writers who have been colonial subjects will interpret their culture(s) exactly alike. Hence, Bhabha argues against the tendency to essentialize third-world countries into a homogenous identity.

One of Bhabha's major contributions to postcolonial studies is his belief that there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. When two cultures commingle, the nature and the characteristics of the newly created culture changes each of the cultures. This dynamic, interactive, and tension-packed process Bhabha names **hybridity.** Bhabha himself says that

"hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It's a social process. It's not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions." As a result, says Bhabha, a feeling of unhomeliness develops in the colonized.

For the colonized writer in such a commingled culture, Bhabha's answer to this sense of unhomeliness is that the colonized writer must create a new discourse by rejecting all the established transcendental signifieds created by the colonizers. Such a writer must also embrace pluralism, believing that no single truth and no metatheory of history exist. To accomplish such goals, Bhabha consistently uses the tools of deconstruction theory to expose cultural metaphors and discourse.

Although Fanon, Said, and Bhabha lay much of the theoretical framework of postcolonialism, many others have joined them in continuing the dialogue between what Bhabha calls "the Occident" and "the Orient." Concentrating on what some critics call the "flows of culture," postcolonialism divides into smaller theoretical schools identified by their choice of theoretical background and methodology. Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, African-American, and psychoanalytic criticism (usually of the Lacanian variety) all influence postcolonial theory. For example, Gayatri Spivak, the publisher of the English translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976), is a feminist, postcolonial critic who applies deconstructive interpretations of imperialism while simultaneously questioning the premises of the Marxism, feminism, and Derridean deconstruction that she espouses.

Postcolonialism is a varied approach to textual analysis that assumes that literature, culture, and history all affect each other in significant ways. Postcolonial critics also believe in the unavoidability of subjective and political interpretations in literary studies, arguing that criticism and theory must be relevant to society as it really is. As such, these critics maintain that colonialism was and is a cause of suffering and oppression, a cause that is inherently unjust. Furthermore, colonialism is not a thing of the past, but continues today—howbeit in subtler and less open ways—as a form of oppression and as such, must be opposed. As the contemporary critic Sam Durrant writes in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2003), "Post-colonialism as a praxis is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal entailing a simple respect for human suffering and a fundamental revolt against it." Suffering and enslavement, say postcolonialists, are elements of oppression and are "simply wrong."

METHODOLOGY

Like many schools of criticism, postcolonialism uses a variety of approaches to textual analysis. Deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, reader-oriented

criticism, African-American criticism, and cultural studies employ postcolonial theories in their critical methodologies. Critics identify two major approaches or "strains" of postcolonial criticism: postcolonial criticism and postcolonial theory. Those who engage in **postcolonial criticism** investigate ways in which texts bear the traces of colonialism's ideology and interpret such texts as challenging or promoting the colonizer's purposes and hegemony. More frequently than not, those who engage in this type of criticism analyze canonical texts from colonizing countries. **Postcolonial theory**, on the other hand, moves beyond the bounds of traditional literary studies and investigates social, political, and economic concerns of the colonized and the colonizer. No matter which methodology a postcolonial critic may choose, it matters greatly whether or not the theorist/critic has been a colonial subject. Those who have been the subjects of colonization ask themselves a somewhat different set of questions than those postcolonialists who have not.

The person living and writing in a colonized culture poses three significant questions:

1. Who am I?
2. How did I develop into the person I am?
3. To what country or countries or to what cultures am I forever linked?

In asking and answering the first question, the colonized author is connecting himself or herself to historical roots. By asking and answering the second question, the writer is admitting a tension between these historical roots and the new culture or hegemony imposed on the writer by the conquerors. By asking and answering the third question, the writer confronts the fact that he or she is both an individual and a social construct created and shaped primarily by the dominant culture. The written works penned by these authors will necessarily be personal and always political and ideological. Furthermore, both the creation of a text and its reading may be painful and disturbing but also enlightening. Whatever the result, the text will certainly be a message sent back to the empire, telling the imperialists the effects of their colonization and how their Western hegemony has damaged and suppressed the ideologies of those who were conquered.

Postcolonialists are quick to point out that they do indeed make value judgments about cultures, people, and texts. In turn, they ask us, their readers and critics, to examine carefully the standards against which we are making our value judgments. Said cautions us that "it is not necessary to regard every reading or interpretation of a text as the moral equivalent of war, but whatever else they are, works of literature are not merely texts." Postcolonialists such as Said attempt to read a text in its fullest context, being careful not to frame their analyses solely in academic discourse. This diverse and oftentimes psychologically laden and complex theory highlights the

"writing back" of those who have experienced colonial oppression to the colonizers and to the world. Postcolonial critics give such texts a close reading, noting particularly the text's language. Such analysis questions the taken-for-granted positions usually held by the Western mindset. For example, how truth is constructed must be examined rather than exposing errors of the colonizers. Because a variety of prejudices and attitudes can be found in all texts, postcolonial critics vary their approach for each text, letting the text itself establish its critical agenda. These critics also guard against ascribing their own cultural ideas onto postcolonial works, realizing that any attempt to understand completely a subaltern group is impossible and can lead to another form of repression. How postcolonial criticism is actually put into practice thus depends strongly on the critic's individual theoretical commitments. But all postcolonial criticism is united in its opposition to colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies and its concern with the best way(s) to create a just and true decolonized culture and literature.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

When applying postcolonialist theory to a text, consider the following questions. After examining each question, ask yourself what questions can be appropriately applied to Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" so you can view this tale from a postcolonialist perspective.

- What happens in the text when the two cultures clash, when one sees itself as superior to another?
- Describe the two or more cultures exhibited in the text. What does each value? What does each reject?
- Who in the text is "the Other"?
- What are the worldviews of each of the cultures?
- What are the forms of resistance against colonial control?
- How does the superior or privileged culture's hegemony affect the colonized culture?
- How do the colonized people view themselves? Is there any change in this view by the end of the text?
- What are the characteristics of the language of the two cultures? How are they alike? Different?
- Is the language of the dominant culture used as a form of oppression? Suppression?
- In what ways is the colonized culture silenced?
- Are there any emergent forms of postcolonial identity after the departure of the colonizers?
- How do gender, race, or social class function in the colonial and postcolonial elements of the text?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSE

Like other approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism is not a homogenous school of literary theory and criticism, but a loosely defined set of theories and methodologies that seeks to uncover and discover what happens to the colonized once they have been conquered by the colonizers. Postcolonialism chiefly deals with literature that has been written by the colonized in colonized countries. Its aim is to examine what has been missing from literary analyses by highlighting the interest of the colonized and the destructive forces of the colonizer's hegemony as forced on the colonized. As such, postcolonialism becomes, like deconstruction, more of a reading strategy than a codified school of literary criticism. In its methodology, it gives authority and presence to "the Other," the people who have become the separate ones and who stand apart from the dominant, colonizing culture. And its goal is to win back a place in history for the colonized, enabling all readers to value the many different kinds of cultures and peoples who inhabit the earth. Whether the postcolonial critic embraces the tenets of feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, or any other theoretical framework, such a critic emphasizes each person's humanity and right to personal freedom.

Some critics of postcolonialism point out that many of its most influential spokespersons have been and continue to be educated in the West and are, therefore, products of the Western mindset, not subaltern cultures. How can such "Western"-minded individuals speak for subaltern cultures? Other critics observe that postcolonial studies remains situated in academia, in the "upper classes" of society, having little or no effect on real people in real places. Can academic discussions, assert these critics, bring any change to subaltern cultures and their peoples? If postcolonialism seeks to help and to change the lives of colonized peoples, some of its critics argue that its reading strategies and methodologies must be performed by those who have been colonized, not by academics living in the West. Postcolonialism must, therefore, seek to empower those who have been stripped of power, dignity, and self-worth, maintain some critics, rather than continually marginalizing the colonized through discourse that can be understood by only the culturally elite. Perhaps, say these critics, postcolonialism is radical in only its words, not in life-changing power.

Like most theories and methodologies grouped under the heading of cultural studies, postcolonialism is becoming more and more diverse, including Caribbean, Latin American, and Pacific geographical regions, although some traditional postcolonial sites such as India remain important. By embracing a variety of theories and approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism has ensured its place in literary theory and practice for many decades to come.

See **Readings on Literary Criticism** at the back of the text for a key essay on the overall purpose of a postcolonial reading of a text, "Heroic Ethnocentrism: The Idea of Universality in Literature," by Charles Larson.

11

AFRICAN-AMERICAN CRITICISM

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

W. E. B. DuBois, *The Soul of Double Consciousness*

The growing interest in postcolonialism in American literary theory during the late 1970s to the present helped propel a renewed interest in the works of African-American writers and African-American literary theory and criticism. To say that postcolonialism or other postmodern theories initiated African-American theory and criticism would be inaccurate. Like all schools of criticism, this body of theory and criticism has been evolving over time since the publication of the earliest African-American literature, poems written by the African-American authors Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806) and Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784). From the publication of these poets' works to the writings of contemporary African-Americans, **African-American criticism** challenges established ideologies, racial boundaries, and racial prejudice. It also acknowledges and incorporates the writings of past and often suppressed and forgotten African-American literature, the major historical movements that have influenced African-American writings, and both historical and current attitudes toward African-Americans themselves. Since the emergence of Derridean deconstruction and other poststructuralist theories, African-American criticism frequently employs binary oppositions, viewing the white American as the oppressor of black art and black people. Its strong historical sense, its understanding of racial issues, and its concept of what being Black means combine to create a school of criticism that is unique, multifaceted, and ever growing.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, ASSUMPTIONS, AND METHODOLOGY

Without question, the twentieth century gave rise to a dramatic increase in African-American literature and literary criticism. The increased presence of African-American works directly influences American culture while at the same time the culture is influencing the literature. The writings, the concerns, and the critiques of the earliest African-American writers foreshadow the body of criticism that has developed in the past three centuries in America.

Since its beginnings, African-American literature has been shaped by the enslavement of the blacks in colonial America by white Western Europeans and the suppression of the black race that follows. The personal story of Phillis Wheatley, one of the first prominent African-American poets in early America, embodies the effects of slavery in American literature, in American culture, and in the personal life of one of America's earliest poets.

On August 3, 1761, the following advertisement appeared in the Boston *Evening Post:*

> **To Be Sold**
> A parcel of likely Negroes, imported from Africa, cheap for cash, or short credit. Enquire near the South Market; Also, if any Persons have any Negro Men, they may have an exchange for small Negroes.

Among this group of small Negroes stood a frail, seven-year-old child who would soon be given the name Phillis Wheatley by her new owners, the Wheatleys. Recognizing Phillis's innate intelligence, Susannah Wheatley, the wife of a prosperous Boston tailor and Phillis's "owner," encouraged Phillis's intellectual endeavors, and in a little more than sixteen months after her "adoption" by the Wheatleys, Phillis had mastered English, memorized many passages from the Bible, and was well on her way to fluency in several classical languages. Because she was a brilliant conversationalist, Phillis frequently accompanied her owners on the circuit of Boston social events. By her own choice, she never sat at the same dining tables as her owners and their peers but requested a side table where she would eat alone. She would similarly spend the most significant part of her life in isolation from both whites and blacks, her most frequent company being the works of the eighteenth-century British writers.

By thirteen, Phillis published her first poem with many more to follow. In 1770, the publication of her poem written in memory of "the late Reverend, and Pious George Whitefield" propelled her to fame throughout Boston and the colonies. At age twenty-three, she traveled to London and was greeted as the "Sable Muse," finding herself in the company of Benjamin Franklin, counts and countesses, and even the lord mayor of

London. While in London, the collected edition of her poems, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), was published, the first published volume of poems by a black American. Because both her British and American audience would find it startling and unbelievable that a black woman could write such elegant poetry, the preface to her collected poems contained the testimony of no less than eighteen distinguished Bostonians, including John Hancock, attesting to the authenticity of her work.

Upon her return to America, Wheatley continued to publish her poems, with her work being praised by such prominent Americans as George Washington. Many people, however, questioned how a black woman could be so intelligent as to write such "good" poetry, leading to her being taken to court so that she would be forced to recant her ownership of her poems. Wheatley won her case and continued to publish poems in such prestigious publications as the *Pennsylvania Magazine*.

Upon the death of her owners, Phillis was awarded her freedom and married a free black, John Peters. Ignored by white society, Phillis and John faced numerous struggles in their marriage, including the deaths of all three of their children in childhood. In frail health and unable to publish any poems, Phillis took employment as a cleaner for "a common negro boarding-house." In 1774, soon after the death of her husband, Phillis Wheatley died in poverty and obscurity.

An examination of Wheatley's life highlights the multiple concerns of contemporary African-American criticism:

- Marginalization of blacks
- Social, political, economic, ideological, and literary oppression
- The historical and cultural significance of the black experience that has ties to African language and culture
- Celebrating that which is black in black art
- The significance of slavery as a historical event and its present-day racial implications
- Reading race into all American literature because whiteness is "the Other" of blackness.

Like Wheatley and the many other black Americans who would pen words during the next three centuries, all would grapple with their "blackness" in a dominant white culture.

Although Wheatley's black contemporary writers were indeed few—Jupiter Hammon, author of the first poem published by a black American, "An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries" (1761); and Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), the first African-American critic who praised Wheatley's poetry—by the mid-1800s another form of black literature developed that influenced American culture: slave narratives. Written by former slaves, the autobiographical slave narrative recounts an

individual's personal life as a slave and that individual's escape to freedom. The slave narrative was used by the antislavery movement preceding the Civil War to convince readers of the evils of slavery and to argue for its abolishment. The best-known slave narratives include Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). Like Wheatley, Douglass was accused of not being the author of his work because many white Americans could not believe that a black man was capable of such distinguished and "eloquent" prose.

During the post–Civil War era (1865–1920), African-American authors continued to write nonfiction works concerning the condition of African-Americans in America. One of the prominent writers was W. E. B. DuBois, author of a collection of essays titled *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and a founding member of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "The problem of the twentieth century," says DuBois, "is the problem of the color-line." Only by working together, argues DuBois, can African-Americans fight for equality and justice. Another prominent African-American writer and educator during this era is Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and author of *Up from Slavery* (1901) and *My Larger Education* (1911), among others. Unlike DuBois, Washington asserts that African-Americans must work within the social, political, and educational systems already established by the dominant white culture. Borrowing the words of Benjamin Franklin, Washington maintains that African-Americans should "pick themselves up by their own bootstraps" before they ask for social or political justice.

African-American literature and criticism continued to develop throughout the 1920s and '30s in large part because of a "rebirth" of black literature and art, what became known as the Harlem Renaissance. After World War I, New York City, and particularly Harlem, saw a huge influx of African-Americans from the South. Black artists, poets, dancers, dramatists, and musicians gathered together in Harlem and celebrated African-American culture, giving to African-Americans a sense of pride in their being black. For a short time, Harlem became the idealized center of hope for African-Americans, a hope that envisioned that one day they, like their white counterparts, would receive equal rights under the law. Under the editorship of DuBois, the *Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, echoes this cry for equality, insisting that art should become a tool in the struggle for social justice. "All art is propaganda and ever must be" argued the writers of the *Crisis*, and "the great mission of the Negro to America and to the modern world is the development of Art and the appreciation of Beauty." This development of African-American art and culture was best articulated in the Harlem Renaissance by writer, philosopher, and educator Alain LeRoy Locke in his anthology of African-American writers, *New Negro* (1925). In the opening essay of this work, "The New Negro," Locke presents his understanding of modern black culture and argues that the united African-Americans of the

North, and especially Harlem, are becoming a "progressive force" in society, leading toward black equality with whites. Locke argues that the "New Negro" must embrace a "new psychology" and a "new spirit," thereby "smashing" the stereotypes that depict African-Americans as inferior and unfit—both biologically and environmentally—to take their place in modern society. Throughout the Harlem Renaissance, Locke's use of the term *New Negro* became synonymous with those who refused to submit to the Jim Crow laws, both state and local laws enacted in the United States between 1876 and 1965. These laws maintained racial segregation in all public facilities, including schools, transportation, restrooms, restaurants, and even drinking fountains. The New Negro openly protested against such dehumanizing legislation, advocating dignity for all African-Americans.

The two leading literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance are Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. Novelist, dramatist, short story writer, translator, children's author, and poet Langston Hughes (1902–1967) became famous with the publication of his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in 1921. Unlike Alain Locke and other African-Americans arguing for social equality by embracing the qualities of what Hughes dubbed "whiteness," Hughes asserts that African-Americans should embrace their blackness and their cultural integrity, qualities Hughes sees in lower-class black life, not the middle or upper classes. By embracing their blackness, says Hughes, African-Americans must recognize the importance of their music, especially jazz. For Hughes, jazz "is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile." The other leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), agrees with Hughes. Author of more than fourteen books, Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), a work dubbed an "African American feminist classic" and "one of the very greatest American novels in the twentieth century." Like Hughes, Hurston usually avoids fiction of protest, choosing to write literature that affirms the black consciousness. Because she did not author protest fiction and because of her gender, her works received little attention until the 1970s, when her body of fiction was "rediscovered" by the American author/poet Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983. Walker is a leading African-American feminist who introduced the word *womanist* in literary criticism, a term that highlights the perspectives and experiences of "women of color."

With the coming of the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s and World War II in the 1940s, the ideals that sparked the Harlem Renaissance were quieted, but not before the writings and music of African-Americans were embraced by mainstream American culture. After fighting for their country as did white men and women, black men returned home from the war to face mounting racism in the South. Leaving the Southern

states, black men and women migrated to the Northern cities, seeking equality and economic opportunity. Once again, African-American artists and poets called for social justice.

In what eventually became known as the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s and '60s, three new African-American voices took center stage: James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. Author of the novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), James Baldwin (1924–1987) addresses the concerns of the Civil Rights movement in his fiction. Avoiding the typical protest fiction, Baldwin captures in his prose what it is like to be black in an intensely personal way. Baldwin believed that America was in a process of being, not an arrived-at entity. In his vision or aesthetics, he addresses the problems of race and social justice in American democracy while attempting to create a world that transcends such inequity. For Baldwin, like Wheatley and other artists before him, alienation from both white and black society was the norm. At a time when being black and homosexual were suspect identities, Baldwin was both. Authoring more than eighteen works, Baldwin found no home in American society of the 1950s.

Unlike Baldwin, Richard Wright (1908–1960), another literary voice for African-Americans, embraces Marxist principles and opts to change the society in which he lives. Author of *Native Son* (1940), *The Outsider* (1953), and *White Man, Listen!* (1957), Wright was a novelist, essayist, and activist who believed that "Negro writers must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but to change and transcend them." In his works, Wright asserts that the African-American writers should concentrate their talents on describing the material conditions of black, not white, life in American society. The ideology of the black working classes, not the white upper classes, must be embraced. What this means for the writer, says Wright, is an interaction with, not an isolation from, society. The act of writing is a social act that should bring about change for the better in the lives of blacks. For Wright, writing should highlight the oppression of blacks and must become a radical agent of social change.

Arguably the greatest literary work of this time is Ralph Ellison's only novel, *Invisible Man* (1953). In this work and in Ellison's collections of essays, *Shadow and Act* (1966) and *Going to the Territory* (1986), Ellison (1914–1994) asserts that in America race is the central and most profound issue. Unlike Wright, Ellison argues that literature, especially the novel, should be a place of experimentation and speculation, where various ideas could be examined and pondered. For Ellison, literature is not politics nor is it a bully pulpit to advocate social change. Texts must engage their culture but not be primarily agents of change. African-American art, Ellison declares, must be written and analyzed with the same literary and cultural sophistication as any other kind of art.

In the ongoing development of African-American literature and criticism, the **black arts movement** provides a radical change in direction from

its immediate past, the 1940s and '50s. The African-American scholar-critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls this movement the "shortest and least successful" in African-American cultural history. This black arts movement spans the decade from 1965 to 1975, its beginning dated with the assassination of Malcolm X in February 1965. Radically breaking with the philosophy of the Civil Rights era, this movement advocates black power—that is, militant advocacy of armed self-defense—while inspiring a renewal and pride in African heritage and asserting the goodness and beauty of all things black. Its foremost spokesperson is Amiri Baraka, a Greenwich Village beat poet who became the black arts movement's voice through its literary magazine *Cricket*. The movement's chief concern was the establishment of a black nation, and its literary goal was to describe and develop the black man in a racist white society in order to change the African-American consciousness from one based on shame because of its blackness to one based on being proud of everything black, especially skin color. Although the black arts movement produced a variety of literary works by writers such as Nikki Giovanni (*Black Feeling, Black Folk*, 1967) and Sonia Sanchez (*Homecoming*, 1969), its existence was short lived. Its visionary gleam and its major strength were also its major weakness, alienating African-Americans from other segments of society by attempting to establish its own black nation and making blacks a group of people seemingly standing apart from history.

What African-American literature and criticism needed was a theoretical framework on which to base its criticism. Throughout the first seven decades of the twentieth century, African-American writers wrote texts depicting African-Americans interacting with their culture. These American subaltern writers concerned themselves mainly with issues of nationalism and the exposure of the unjust treatment of African-Americans—a suppressed, repressed, and colonized subculture—at the hands of their white conquerors. Their writings highlight such themes as the African-American's search for personal identity; the bitterness of the struggle of black men and women in America to achieve political, economic, and social success; and both mild and militant pictures of racial protest and hatred. What these authors gave to America were personal portraits of what it meant to be a black writer struggling with personal, cultural, and national identity.

While literature authored by black writers was gaining in popularity throughout the twentieth century, it was being interpreted through the lens of the dominant culture, a lens that was focused on one color—white, the dominant element in the binary opposition white/black, as Derrida would soon explain. A black aesthetics had not yet been established, and critics and theorists alike applied the principles of Western metaphysics and Western hermeneutics to this ever-evolving and steadily increasing body of literature. Although theoretical and critical essays authored by DuBois, Hughes, Wright, and Ellison announced to the literary world that black literature was a distinctive literary practice with its own aesthetics and should not be

dubbed a subcategory or a footnote of American literature, it was not until the late 1970s and the 1980s that black theorists began to articulate the distinctive characteristics of African-American literature. In this increasingly important group of literary critics, two stand out: Abdul R. JanMohamed and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

The founding editor of *Cultural Critique*, Abdul JanMohamed is one of the most influential postcolonial theorists. A professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, JanMohamed has authored a variety of scholarly articles and texts highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of literary criticism. Raised in Kenya (and, therefore, not considered by some to be an African-American), JanMohamed witnessed firsthand British imperialism and colonial methods that attempt to dominate, quell, and otherwise eliminate the vital elements of the colonized culture. He has spent his life studying the effects of colonization and the intertwined economic and social dynamics of both the conqueror and the conquered. Of particular importance is his text *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (1983), in which he argues that literature authored by the colonized (Africans in Kenya and African-Americans in America, for example) is more interesting for its **noematic** value—the complexities of the world it reveals—than for its **noetic** or subjective qualities concerning what it perceives. JanMohamed delineates the antagonistic relationship that develops between hegemonic and nonhegemonic literature. In African-American literature, for example, he notes that black writers such as Richard Wright and Frederick Douglass were shaped by their personal socioeconomic conditions. At some point in their development as writers and as persons who were on the archetypal journey of self-realization, these writers became "agents of resistance" and were no longer willing to "consent" to the hegemonic culture. According to JanMohamed, at some point, subaltern writers will resist being shaped by their oppressors and become literary agents of change. It is this process of change from passive observers to resisters that forms the basis of JanMohamed's aesthetics.

Perhaps the most important and leading contemporary African-American theorist is Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Unlike many African-American writers and critics, Gates directs much of his attention to other African-American critics, declaring that they and he "must redefine 'theory' itself from within [their] own black cultures, refusing to grant the premise that theory is something that white people do. We are all heirs to critical theory, but we Black critics are heir to the black vernacular as well." In his critical theory, Gates provides a theoretical framework for developing a peculiarly African-American literary canon. In this framework, he insists that African-American literature be viewed as a form of language, not a representation of social practices or culture. For black literary criticism to develop, its principles must be derived from the black tradition itself and include what he calls "the language of blackness, the signifying difference which makes the Black

tradition our very own." In his texts *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) and *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Radical" Self* (1987), Gates develops these ideas and announces the **double-voicedness** of African-American literature—that is, African-American literature draws on two voices and cultures, the white and the black. It is the joining of these two discourses, Gates declares, that produces the uniqueness of African-American literature.

Along with other theorists such as Houston Baker, Deborah McDowell, Hazel Carby, bell hooks, Gloria A. Hull, Toni Morrison, Claudia Tate, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, Ntozake Shange, and a host of African-American feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and gay and lesbian critics, present-day African-American theorists and critics are developing a body of culture-specific theory and criticism of African-American literature. Theirs, they believe, is a significant discourse that has, for too long, been neglected. The study of this body of literature, they insist, needs to be reformed. The beginning of this reformation, reclamation, and ongoing development of peculiarly African-American literary theories and criticism has helped other marginalized groups such as gays and lesbians to develop and articulate their own critical theories and practical criticism.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

When reading a text through the lens of African-American theory and criticism, consider the following questions:

- Is race evident?
- Who are the marginalized characters? What color is their skin?
- Who are the oppressors?
- What are the means of oppression?
- What does it mean to be black in this text?
- What is the dominant hegemony?
- Are the marginalized characters aware of their oppression?
- What are the ties of the black characters to African language and cultural practices?
- Who speaks for blacks?
- Are any characters marginalized through silence?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

Recent demographics from the U.S. Census Bureau estimate that 41 million African-Americans live in the United States, comprising about 13.5 percent of the total population. Most live in the South, followed by the Northeast

and the Midwest, with 88 percent living in metropolitan areas. In comparison to whites and to other minorities, as a group African-Americans remain economically, educationally, and socially disadvantaged. Earning about 55 percent of the median income of European-Americans, African-Americans face discrimination in housing, employment, and accessible health care. These statistics lend support to the central concerns of African-American literature: oppression, suppression, and enslavement of blacks as depicted in black literature. And such are the major issues of African-American literary theory and criticism: marginalization of blacks; economic, social, political, and literary oppression; the historical significance of slavery and its present-day racial ramifications; and the celebration of all things black in the arts.

According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the task of African-American theory and criticism is not to cry "special"—that is, demanding a unique approach unlike any other past or contemporary school of criticism. Instead, Gates argues that black theorists and critics must use the most sophisticated contemporary theories and practices to redefine the language of critical theory and to allow black language to enter academic discourse and help disclose prejudice and ethnic differences in literature. Toni Morrison, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Claudia Tate, and Deborah G. Chay use the theories and methodologies of cultural studies, feminism, psychoanalysis, and gay and lesbian studies not only to highlight the concerns of African-Americans in their own literature but also to develop new critical theories that will reveal the as yet unspoken and silenced concerns of the past and the present in black literature.

Some critics of African-American theory and criticism, both black and white, ask questions that continue to be debated by African-American theorists: Who really can speak—conceive, develop, and write—both theory and criticism for African-Americans: only blacks? Whites? Other minorities? Is African-American literature an integral part of American literature or unique unto itself? Is present-day interest in African-American literature a reflection of America's contemporary concern for minorities that will eventually wane, or is it an interest that is reshaping the fabric of American literature? And are African-American writers themselves depicting blacks unduly negatively? Such complex questions and their multifaceted answers will continue to shape contemporary African-American criticism for the next several decades.

12

Queer Theory: Gay and Lesbian Criticism

It's exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful.

Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" *College English*, October 1972

Brokeback Mountain, the most discussed, controversial, and honored Hollywood film of 2005, is based on a short story by E. Annie Proulx. Proulx writes that one day she saw an old cowboy in a bar with a certain look in his eye, a look of dissatisfaction with his life, as he observed the younger cowboys. Deciding that the older cowboy was gay, Proulx began to write her short story, one that would simmer in her mind for a protracted time. Years after the story was published, Larry McMurty and Diana Ossana would write the screenplay for what would become Hollywood's love story for 2005.

Brokeback Mountain tells the story of two, nineteen-year-old, Wyoming cowboys, Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist. In the summer of 1963, the cowboys are employed by a sheep farmer to guard his flock while the sheep graze on Brokeback Mountain. After a few days of work and drinking, one night without warning and seemingly any premeditation, the two cowboys have a sexual encounter. After the night's event, Ennis says to Jack, "You know I ain't queer," and Jack responds, "Me neither." Then Ennis remarks, "This is a one-shot thing we got going on here." But it wasn't.

When the summer ends, Ennis and Jack part ways, assuming they will work at the same job next summer. When Jack returns the following year and applies for work, his boss tells him that he and his kind are not wanted there.

Years pass, during which time Ennis and Jack fall in love with two beautiful women and marry. One day Jack surprises Ennis with a visit. Upon meeting, both cowboys embrace and passionately kiss, shocking both of them, a scene that is viewed through an upstairs window by Ennis's wife, Alma. Periodically Ennis and Jack decide to go on "fishing" trips to

Brokeback Mountain. As Alma soon discovers, no fish are ever caught on these many outings.

Both men struggle with their feelings for each other. Ennis's father had taught him to hate homosexuals, telling Ennis the story of two old men who lived together and who were both killed by the townspeople, probably Ennis's dad among them. Jack, on the other hand, finds an outlet for his feelings by traveling to Mexico to seek a male prostitute. Toward the end of the movie, Ennis has divorced his wife, and Jack's marriage is in trouble. Ennis is now living in a rundown trailer and continues to struggle with his feelings for Jack, saying, "Why don't you let me be? It's because of you, Jack, that I'm like this—nothing and nobody." The movie's ending portrays a lonely, confused, and heartbroken Ennis struggling with his passion for Jack, who has been murdered by men who despise Jack's love for Ennis.

The critical reviews of *Brokeback Mountain* are as varied as the personal responses to the movie:

"Brokeback Mountain, *if you are willing to give it a chance, is an emotional, heartbreaking movie.*"

Willie Waffle, Wafflemovies.com

"This ostensible gay Western is marked by a heightened degree of sensitivity and tact, as well as an outstanding performance."

Todd McCarthy, Variety.com

"Some American audiences may reject out of hand a gay-themed tale set in the macho sanctity of the West. But they'd be missing great performances."

James Verniere, *Boston Herald*

"While the message at the core is that love is love, the way the initial sexual encounter is shown will only reinforce the negative views that bigots have of gay culture."

John Venable, Supercala.com

"And Lee (the director) conveys maddening delirium rendered in the way one man's eyes gaze at another's, and then look away, and the looking-away amounts to the murder of two souls as surely as if they'd drawn guns and hit each other in the heart."

Ken Tucker, *New York Magazine*

"Any of us can imagine a forbidden passion so sweeping that it carries us off at flood tide, never allowing us to question it. Whether the object of our affection would carry a purse, a lariat or both is beside the point."

Lawrence Toppman, *Charlotte Observer*

"A beautiful tragedy about the anguish of unfulfilled love. It's an absolute triumph, in every way."

Dawn Taylor, *Portland Tribune*

"This story of suppressed passion is, irrespective of gender considerations, a deeply moving, indeed lacerating film."

Frank Swietek, *One Guy's Opinion*

"Lee strips away all the pizzazz for something that is much more pure—a rough and tough emotional journey."

Mark Sells, *Oregon Herald*

"Eloquently sums up and universalizes the hopelessness of Jack and Ennis' situation while showing the staggering cost of hypocrisy and deceit."

James Sanford, *Kalamazoo Gazette*

"It is up to date in its version of forbidden love because its conflict is based on one of the last socially-sanctioned forms of discrimination."

Robert Roten, *Laramie Movie Scope*

"One of the all-time greatest love stories, its potent poignancy comes from universally relatable ideas like nagging love, lost dreams, a half-lived life and comfort in knowing incomplete joy is better than none at all."

Nick Rogers, *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, Illinois)

"Michelle Williams nearly steals the film as Ennis's wife in a quiet, complex, heartbreaking performance."

Jon Popick, *Planet Sickboy*

"Explores repressed feelings, loneliness, suffering, and alienation as adroitly as any film in recent memory."

John A. Nesbit, *Toxicuniverse.com*

"You can't take the 'gay' out of the 'gay cowboy' movie. What gives 'Brokeback Mountain' its punch is the (no pun intended) straight way in which its romance is told."

Eric Melin, *Scenestealers.com*

"I never became emotionally involved in their story."

Sean McBride, *Sean the Movie Guy*

"Change the names and genders as you wish. This is the sort of adult drama that people can relate to if they have any sort of romantic regrets."

Daniel M. Kimmel, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*

"Lee's film says unequivocally that it's in everyone's best interest for gay couples to live openly and safely."

Ken Fox, *TV Guide's Movie Guide*

"Foremost about a love that can never break out of its societal prison."

Jeffrey Chen, *Window to the Movies*

"The hubbub seems more politically driven in the wake of the gay marriage debate. And an Oscar win will be pandering to that."

Kevin Carr, *7M Pictures*

"The film's edge is its same-sex controversy."

Kevin A. Ransom, *Moviecrypt.com*

What these reviews of *Brokeback Mountain* successfully capture is the central concerns and questions of **queer theory,** one of the most recent schools of literary criticism to appear in academia. Influenced by deconstruction, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and other postmodern theories, queer theory questions the very terms we use to describe ourselves such as *heterosexual* or *homosexual.* These terms, queer theorists argue, are socially constructed concepts that do not define who we really are. As demonstrated in the movie reviews, queer theory challenges the assumption that human nature is unchangeable and can be defined by a finite list of characteristics. In queer theory's ongoing development, it asks such questions as the following:

- What is a man?
- What is a woman?
- What is gender?
- What does it mean to be a heterosexual? Homosexual? Gay? Lesbian? Bisexual? Queer?
- What does it mean to be masculine? Feminine?
- What does it mean to be human?
- What is normal? Abnormal?
- What is a "macho" man?
- What is love?
- What is "forbidden" passion? Forbidden by whom?

- What is "unfulfilled" love? What are its causes?
- Why do hypocrisy and deceit operate in a so-called forbidden-love relationship?
- Who or what in society sanctions or does not sanction the various kinds of love? Heterosexuality? Homosexuality? Bisexuality?
- How and why do some elements of society form a "societal prison" out of some love relationships?
- What does it mean to be homophobic?

These questions and their multiple answers provide the basis for queer theory and its continuing development that challenges traditional ways of viewing our sexuality and our identities.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ASSUMPTIONS

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the word *queer* was a pejorative term used to describe homosexuals, particularly males. Using a Marxist technique called hailing the subject or interpellation, queer theorists embraced the word and turned it on its head, making it a respectable critical term in academic studies. The term was first coined by the gender theorist Teresa de Lauretis in a special edition of the feminist journal *differences* titled *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, published in 1991. Since its inception, queer theory endeavors to debunk the idea that a person's identity is stable or fixed at birth. Like all schools of criticism, queer theory borrows, adopts, and adapts concepts, terms, theories, and methodologies from previously developed critical schools and finds its multipronged, historical roots in feminism, deconstruction theory, **gender studies,** and gay and lesbian studies.

Beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), feminist theory and criticism demands that women define for themselves what it means to be a woman. Following Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf asserts in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) that women must reject the social construct of femaleness and establish and define their own identity. A decade later, Simone de Beauvoir declares in *The Second Sex* (1949) that women must reject that they are the Other, an object defined and interpreted by males. Two decades later, Kate Millett writes in *Sexual Politics* (1969) that a female is born, but a woman is created. One's sex, Millet asserts, is biologically determined, but one's gender is a social construct created by society. Many feminist critics of the past several decades have embraced Millet's assertion that gender is not innate or biological, but constructed and perpetuated by social institutions and power structures. Our sex, which is biologically determined, fixed, and stable, is *different* from our gender, which is mutable and attributive. Because gender is a product of social ideas, feminists declare that gender should not and must not shape the identity of what it means to be a woman.

By asserting that gender must not shape a woman's identity, feminist theorists attack the long-held classical humanist belief called **essentialism,** which asserts that the true essence or identity of an individual is composed of finite and fixed properties that are the essential components of what it means to be human. Essentialism declares that to be human means that we have an unchangeable human nature, a true invariable essence. Essentialists believe that our sexuality and our gender are determined by our essential features—our true selves that give us our core sense of who we are, our identity, and our selfhood. Nothing—not society, education, or any spiritual beliefs—can change this unchangeable core, our essence.

Contemporary feminist critics reject essentialism with its assumption of an unchangeable human essence and accept what is known as **social constructivism.** These social constructivists reject essentialism's belief in an unalterable human essence but assert that gender is a socially constructed term and concept. Words such as *homosexual, heterosexual, male,* and *female* are likewise constructed and shaped distinctions that are subject to constant change. All such terms are laden with ideological suppositions and must be deconstructed and eventually reconstructed. Unlike the essentialist, who believes that knowledge is discovered, forgotten, and repressed and must then be rediscovered through history and experimentation, the social constructivist agrees with the poststructuralist assumptions of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction.

For Derrida and many other postmodern critics, Western metaphysics assumes logocentrism, a belief in an ultimate reality or center of truth that serves as the basis for all thoughts and actions. Various centers of truth can exist: the self, a spiritual being, reason, and so forth. According to Derrida, logocentric thinking has its origin in Aristotle's principle of noncontradiction: A thing cannot both have a property and not have a property. Hence, Western metaphysics has developed an "either-or" mentality that leads to dualistic thinking and to the constant centering and decentering of absolute truth(s). Once a center is established, it can be quickly decentered. Such reasoning leads Derrida to conclude that Western metaphysics is based on a system of binary operations or conceptual oppositions: good/bad, honesty/falsehood, up/down, right/wrong, God/humanity, and so forth. In each of these binary operations, one concept (the numerator) is superior or privileged, and the second (the denominator) is inferior or unprivileged. Both the privileged and the unprivileged parts of a binary opposition relate directly to a concept of truth Derrida calls the transcendental signified. What we privilege in binary oppositions thus supports our concept of truth.

Social constructivist feminists agree with Derrida that we think logocentrically. What happens, however, if truth is not absolute, but relative? If no absolute truth exists, truth is socially constructed. If there is no transcendental signified that gives meaning to the concept of selfhood, then selfhood is not an absolute, not a quality that is an "essential," objective part of our human

nature acquired at birth. The core argument of essentialism is thus turned on its head. Selfhood, our identity, is not prescribed or predetermined, but is subjective. Because no transcendental signified exists that determines who or what we are, what is it that defines and shapes us? According to social constructivist critics, the answer is clear: language. Our identities are subjective, not objective, and are constantly in the process of change. Any binary opposition we create to define ourselves is simply a social construct that must undergo constant revision. In particular, the male/female, man/woman, and masculine/feminine binaries represent unstable concepts and are products of culture and institutions of power. There exists no stable concept of the self or selfhood because these terms are subjective and unstable. Similarly, concepts such as sexuality, maleness, and femaleness are also unstable. These concepts become what Derrida calls free-floating signifieds—that is, concepts whose meanings are not fixed, but ever shifting. The meaning of these signifieds resides in how language is used or constructed.

Throughout the past several decades, feminist and gender critics highlight the unstable relationship expressed in the man/woman, male/female, and masculine/feminine binary oppositions. Because these critics believe that no transcendental signified exists to stabilize language with its accompanying binary oppositions, the term *gender* becomes for them a free-floating signified that shifts on a daily basis. For example, the "male" head of the home in 1960 in all probability did not wash dishes, make the bed, or clean the house. Nor did he pierce his ears or other body parts. On the other hand, today's male often performs household tasks and may wear an earring in one if not both ears.

In the mid-1980s, another school of criticism borrows and develops the gender concerns of the feminists and gender critics: **gay and lesbian studies.** Whereas feminist and gender critics debate and redefine the man/woman binary and emphasize gender differences, gay and lesbian studies target the heterosexual/homosexual binary, emphasizing sexual differences while also examining sexual differences applicable to the male and female, respectively. Gay and lesbian studies also analyze the social structures that have defined gays and lesbians as deviant or abnormal, questioning how such definitions developed throughout history, and why heterosexuality has been so positively defined. Like feminist studies, gay and lesbian studies are also studies of recovery, seeking to rediscover those gay and lesbian writers who throughout the centuries have been silenced, masked, or erased not only from the literary canon but also from history.

In the early 1990s, another group of literary theorists and critics developed from gay and lesbian studies: queer theory. Unlike gay and lesbian studies that emphasize the male and female gender, queer theory minimizes the discussion of gender while emphasizing and enlarging the conversation concerning sexual differences. While not abandoning an analysis of homosexuality, queer studies is more inclusive than gay and lesbian

studies, analyzing, discussing, and debating sexual topics that are considered queer—that is, odd, abnormal, or peculiar. Like the feminist social constructivists, queer theorists declare that our identities and our sexuality are not fixed: they are unstable. No set of prerequisites exist that define our human nature or our sexuality. From queer theory's point of view, it is pointless to discuss what it means to be male or female because our sexual identities are all different, each being socially constructed. Queer theory also challenges the compartmentalization of any person into a socially assigned group based on some shared lifestyle or habit versus those who do not. No identity or group can be defined as abnormal, lacking, complete, or incomplete. Our identities, including our sexuality, are shaped and developed by social codes, our individual actions, power structures within society, and a host of complex forces that are in continuous flux.

QUEER CRITICAL THEORISTS

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009) was one of queer theory's leading theorists. Earning her undergraduate degree at Cornell University and her Ph.D. from Yale University, Sedgwick taught at several prestigious liberal arts undergraduate colleges, also serving as professor of English at Duke University and, until her death in 2009, at The City University of New York Graduate Center. Her groundbreaking texts include *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), *Tendencies* (1993), *A Dialogue of Love* (2000), and *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003). In *Epistemology* Sedgwick affirms the necessity of studying gay/lesbian and queer theories, asserting:

> An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition, especially from the relatively de-centered perspective of modern gay and anti-homophobic theory.

Sedgwick's working thesis is simple yet profound: "People are different from each other." These differences should not be exploited, but accepted. In *Tendencies* she "attempts to find new ways to think about lesbian, gay, and other sexually dissident loves and identities in a complex social ecology where the presence of different gender, different identities and identifications, will be taken as a given." For Sedgwick, the word *queer* when directed toward or about a person, hinges upon performative acts—that is, only people who use the word *queer* in the first person about themselves are queer.

Another leading queer theorist is Judith Butler. Author of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies that Matter: On the*

Discursive Limits of "Sex" (1993), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), and many others, Butler is a professor of comparative literature and rhetoric at the University of California at Berkeley. One of her most influential works, *Gender Trouble*, asserts that feminism made a mistake when it declared that women were a special group with common interests. By so doing, feminists, maintains Butler, reinforced the patriarchal culture, which assumed the masculine/feminine and male/female binary oppositions. For Butler, gender is not stable, but fluid and changes from person to person and from context to context. Like gender, self-identity is performative—that is, what one does at a particular time, place, and context determines one's gender and identity, not a universal concept of who we are. Our identities are connected to what we do and are, not to our supposed essence (essentialism). Our identities are the *effect*, not the cause, of our performances. For Butler, the performative nature of our identities is queer theory's key concept.

Other queer theorists such as Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Warner, Sandy Stone, and Joseph Litvak use postist theories to investigate such diverse topics as cross-dressing, bisexuality, public sex, gay marriage, and gay media, to name a few. Unlike other schools of criticism, queer studies desires to be open ended, refusing at times to define itself by using any binary oppositions. If such binaries were established, queer theorists believe, queer theory would become too exclusionary and hinder its development. For queer theorists, queer theory does not enable them to define their identity, but is a critique of it. Accordingly, for queer theorists their theory and criticism are "always under construction" and always performative.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Read carefully Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown." Then ask yourself the following questions:

- How are the binaries male/female and masculine/feminine being defined?
- Who attributes masculine or feminine qualities to whom?
- How is gender being ascribed?
- Are the critical assumptions of essentialism or social constructivism established? By what character(s)?
- How are the characters' sexual identities shaped and formed?
- Is gender performative?
- What prejudices exist about any character's supposed sexuality?
- What social forces or constructs determine sexual identity?
- What is queer about the text?
- Is any character in crisis concerning his or her sexual identity?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSE

Queer theory assumes that our personal identities are unstable and in constant flux. An antiessentialist theory, queer studies decrees that we have no essential core to our humanness that defines us as human. As Butler maintains, all people are different. We must not allow society to shape our identities, but we ourselves must declare by our own acts who we are. No predetermined societal binary oppositions with their accompanying prejudices should determine our identities. We must challenge the concepts of sexual identity, gender, and sexual differences. What it means to be a male or a female is always in flux, always a process of becoming. Seeing all life as becoming, queer theorists challenge the notion of a fixed self-identity and examine areas of human activity such as bisexuality, cross-dressing, and gay marriage that often cause emotional debate, especially among queer theory's dissenters.

Like other schools of criticism, queer theory has its critics. Some believe it is deviant or weird and should not be studied at all. Others are ignorant of its content but somewhat fearful to read its theories. Many disagree with its social constructivist position and believe that a person's sexual identity is not fluid or unstable. Still others decree that queer theory is too theoretical and unlike real life. And many claim that gay and lesbian studies and queer theory (these two schools of criticism are often viewed as one) empower gay and lesbian politics, making them more important than they actually are while celebrating sexual desires.

Queer theorists themselves affirm that they do not know where their theories may take them, for as Butler notes, there are many queer theories, not just one. Queer theory is, from her perspective, unlimited in its possibilities because it refuses to define itself, seeing itself, like the concept of self-identity, as always in flux. In refusing to define itself, queer theory, argue some critics, may be the cause of its own eventual demise. Being future directed and open ended, this critical stance is chiefly characterized by its transitory and transformational potential. Because it holds nonreferentiality as a core tenet, it may, say some critics, envision a future that is indeed unimaginable and may have already outlived its "queer moment" in history.

On the other hand, some critics, such as Lynne Huffer in her work *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (2009), continue to lead queer theory into the future. Revisiting Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Huffer views sexuality as a lived experience, one that we are consistently called on to remember. Such innovative, provocative, and thoughtful research may indeed propel queer theory into a successful and long-lived future.

See **Readings on Literary Criticism** at the back of the text for a poignant essay that helps clarify the meaning of the words *queer* and *queer theory*, "Queer Theory," by Annamarie Jagose.

13

ECOCRITICISM

If we represent knowledge as a tree, we know that things that are divided are yet connected. We know that to observe the divisions and ignore the connections is to destroy the tree.

Wendell Berry

A clarion call to arms is being rung throughout college and university campuses across America and Europe. Its loud message is clear and pointed: Go green—otherwise known as the greening of campuses. A seedbed for relevant and current issues that affect all of us, colleges and universities are rising to the environmental task of making their campuses green. For example, the October 2006 meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education at Arizona State University introduced the Climate Commitment document. More than five hundred college and university presidents signed it, committing their institutions to achieve climate neutrality, to reduce greenhouse gases, to purchase or produce at least 15 percent of their institution's electricity consumption from renewable sources, and to reduce campus waste. Innovative but sometimes controversial campus projects stemming from such commitments include eliminating napkins at tables while providing napkin dispensers around the perimeters of dining halls (thus eliminating tons of paper waste), banning trays in dining halls (and saving tons of uneaten food formerly carried on the spaces around plates, which were all placed on trays), and setting time limits on showers in dorms. Other less controversial but highly innovative "greening" initiatives continue to occur on many campuses. For instance, at Seattle University, former trash such as pineapple heads, watermelon rinds, and lettuce leaves have now become fertilizer for the flowerbeds across campus. On the campus of Warren Wilson College in North Carolina, an "EcoDorm" powered with solar fuel cells that convert sunlight into electricity and heat has been constructed. In addition, at Warren Wilson College hungry students hurrying to classes can now munch

on the all-edible shrubs! And as part of an Earth Day celebration and initiative, the multiple residence halls compete to see which dorm can conserve the most energy by dimming lights and unplugging all electrical appliances when not in use, including computers, phone chargers, and mp3 players.

What college administrators and students are now recognizing is what the early environmentalists of the 1960s and 1970s declared decades ago: all life is interconnected. How we live, how and what we eat, how and where we work, how we play, and even how we study are all interrelated activities. Perhaps Walt Disney World™ in Orlando, Florida, recognized this interconnectedness when Spaceship Earth™ was built as the centerpiece of its EPCOT™. We are all travelers on the same planet, inhabiting similar spaces, and using the earth's soil and air, living, in essence, in one rather large community. As espoused by the leading Latin American advocate-critic of the environment, Walter Rojas Perez, Earth, our home planet, is our "Spaceship Earth," a place where none are conquerors but all are crewmembers.

As fellow crewmembers, each of us, say those who have signed the College Commitment document, is responsible for our planet. As such, it is up to us—both individually and collectively, they argue—to protect planet Earth, our natural world. In essence, we must become peoples of "place," those who recognize that we define ourselves biologically, socially, and politically through everyday, common events: eating, working, and playing. Addressing our present-day global environmental crisis, say these environmentalists, is an interdisciplinary task that must be undertaken at all levels: internationally, nationally, and locally. In the academic arena, spearheading such concerns is one group of scholars-critics-writers: the ecocritics. Ecocritics' environmental writings and criticism have been dubbed with a variety of names: green studies, green cultural studies, green criticism, ecopoetics, literary ecology, environmental literary criticism, and perhaps the most popular name, ecocriticism.

WHAT IS ECOCRITICISM?

Dating from the late 1980s, **ecocriticism** is the latest emerging field in literary studies that directly relates who we are as human beings to the environment. Like other schools of criticism such as reader-oriented criticism and feminism, ecocriticism is an eclectic group of writers, critics, and theorists who emphasize place, nature, and the physical world, attesting to the interconnectedness between humans (their culture) and nature. Perhaps the most succinct and best definition of ecocriticism appears in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1995), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm: "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines

language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies." Thanks, in large part, to Glotfelty, ecocriticism has now become a legitimate field of study in literary criticism, with its canonical status dating from 1993. Glotfelty herself acknowledges that she did not coin the term, that honor going to William H. Rueckert in whose article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) the word first appeared. Glotfelty and other like-minded ecocritics challenge the academic community to re-examine what they call "nature writing." Such a challenge is not simply a summons to reread the works of Thoreau or Emerson and passively and enjoyably contemplate nature. According to another leading ecocritic and author of the groundbreaking text *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), Lawrence Buell, ecocriticism calls us to activism, declaring that ecocriticism is a "study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis." In other words, ecocritics invite and challenge us to participate in actually doing something about our environment, not simply contemplating change or involvement. Such a call to action, ecocritics maintain, must necessarily raise moral questions about how we interact with nature. Through examining texts that highlight the natural environment, ecocritics entreat us to participate in practices that will change our environment and our material world, encouraging us to become guardians of our planet not only for ourselves but also for future generations.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

When many people hear the word *ecocriticism*, thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William Wordsworth, and others who write about nature and who create pastoral scenes for their readers come to mind. Long before these writers, however, the Greeks and Romans along with many others authored texts that contained pastoral scenes that highlight setting and the natural world while generating literary responses to environmental concerns, such as animal rights, pollution, and excessive waste. One can legitimately argue, then, that "nature literature" is as old as Western literature itself.

Like feminism, environmentalism and ecocriticism have historic roots in the 1960s. And like feminism with its historically based first, second, and third "waves" of criticism, ecocriticism can be divided into first- and second-wave environmental criticism. The first ecocritic to note such a distinction is Lawrence Buell in his text *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005). In this work, Buell maintains that first-wave ecocriticism is the somewhat older environmental criticism of the

twentieth century that reread and examined "nature writing" of the nineteenth century. Second-wave criticism, on the other hand, examines more current works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which focuses more directly on current environmental concerns. It is Carson's text, for example, that touched off environmental concerns that are discussed and debated today, such as poisons from insecticides, weed killers, and other products that ultimately lead to dangerous chemicals appearing in the food supply. Arguing that such poisons are more dangerous than radiation, Carson demonstrates that insecticides can stay in a person's body from birth to death, causing a host of diseases along with birth abnormalities.

Dating from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, first-wave ecocriticism with its focus on nineteenth-century literature divides itself on geographical grounds: American and British. During the period known as the "Flowering of American Literature" (mid-nineteenth century), American authors such as Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), editor of the literary mouthpiece for the American transcendentalists, *The Dial;* Ralph Waldo Emerson, author of *Nature* (1836), a landmark essay defining the philosophical content of the American Romantic movement; and Henry David Thoreau, author of what has become the quintessential nature writing text, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), set the standard for nature writing. These works highlight natural settings, nature, and a type of spirituality that connects both humanity and nature itself, a life force in and through nature that humanity can and should embrace. Known as transcendentalism, this peculiarly American philosophy became the philosophical center of American literature during the first half of the nineteenth century. And it is these works that the first-wave ecocritics used to highlight their chief concerns: place, setting, nature, the earth, and the spirit forces embodied in nature itself.

Simultaneously in Great Britain the first-wave scholars of "green studies" (the name given to ecocriticism in Great Britain) centered their scholarship on authors such as William Wordsworth (1770–1850), coauthor of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) along with Samuel T. Coleridge (1772–1834); and the poetry of John Keats (1795–1821), author of many famous Romantic poems such as "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "Ode to a Nightingale." In 1973, Welsh academic and leading foundational critic of cultural studies Raymond Williams published his book *The Country and the City.* In this text, Williams articulates some of the chief ecocritical or green studies concerns before either term—ecocriticism or green studies—was coined, including the key distinctions between rural and urban and nature and civilization.

Dating from the late 1990s, second-wave ecocriticism places less emphasis on the pastoral and Romantic American and British authors, while emphasizing present-day environmental concerns. For example, second-wave ecocritics have been active in the environmental justice movement. In his essay titled "Environmentalism and Ecocriticism" (2006), the Welsh author-critic Richard Kerridge notes that the environmental justice movement is "a collective term for the efforts of poor communities to defend themselves

against the dumping of toxic wastes." Proponents of this movement, says Kerridge, necessarily highlight questions of gender, class, race, and colonialism, challenging first-wave ecocritics who seem more interested in preserving "wild" and untamed nature than protecting the environment. Because second-wave ecocritics do not abandon the interests of first-wave ecocriticism, it is often difficult to declare a particular ecocritic to be solely a first-wave or a second-wave critic.

As one of the latest critical movements to join literary criticism and practice, ecocriticism and its emergence on the literary studies stage can be dated from the mid-1980s in America and the early 1990s in Great Britain. A pivotal year for ecocriticism is 1992, the year the Association of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was formed, along with its official academic journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, or *ISLE*, first published in 1993. Since 1993, a variety of other worldwide organizations such as ASLE-UK (Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment), ASLE-Korea, and the Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC or ACEE) have become active literary/scientific societies advocating the concerns of ecocriticism. Without question, the leading ecocritics whose works have already been mentioned in this chapter are Cheryll Glotfelty, Harold Fromm, and Lawrence Buell. Their work has spearheaded worldwide conferences on ecocriticism, bringing attention to ecocritical concerns both within and outside the academy. Other critics such as Joni Adamson (*American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism*, 2001), John Elder (*American Nature Writers* in two volumes, 1996), Scott Bryson (*Ecopoetry: Critical Introduction*, 2002), and Glen A. Love (*Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, the Environment*, 2003) have also contributed significantly to ecocritical theory and practice. While American scholars presently dominate ecocritical practices, year by year ecocritical approaches to texts are gaining worldwide interest as evidenced in a variety of conferences and other scholarly activities occurring in Europe and Asia.

ASSUMPTIONS

Unlike some other schools of literary criticism, ecocriticism does not have a unified set of assumptions to which most ecocritics ascribe. Being one of the newest critical schools, ecocriticism continues to grow and change as it challenges not only worldwide concerns for the environment through literary analysis of texts but also its own philosophical assumptions. We can, however, articulate some of its chief concerns.

Ecocriticism

- emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things, including nature and culture.
- is interdisciplinary, believing that the humanities and the sciences should and must be in constant dialogue.

- believes that human culture is connected to the physical world; that is, humanity, the microcosm, directly affects and is affected by the physical world, the macrocosm.
- debunks poststructuralism's assumption that language—including our understanding of nature, the world, and humanity—is a social/cultural/linguistic construct.
- assumes that nature, the world, and humanity possess ontological status; that is, nature literally exists and cannot be contained or fully described and encoded by humanity's language, concepts, or beliefs.
- is ethically committed to the natural world—our planet—as being vitally important rather than simply an object for aesthetic discussion.
- analyzes texts that concern themselves with the physical environment.
- assumes that all texts necessarily develop a concept of "place" or setting that leads to an ecocritical reading of the text.
- is ecologically sensitive in textual analysis.
- encourages, endorses, and is active in political discussions in and through texts and textual analysis; that is, ecocriticism encourages political activism that supports its causes.
- advocates a literal "saving" of planet Earth, not only for present generations but also for generations to come.
- believes in being inclusive, not exclusive, in its theories and practices.

METHODOLOGY

Unlike some other schools of literary criticism, ecocriticism embraces plurality and is somewhat free of theoretical disputes and infighting. Because ecocriticism welcomes multiple perspectives, there exists no single, dominant methodology by which ecocritics analyze texts. Marked by what J. Levin calls a "tremendously ambitious intellectual, ethical, political, and even (sometimes) spiritual agenda" in his October 1999 article in *PMLA* titled "Form on Literatures of the Environment," ecocriticism approaches texts with an intense environmental concept of place and a profound interest and understanding of nature. It seeks to demonstrate humanity's connectedness to nature or what some ecocritics dub the **ecosphere**—that is, humanity's interconnectedness to all the earth's living organisms and their physical environment. Like scientists, ecocritics keenly observe a text's "environment" (setting or place), noting how characters and place are intertwined and seeking to demonstrate how place affects and defines the characters as do the characters affect the natural setting or place. Ecocritics also hold to the moral imperative that humanity must safeguard its planet—a concept that they dub an ecocentric value. And it is through the lens of this ethical perspective that they read and analyze texts.

Depending on one's particular personal interests, an ecocritic may approach textual analysis by emphasizing different perspectives. For example,

one ecocritic may highlight ecocriticism's first-wave interest: the beauty of nature in the nature writings of Emerson, Thoreau, or Wordsworth. Another may acknowledge that all such nature writing is politically inscribed. This critic would then demonstrate through textual analysis the hows and whys of protecting place or setting or nature as evidenced in the text. Still another ecocritic may choose to focus on "urban nature," demonstrating what eco-critic Cynthia Deitering calls **toxic consciousness**—those works of literature that highlight apocalyptic themes in postindustrial ecosystems. And yet another ecocritic may choose to be involved in **ecocomposition,** showing in the composition classroom how individuals can develop ecosensitive human relationships by and through journal and/or memoir writing. In addition, the ecofriendly composition professor-ecocritic can also encourage environmental "life writing," both examining autobiographies through the lens of environmental concerns and encouraging students themselves to write ecoaware autobiographies.

Such diverse practices have enabled ecocriticism's assumptions and beliefs to crystallize into ever-expanding areas of study. One such area is ecofeminism (or ecological feminism), which analyzes the interconnection of the oppression of women and nature. Using their literary methodology, ecofeminists demonstrate connections between sexism and the domination of nature. The subjection and subordination of women in society is linked, they believe, to the prescribed degradation of nature in a patriarchal society. As men dominate women, they argue, men classify not only women but all races and natural objects. Such thinking is demonstrated through a series of binaries or opposites to which many people subscribe, either consciously or subconsciously, including but not limited to man's dominating woman (man/women), white/black, and culture/nature. By examining such works of fiction as Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985) and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (2000), ecofeminists underscore these concerns, thereby bringing ecofeminist interests to the attention of their readers. Such readings of texts have embraced what some scholars call the environmental justice movement. By consciously raising awareness of class, race, and gender through ecocritical readings of texts, ecocritics issue a "call to arms," actively highlighting their concerns while bringing to the foreground the many unjust scenarios of race, class, and gender as pictured not only in texts but in society as a whole.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

By using the principles and practices of textual analysis espoused by ecocriticism, ecocritics assert that readers will become involved in a re-evaluation of their own assumptions concerning nature, humanity, and the environment.

Such an examination is indeed an important one because how we discuss and analyze our natural world, declare ecocritics, is as equally important as the land itself. The interconnectedness of humanity and the land or the natural world cannot, they say, be denied.

To venture into the amazing world of ecocriticism, readers can begin their journey by asking the same kinds of philosophical and practical questions about and concerning texts that ecocritics ask. The following questions provide a doorway into ecocritical textual analysis. In particular, read Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown." After your reading, ask yourself the following questions concerning this text:

- What do we mean by "nature," both in a given text and in our world?
- How is nature portrayed in a text?
- How are the characters in a text portrayed in relationship with nature?
- How do the characters interact with nature?
- How does nature interact with the characters?
- How does the text demonstrate how the microcosm (humanity) affects the macrocosm (nature) and how the macrocosm affects the microcosm?
- How does the actual physical setting of the text affect the text's plot?
- How are race, class, and gender illustrated in the text, and how are they related to nature or the land?
- What particular historical period is depicted in the text? How is this historical period related to issues of nature or the land?
- Is the text challenging its readers to environmental action and promoting changes in how we treat nature? Other classes? Races? Genders?

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

A quick glance at the table of contents of the core text of ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, reveals the multifaceted nature of this ever-evolving school of criticism: "Nature and Silence," "The Uses of Landscape," "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy," "Literature and Ecology," "The Comic Mode," and "Unearthing Herstory" are just a few. By its very openness, ecocriticism invites a diverse group of theorists and critics to participate in its philosophical and practical environmental concerns. Inviting postcolonialists, feminists, and New Historicists to their literary table, for example, ecocritics enlarge the vision(s) of texts and their role and function in our lives while challenging us, the readers, to investigate and grapple with our personal understanding of humanity, texts, and nature itself. In other words, ecocriticism desires change: change in how we treat each other and how we treat our world.

By declaring itself to be proactive in regards to protecting and reclaiming nature and the environment, ecocriticism opens itself to the "so what" question. After reading an ecocritical essay, some critics ask, "So what?" What happens? How can we, as readers, critics, and scholars, actually affect any change in how humanity treats the physical environment or its world? Does or can such a literary analysis make any more significant difference than, let us say, a New Critical reading or a reader-oriented response to a text? In other words, how can ecocriticism's positions and analyses turn literary analysis into political action in the real world?

Critics of ecocriticism also point out that ecocriticism has little if any theory of its own; it simply borrows a bit of theory from one school of thought and adds a second to its beliefs from another, while continuing to add thoughts and beliefs from rather diverse and sometimes contradictory philosophies and theories. One leading scholar-critic, Patrick D. Murphy, states this concern rather bluntly, noting that too much of ecocriticism's theory "remains theoretically unsophisticated." And too often, he notes, "there remains an anti-theoretical, naive, realist attitude expressed" in the writings of the ecocritics. Stephanie Sarver, another critic-scholar, adds that ecocriticism is not a theory at all, but simply a focus on one topic, the environment.

In addition, critics of ecocriticism point out that ecocriticism's phenomenal growth in the 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century has both positive and negative results. Initially, ecocriticism embraced diverse perspectives, theories, and practices to develop and articulate its chief concerns about the natural world. Interestingly, some of their initial concerns about awakening readers to environmental concerns have already been accomplished. What now is ecocriticism's primary task?

Accompanying this attack on criticism are the words of Leo Marx, American studies scholar at MIT and author of *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), among other notable works. Marx writes, "Ecocentrists are the Puritans of today's environment movement, critical of anyone—whether an environmentalist or a despoiler—who assumes that the chief reason for protecting the environment is its usefulness to human beings."

Ecocriticism will continue to grow in popularity among literary scholars and in literary studies. And as this field of inquiry expands and continues to challenge readers' anthropocentric ideas, it is positioning itself to redirect its focus toward that of stewardship, encouraging its readers to become wardens of their one and only home: planet Earth.

See **Readings on Literary Criticism** at the back of the text for an example of a carefully crafted and poignant ecocritical essay, "John Keats and Nature: An Ecocritical Inquiry," by Charles Ngiewih TEKE.

LITERARY SELECTION

Young Goodman Brown (1835)

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street of Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap, while she called to Goodman Brown.

"Dearest heart," whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, "prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts, that she's afeard of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year!"

"My love and my Faith," replied young Goodman Brown, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married!"

"Then God bless you!" said Faith with the pink ribbons, "and may you find all well, when you come back."

"Amen!" cried Goodman Brown. "Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee."

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him, with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought, as she spoke, there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no! 'twould kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind.

It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

"There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree," said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him, as he added, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and, looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose at Goodman Brown's approach, and walked onward, side by side with him.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South was striking as I came through Boston; and that is full fifteen minutes agone."

"Faith kept me back awhile," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveller was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger and as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner-table, or in King William's court, were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought, that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light.

"Come, Goodman Brown," cried his fellow-traveller, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

"Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples, touching the matter thou wot'st of."

"Sayest thou so?" replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go, and if I convince thee not, thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest yet."

"Too far, too far!" exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk. "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians, since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept—"

"Such company, thou wouldst say," observed the elder person, interrupting his pause. "Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well

acquainted with your family as ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem. And it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you, for their sake."

"If it be as thou sayest," replied Goodman Brown, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness."

"Wickedness or not," said the traveller with twisted staff, "I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the selectmen of divers towns make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too—But these are state secrets."

"Can this be so!" cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. "Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble, both Sabbath-day and lecture-day!"

Thus far, the elder traveller had listened with due gravity, but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth, shaking himself so violently that his snake-like staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted he again and again; then composing himself, "Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, prithee, don't kill me with laughing!"

"Well, then, to end the matter at once," said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled, "there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I'd rather break my own!"

"Nay, if that be the case," answered the other, "e'en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not, for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us, that Faith should come to any harm."

As he spoke, he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin.

"A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness, at nightfall," said he. "But, with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods, until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with, and whither I was going."

"Be it so," said his fellow-traveller. "Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path."

Accordingly the young man turned aside, but took care to watch his companion, who advanced softly along the road until he had come within a staff's length of the old dame. She, meanwhile, was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and mumbling some indistinct words—a prayer, doubtless—as she went. The traveller put forth his staff and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail.

"The devil!" screamed the pious old lady.

"Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?" observed the traveller, confronting her, and leaning on his writhing stick.

"Ah, forsooth, and is it your worship, indeed?" cried the good dame. "Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But, would your worship believe it?—my broomstick hath strangely disappeared, stolen, as I suspect, by that unhanged witch, Goody Cory, and that, too, when I was all anointed with the juice of smallage and cinquefoil and wolf's-bane—"

"Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe," said the shape of old Goodman Brown.

"Ah, your worship knows the recipe," cried the old lady, cackling aloud. "So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting, and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it; for they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion tonight. But now your good worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling."

"That can hardly be," answered her friend. "I will not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse, but here is my staff, if you will."

So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian magi. Of this fact, however, Goodman Brown could not take cognizance. He had cast up his eyes in astonishment, and looking down again, beheld neither Goody Cloyse nor the serpentine staff, but his fellow-traveller alone, who waited for him as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"That old woman taught me my catechism!" said the young man; and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment.

They continued to walk onward, while the elder traveller exhorted his companion to make good speed and persevere in the path, discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor, than to be suggested by himself.

As they went, he plucked a branch of maple to serve for a walking-stick, and began to strip it of the twigs and little boughs, which were wet with evening dew. The moment his fingers touched them they became strangely withered and dried up as with a week's sunshine.

Thus the pair proceeded, at a good free pace, until suddenly, in a gloomy hollow of the road, Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree and refused to go any farther.

"Friend," said he, stubbornly, "my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go

to the devil, when I thought she was going to heaven; is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith and go after her?"

"You will think better of this by and by," said his acquaintance, composedly. "Sit here and rest yourself a while; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along."

Without more words, he threw his companion the maple stick, and was as speedily out of sight as if he had vanished into the deepening gloom. The young man sat a few moments by the roadside, applauding himself greatly, and thinking with how clear a conscience he should meet the minister in his morning walk, nor shrink from the eye of good old Deacon Gookin. And what calm sleep would be his that very night, which was to have been spent so wickedly, but purely and sweetly now, in the arms of Faith! Amidst these pleasant and praiseworthy meditations, Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

On came the hoof-tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding-place; but owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot, neither the travellers nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the wayside, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky athwart which they must have passed. Goodman Brown alternately crouched and stood on tiptoe, pulling aside the branches and thrusting forth his head as far as he durst without discerning so much as a shadow. It vexed him the more, because he could have sworn, were such a thing possible, that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin, jogging along quietly, as they were wont to do, when bound to some ordination or ecclesiastical council. While yet within hearing, one of the riders stopped to pluck a switch.

"Of the two, reverend sir," said the voice like the deacon's, "I had rather miss an ordination dinner than to-night's meeting. They tell me that some of our community are to be here from Falmouth and beyond, and others from Connecticut and Rhode Island, besides several of the Indian powwows, who, after their fashion, know almost as much deviltry as the best of us. Moreover, there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion."

"Mighty well, Deacon Gookin!" replied the solemn old tones of the minister. "Spur up, or we shall be late. Nothing can be done, you know, until I get on the ground."

The hoofs clattered again; and the voices, talking so strangely in the empty air, passed on through the forest, where no church had ever been gathered, or solitary Christian prayed. Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying, so deep into the heathen wilderness? Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground,

faint and over-burthened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it.

"With Heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" cried Goodman Brown.

While he still gazed upward, into the deep arch of the firmament and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and hid the brightening stars. The blue sky was still visible except directly overhead, where this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward. Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of town's people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine at Salem village, but never, until now, from a cloud at night. There was one voice, of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain; and all the unseen multitude, both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward.

"Faith!" shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, "Faith! Faith!" as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness.

The cry of grief, rage, and terror was yet piercing the night, when the unhappy husband held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately in a louder murmur of voices fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the clear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.

"My Faith is gone!" cried he, after one stupefied moment. "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given."

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path, rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds—the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn. But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Goodman Brown, when the wind laughed at him. "Let us hear which will laugh loudest! Think not to frighten me with your devilry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powwow, come devil himself, and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you!"

In truth, all through the haunted forest there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy, and now shouting forth such laughter as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man. Thus sped the demoniac on his course, until, quivering among the trees, he saw a red light before him, as when the felled trunks and branches of a clearing have been set on fire, and throw up their lurid blaze against the sky, at the hour of midnight. He paused, in a lull of the tempest that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness pealing in awful harmony together. Goodman Brown cried out; and his cry was lost to his own ear, by its unison with the cry of the desert.

In the interval of silence he stole forward until the light glared full upon his eyes. At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock, bearing some rude, natural resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit, and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage that had overgrown the summit of the rock, was all on fire, blazing high into the night and fitfully illuminating the whole field. Each pendent twig and leafy festoon was in a blaze. As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

"A grave and dark-clad company!" quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth, they were such. Among them, quivering to-and-fro between gloom and splendor, appeared faces that would be seen next day at the council-board of the province, and others which, Sabbath after Sabbath, looked devoutly heavenward, and benignantly over the crowded pews, from the holiest pulpits in the land. Some affirm that the lady of the governor was there. At least there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled lest their mothers should espy them. Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity. Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and

waited at the skirts of that venerable saint, his reverend pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered also among their pale-faced enemies were the Indian priests, or powwows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft.

"But, where is Faith?" thought Goodman Brown, and, as hope came into his heart, he trembled.

Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable to mere mortals is the lore of fiends. Verse after verse was sung; and still the chorus of the desert swelled between like the deepest tone of a mighty organ; and, with the final peal of that dreadful anthem there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconverted wilderness were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man in homage to the prince of all. The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages of horror on the smoke wreaths above the impious assembly. At the same moment the fire on the rock shot redly forth and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches.

"Bring forth the converts!" cried a voice, that echoed through the field and rolled into the forest.

At the word, Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms and led him to the blazing rock. Thither came also the slender form of a veiled female, led between Goody Cloyse, that pious teacher of the catechism, and Martha Carrier, who had received the devil's promise to be queen of hell. A rampant hag was she. And there stood the proselytes beneath the canopy of fire.

"Welcome, my children," said the dark figure, "to the communion of your race! Ye have found, thus young, your nature and your destiny. My children, look behind you!"

They turned; and flashing forth, as it were, in a sheet of flame, the fiend-worshippers were seen; the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.

"There," resumed the sable form, "are all whom ye have reverenced from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet, here are they all, in my worshipping assembly. This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds; how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widow's weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their father's wealth; and how fair damsels—blush not, sweet ones—have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest, to an infant's funeral.

By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin, ye shall scent out all the places—whether in church, bed-chamber, street, field, or forest—where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood-spot. Far more than this. It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power—than my power at its utmost—can make manifest in deeds. And now, my children, look upon each other."

They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed altar.

"Lo! there ye stand, my children," said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad, with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race. "Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome, again, my children, to the communion of your race!"

"Welcome!" repeated the fiend-worshippers, in one cry of despair and triumph.

And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness in this dark world. A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand, and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

"Faith! Faith!" cried the husband. "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One!"

Whether Faith obeyed, he knew not. Hardly had he spoken, when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind

which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock, and felt it chill and damp; while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning young Goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the grave-yard to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on Goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint as if to avoid an anathema. Old Deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words of his prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth Goodman Brown. Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine at her own lattice, catechising a little girl who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at the sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?

Be it so, if you will; but, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate, man did he become, from the night of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath day, when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen, because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid eloquence and with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith, and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down in prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave, a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone; for his dying hour was gloom.

READINGS ON LITERARY CRITICISM

In this selection of professional essays, you will find five cornerstone essays that helped lay the foundation for their respective schools of criticism with their theoretical assumptions, methodologies, and practices. The first essay, "The Formalist Critics," by Cleanth Brooks, provides "some articles of faith" for New Criticism, asserting that literary study be "concerned primarily with the work itself." The second essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," by Jacques Derrida, is the pivotal essay of poststructuralism or postmodernity, which asserts that we cannot make definitive statements because nothing is stable; meaning, declares Derrida, is always contingent and ambiguous. The third essay, "Heroic Ethnocentrism: The Idea of Universality in Literature," by Charles Larson, introduces the reader to postcolonialism, declaring that "the purpose of any piece of literature . . . is to show us something we were previously unaware of" and that literature is "a voyage into a previously untraveled world." The fourth essay, "Queer Theory," by Annamarie Jagose, gives us working definitions of the word *queer* and *queer theory*, maintaining that "queer is always an identity under construction." And the fifth essay, "John Keats and Nature: An Ecocritical Inquiry," by Charles Ngiewih TEKE, provides an excellent example of the principles and practices of ecocriticism applied to a nineteenth-century text.

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"The Formalist Critics[1]"

by Cleanth Brooks

Here are some articles of faith I could subscribe to: *That literary criticism is a description and an evaluation of its object.*

That the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity — the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole.

That the formal relations in a work of literature may include, but certainly exceed, those of logic.

That in a successful work, form and content cannot be separated.

That form is meaning.

That literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolic.

That the general and the universal are not seized upon by abstraction, but got at through the concrete and the particular.

That literature is not a surrogate for religion.

That, as Allen Tate[2] says, "specific moral problems" are the subject matter of literature, but that the purpose of literature is not to point a moral.

That the principles of criticism define the area relevant to literary criticism; they do not constitute a method for carrying out the criticism.

Such statements as these would not, however, even though greatly elaborated, serve any useful purpose here. The interested reader already knows the general nature of the critical position adumbrated—or, if he does not, he can find it set forth in writings of mine or of other critics of like sympathy. Moreover, a condensed restatement of the position here would probably beget as many misunderstandings as have past attempts to set it forth. It seems much more profitable to use the present occasion for dealing with some persistent misunderstandings and objections.

In the first place, to make the poem or the novel the central concern of criticism has appeared to mean cutting it loose from its author and from his life as a man, with his own particular hopes, fears, interests, conflicts, etc. A criticism so limited may seem bloodless and hollow. It will seem so to the typical professor of literature in the graduate school, where the study of literature is still primarily a study of the ideas and personality of the author as revealed in his letters, his diaries, and the recorded conversations of his friends. It will certainly seem so to literary gossip columnists who purvey literary chitchat. It may also seem so to the young poet or novelist, beset with his own problems of composition and with his struggles to find a subject and a style and to get a hearing for himself.

In the second place, to emphasize the work seems to involve severing it from those who actually read it, and this severance may seem drastic and

[1]Originally published in the *Kenyon Review* in a series titled "My Credo."
[2]American editor, poet, novelist, and critic (1899–1979).

therefore disastrous. After all, literature is written to be read. Wordsworth's poet was a man speaking to men.[3] In each Sunday *Times*, Mr. J. Donald Adams[4] points out that the hungry sheep look up and are not fed; and less strenuous moralists than Mr. Adams are bound to feel a proper revulsion against "mere aestheticism." Moreover, if we neglect the audience which reads the work, including that for which it was presumably written, the literary historian is prompt to point out that the kind of audience that Pope[5] had did condition the kind of poetry that he wrote. The poem has its roots in history, past or present. Its place in the historical context simply cannot be ignored.

I have stated these objections as sharply as I can because I am sympathetic with the state of mind which is prone to voice them. Man's experience is indeed a seamless garment, no part of which can be separated from the rest. Yet if we urge this fact of inseparability against the drawing of distinctions, then there is no point in talking about criticism at all. I am assuming that distinctions are necessary and useful and indeed inevitable.

The formalist critic knows as well as anyone that poems and plays and novels are written by men—that they do not somehow happen—and that they are written as expressions of particular personalities and are written from all sorts of motives—for money, from a desire to express oneself, for the sake of a cause, etc. Moreover, the formalist critic knows as well as anyone that literary works are merely potential until they are read—that is, that they are re-created in the minds of actual readers, who vary enormously in their capabilities, their interests, their prejudices, their ideas. But the formalist critic is concerned primarily with the work itself. Speculation on the mental processes of the author takes the critic away from the work into biography and psychology. There is no reason, of course, why he should not turn away into biography and psychology. Such explorations are very much worth making. But they should not be confused with an account of the work. Such studies describe the process of composition, not the structure of the thing composed, and they may be performed quite as validly for the poor work as for the good one. They may be validly performed for any kind of expression—non-literary as well as literary.

On the other hand, exploration of the various readings which the work has received also takes the critic away from the work into psychology and the history of taste. The various imports of a given work may well be worth studying. I. A. Richards has put us all in his debt by demonstrating what different experiences may be derived from the same poem by an apparently homogeneous group of readers;[6] and the scholars have pointed out, all along,

[3]See WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850), preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800; above).
[4]James Donald Adams (1891–1968), author and editor, best known for his weekly column (which began in 1943) in the *New York Times Book Review*. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed" echoes line 125 of John Milton's "lycidas" (1637), a pastoral elegy for the poet Edward King.
[5]ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744), English poet and satirist.
[6]Brooks refers here to *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), by the English critic and theorist Richards (1893–1979).

how different Shakespeare appeared to an 18th Century as compared with a 19th Century audience; or how sharply divergent are the estimates of John Donne's[7] lyrics from historical period to historical period. But such work, valuable and necessary as it may be, is to be distinguished from a criticism of the work itself. The formalist critic, because he wants to criticize the work itself, makes two assumptions; (1) he assumes that the relevant part of the author's intention is what he got actually into his work; that is, he assumes that the author's intention *as realized* is the "intention" that counts, not necessarily what he was conscious of trying to do, or what he now remembers he was then trying to do. And (2) the formalist critic assumes an ideal reader: that is, instead of focusing on the varying spectrum of possible readings, he attempts to find a central point of reference from which he can focus upon the structure of the poem or novel.

But there *is* no ideal reader, someone is prompt to point out, and he will probably add that it is sheer arrogance that allows the critic, with his own blindsides and prejudices, to put himself in the position of that ideal reader. There is no ideal reader, of course, and I suppose that the practising critic can never be too often reminded of the gap between his reading and the "true" reading of the poem. But for the purpose of focusing upon the poem rather than upon his own reactions, it is a defensible strategy. Finally, of course, it is the strategy that all critics of whatever persuasion are forced to adopt. (The alternatives are desperate: either we say that one person's readings is as good as another's and equate those readings on a basis of absolute equality and thus deny the possibility of any standard reading. Or else we take a lowest common denominator of the various readings that have been made; that is, we frankly move from literary criticism into socio-psychology. To propose taking a consensus of the opinions of "qualified" readers is simply to split the ideal reader into a group of ideal readers.) As consequences of the distinction just referred to, the formalist critic rejects two popular tests for literary value. The first proves the value of the work from the author's "sincerity" (or the intensity of the author's feelings as he composed it). If we heard that Mr. Guest[8] testified that he put his heart and soul into his poems, we would not be very much impressed, though I should see no reason to doubt such a statement from Mr. Guest. It would simply be critically irrelevant. Ernest Hemingway's statement in a recent issue of *Time* magazine that he counts his last novel his best is of interest for Hemingway's biography, but most readers of *Across the River and Into the Trees*[9] would agree that it proves nothing at all about the value of the novel—that in this case the judgment is simply pathetically inept. We discount also such tests for poetry as that

[7]English poet (1576–1631).

[8]Edgar A. Guest (1881–1959), popular author whose sentimental poems were published daily in the *Detroit Free Press*.

[9]*Across the River and into the Trees* received harsh reviews when it was published in 1950. Hemingway (1899–1961), American writer of fiction.

proposed by A. E. Housman[10]—the bristling of his beard at the reading of a good poem. The intensity of his reaction has critical significance only in proportion as we have already learned to trust him as a reader. Even so, what it tells us is something about Housman—nothing decisive about the poem.

It is unfortunate if this playing down of such responses seems to deny humanity to either writer or reader. The critic may enjoy certain works very much and may be indeed intensely moved by them. I am, and I have no embarrassment in admitting the fact; but a detailed description of my emotional state on reading certain works has little to do with indicating to an interested reader what the work is and how the parts of it are related.

Should all criticism, then, be self-effacing and analytic? I hope that the answer is implicit in what I have already written, but I shall go on to spell it out. Of course not. That will depend upon the occasion and the audience. In practice, the critic's job is rarely a purely critical one. He is much more likely to be involved in dozens of more or less related tasks, some of them trivial, some of them important. He may be trying to get a hearing for a new author, or to get the attention of the freshman sitting in the back row. He may be comparing two authors, or editing a text; writing a brief newspaper review or reading a paper before the Modern Language Association.[11] He may even be simply talking with a friend, talking about literature for the hell of it. Parable, anecdote, epigram, metaphor—these and a hundred other devices may be thoroughly legitimate for his varying purposes. He is certainly not to be asked to suppress his personal enthusiasms or his interest in social history or in politics. Least of all is he being asked to *present* his criticisms as the close reading of a text. Tact, common sense, and uncommon sense if he has it, are all requisite if the practising critic is to do his various jobs well.

But it will do the critic no harm to have a clear idea of what his specific job as a critic is. I can sympathize with writers who are tired of reading rather drab "critical analyses," and who recommend brighter, more amateur, and more "human" criticism. As ideals, these are excellent; as recipes for improving criticism, I have my doubts. Appropriate vulgarizations of these ideals are already flourishing, and have long flourished—in the class room presided over by the college lecturer of infectious enthusiasm, in the gossipy Book-of-the-Month Club bulletins, and in the columns of the *Saturday Review of Literature.*

I have assigned the critic a modest, though I think an important, role. With reference to the help which the critic can give to the practising artist,

[10]Classical scholar and poet (1859–1936). Housman stated in "The Name and Nature of Poetry" (1933): "Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act."

[11]The primary North American professional organization for scholars in English and foreign languages and literatures.

the role is even more modest. As critic, he can give only negative help. Literature is not written by formula: he can have no formula to offer. Perhaps he can do little more than indicate whether in his opinion the work has succeeded or failed. Healthy criticism and healthy creation do tend to go hand in hand. Everything else being equal, the creative artist is better off for being in touch with a vigorous criticism. But the other considerations are never equal, the case is always special, and in a given case the proper advice *could* be: quit reading criticism altogether, or read political science or history or philosophy—or join the army, or join the church.

There is certainly no doubt that the kind of specific and positive help that someone like Ezra Pound[12] was able to give to several writers of our time is in one sense the most important kind of criticism that there can be. I think that it is not unrelated to the kind of criticism that I have described: there is the same intense concern with the text which is being built up, the same concern with "technical problems." But many other things are involved—matters which lie outside the specific ambit of criticism altogether, among them a knowledge of the personality of the particular writer, the ability to stimulate, to make positive suggestions.

A literary work is a document and as a document can be analysed in terms of the forces that have produced it, or it may be manipulated as a force in its own right. It mirrors the past, it may influence the future. These facts it would be futile to deny, and I know of no critic who does deny them. But the reduction of a work of literature to its causes does not constitute literary criticism; nor does an estimate of its effects. Good literature is more than effective rhetoric applied to true ideas—even if we could agree upon a philosophical yardstick for measuring the truth of ideas and even if we could find some way that transcended nose-counting for determining the effectiveness of the rhetoric.

A recent essay by Lionel Trilling bears very emphatically upon this point.[13] (I refer to him the more readily because Trilling has registered some of his objections to the critical position that I maintain.) In the essay entitled "The Meaning of a Literary Idea," Trilling discusses the debt to Freud and Spengler of four American writers, O'Neill, Dos Passos, Wolfe, and Faulkner. Very justly, as it seems to me, he chose Faulkner as the contemporary writer who, along with Ernest Hemingway, best illustrates the power and importance of ideas in literature. Trilling is thoroughly aware that his choice will

[12]American poet and critic (1885–1972). Pound worked vigorously to promote T. S. ELIOT (1888–1965), Robert Frost (1874–1963), James Joyce (1882–1941), and other writers.

[13]The essay referred to is included in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950). The American critic Trilling (1905–1975) discusses in it the influence of the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939) and the German philosopher of history Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), author of *The Decline of the West* (1918–22), on the playwright Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953) and the novelists John Dos Passos (1896–1970), Thomas Wolfe (1900–1938), and William Faulkner (1897–1962).

seem shocking and perhaps perverse, "because," as he writes, "Hemingway and Faulkner have insisted on their indifference to the conscious intellectual tradition of our time and have acquired the reputation of achieving their effects by means that have the least possible connection with any sort of intellectuality or even with intelligence."

Here Trilling shows not only acute discernment but an admirable honesty in electing to deal with the hard cases—with the writers who do not clearly and easily make the case for the importance of ideas. I applaud the discernment and the honesty, but I wonder whether the whole discussion in his essay does not indicate that Trilling is really much closer to the so-called "new critics" than perhaps he is aware. For Trilling, one notices, rejects any simple one-to-one relation between the truth of the idea and the value of the literary work in which it is embodied. Moreover, he does not claim that "recognizable ideas of a force or weight are 'used' in the work," or "new ideas of a certain force and weight are 'produced' by the work." He praises rather the fact that we feel that Hemingway and Faulkner are "intensely at work upon the recalcitrant stuff of life." The last point is made the matter of real importance. Whereas Dos Passos, O'Neill, and Wolfe make us "feel that *they* feel that they have said the last word," "we seldom have the sense that [Hemingway and Faulkner] . . . have misrepresented to themselves the nature and the difficulty of the matter they work on."

Trilling has chosen to state the situation in terms of the writer's activity (Faulkner is intensely at work, etc.). But this judgment is plainly an inference from the quality of Faulkner's novels—Trilling has not simply heard Faulkner say that he has had to struggle with his work. (I take it Mr. Hemingway's declaration about the effort he put into the last novel impresses Trilling as little as it impresses the rest of us.)

Suppose, then, that we tried to state Mr. Trilling's point, not in terms of the effort of the artist, but in terms of the structure of the work itself. Should we not get something very like the terms used by the formalist critics? A description in terms of "tensions," of symbolic development, of ironies and their resolution? In short, is not the formalist critic trying to describe in terms of the dynamic form of the work itself how the recalcitrancy of the material is acknowledged and dealt with?

Trilling's definition of "ideas" makes it still easier to accommodate my position to his. I have already quoted a passage in which he repudiates the notion that one has to show how recognizable ideas are "used" in the work, or new ideas are "produced" by the work. He goes on to write: "All that we need to do is account for a certain aesthetic effect as being in some important part achieved by a mental process which is not different from the process by which discursive ideas are conceived, and which is to be judged by some of the criteria by which an idea is judged." One would have to look far to find a critic "formal" enough to object to this. What some of us have been at pains to insist upon is that literature does not simply "exemplify" ideas or "produce"

ideas—as Trilling acknowledges. But no one claims that the writer is an inspired idiot. He uses his mind and his reader ought to use his, in processes "not different from the process by which discursive ideas are conceived." Literature is not inimical to ideas. It thrives upon ideas, but it does not present ideas patly and neatly. It involves them with the "recalcitrant stuff of life." The literary critic's job is to deal with that involvement.

The mention of Faulkner invites a closing comment upon the critic's specific job. As I have described it, it may seem so modest that one could take its performance for granted. But consider the misreadings of Faulkner now current, some of them the work of the most brilliant critics that we have, some of them quite wrong-headed, and demonstrably so. What is true of Faulkner is only less true of many another author, including many writers of the past. Literature has many "uses"—and critics propose new uses, some of them exciting and spectacular. But all the multiform uses to which literature can be put rest finally upon our knowing what a given work "means." That knowledge is basic.

1951

Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences

by Jacques Derrida

We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.

—Montaigne

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an 'event,' if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural—or structuralist—thought to reduce or to suspect. Let us speak of an 'event,' nevertheless, and let us use quotation marks to serve as a precaution. What would this event be then? Its exterior form would be that of a *rupture* and a redoubling.

It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word 'structure' itself are as old as the *epistēmē*[1]—that is to say, as old as Western science and Western philosophy—and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the *epistēmē* plunges in order to gather them up and to make them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, up to the event which

[1]A term coined by Michel Foucault (see below, pp. 281–93) to refer to 'the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems of knowledge'.

I wish to mark out and define, structure—or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.

Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation of the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained *interdicted* (and I am using this word deliberately). Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure—although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *epistēmē as* philosophy or science—is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire.[i] The concept of centered structure is in fact 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. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset. And again on the basis of what we call the center (and which, because it can be either inside or outside, can also indifferently be called the origin or end, *archē* or *telos*), repetitions, substitutions, transformations, and permutations are always *taken* from a history of meaning [*sens*]—that is, in a word, a history—whose origin may always be reawakened or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence. This is why one perhaps could say that the movement of any archaeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive of structure on the basis of a full presence which is beyond play.

If this is so, the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions

of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix—if you will pardon me for demonstrating so little and for being so elliptical in order to come more quickly to my principal theme—is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos, archē, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.

The event I called a rupture, the disruption I alluded to at the beginning of this paper, presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this disruption was repetition in every sense of the word. Henceforth, it became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed the desire for a center in the constitution of structure, and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for this law of central presence—but a central presence which has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute. The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it. Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.

Where and how does this decentering, this thinking the structurality of structure, occur? It would be somewhat naive to refer to an event, a doctrine, or an author in order to designate this occurrence. It is no doubt part of the totality of an era, our own, but still it has always already begun to proclaim itself and begun to *work*. Nevertheless, if we wished to choose several 'names,' as indications only, and to recall those authors in whose discourse this occurrence has kept most closely to its most radical formulation, we doubtless would have to cite the Nietzchean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of ontotheology,

of the determination of Being as presence.[2] But all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a kind of circle. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. To take one example from many: the metaphysics of presence is shaken with the help of the concept of *sign*. But, as I suggested a moment ago, as soon as one seeks to demonstrate in this way that there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limit, one must reject even the concept and word 'sign' itself—which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification 'sign' has always been understood and determined, in its meaning, as sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word 'signifier' itself which must be abandoned as a metaphysical concept. When Lévi-Strauss says in the preface to *The Raw and the Cooked* that he has 'sought to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by operating from the outset at the level of signs,'[ii] the necessity, force, and legitimacy of his act cannot make us forget that the concept of the sign cannot in itself surpass this opposition between the sensible[3] and the intelligible. The concept of the sign, in each of its aspects, has been determined by this opposition throughout the totality of its history. It has lived only on this opposition and its system. But we cannot do without the concept of the sign, for we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity, or without the risk of erasing difference in the self-identity of a signified reducing its signifier into itself or, amounting to the same thing, simply expelling its signifier outside itself. For there are two heterogenous ways of erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified: one, the classic way, consists in reducing or deriving the signifier, that is to say, ultimately in *submitting* the sign to thought; the other, the one we are using here against the first one, consists in putting into question the system in which the preceding reduction functioned: first and foremost, the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. For the *paradox* is that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing. The opposition is systematic with the reduction. And what we are saying here about the sign can be extended to all the concepts and all the sentences of metaphysics, in particular to the discourse on 'structure'. But there are several ways of being caught in

[2] See p. 207 n.s, above.
[3] 'Sensible' meaning 'perceptible through the senses'.

this circle. They are all more or less naive, more or less empirical, more or less systematic, more or less close to the formulation—that is, to the formalization—of this circle. It is these differences which explain the multiplicity of destructive discourses and the disagreement between those who elaborate them. Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, for example, worked within the inherited concepts of metaphysics. Since these concepts are not elements or atoms, and since they are taken from a syntax and a system, every particular borrowing brings along with it the whole of metaphysics. This is what allows these destroyers to destroy each other reciprocally—for example, Heidegger regarding Nietzsche, with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last 'Platonist.' One could do the same for Heidegger himself, for Freud, or for a number of others. And today no exercise is more widespread.

What is the relevance of this formal schema when we turn to what are called the 'human sciences'? One of them perhaps occupies a privileged place—ethnology. In fact one can assume that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the moment when European culture—and, in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts—had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference. This moment is not first and foremost a moment of philosophical or scientific discourse. It is also a moment which is political, economic, technical, and so forth. One can say with total security that there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism—the very condition for ethnology—should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of the history of metaphysics. Both belong to one and the same era. Now, ethnology—like any science—comes about within the element of discourse. And it is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he wants to or not—and this does not depend on a decision on his part—the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he denounces them. This necessity is irreducible; it is not a historical contingency. We ought to consider all its implications very carefully. But if no one can escape this necessity, and if no one is therefore responsible for giving in to it, however little he may do so, this does not mean that all the ways of giving in to it are of equal pertinence. The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigor with which this relation to the history of metaphysics and to inherited concepts is thought. Here it is a question both of a critical relation to the language of the social sciences and a critical responsibility of the discourse itself. It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem *of economy* and *strategy*.

If we consider, as an example, the texts of Claude Lévi-Strauss, it is not only because of the privilege accorded to ethnology among the social sciences,

nor even because the thought of Lévi-Strauss weighs heavily on the contemporary theoretical situation. It is above all because a certain choice has been declared in the work of Lévi-Strauss and because a certain doctrine has been elaborated there, and precisely, in a *more or less explicit manner*, as concerns both this critique of language and this critical language in the social sciences.

In order to follow this movement in the text of Lévi-Strauss, let us choose as one guiding thread among others the opposition between nature and culture. Despite all its rejuvenations and disguises, this opposition is congenital to philosophy. It is even older than Plato. It is at least as old as the Sophists.[4] Since the statement of the opposition *physis*/*nomos*, *physis*/*technē*, it has been relayed to us by means of a whole historical chain which opposes 'nature' to law, to education, to art, to technics—but also to liberty, to the arbitrary, to history, to society, to the mind, and so on. Now, from the outset of his researches, and from his first book (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) on, Lévi-Strauss simultaneously has experienced the necessity of utilizing this opposition and the impossibility of accepting it. In the *Elementary Structures*, he begins from this axiom or definition: that which is *universal* and spontaneous, and not dependent on any particular culture or on any determinate norm, belongs to nature. Inversely, that which depends upon a system of *norms* regulating society and therefore is capable of *varying* from one social structure to another, belongs to culture. These two definitions are of the traditional type. But in the very first pages of the *Elementary Structures* Lévi-Strauss, who has begun by giving credence to these concepts, encounters what he calls a *scandal*, that is to say, something which no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition he has accepted, something which *simultaneously* seems to require the predicates of nature and of culture. This scandal is the *incest prohibition*. The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural:

> Let us suppose then that everything universal in man relates to the natural order, and is characterized by spontaneity, and that everything subject to a norm is cultural and is both relative and particular. We are then confronted with a fact, or rather, a group of facts, which, in the light of previous definitions, are not far removed from a scandal: we refer to that complex group of beliefs, customs, conditions and institutions described succinctly as the prohibition of incest, which presents, without the slightest ambiguity, and inseparably combines, the two characteristics in which we recognize the conflicting features of two mutually exclusive orders. It constitutes a rule, but a rule which, alone among all the social rules, possesses at the same time a universal character.[iii]

Obviously there is no scandal except within a system of concepts which accredits the difference between nature and culture. By commencing his work with the *factum* of the incest prohibition, Lévi-Strauss thus places himself at

[4]Philosophers and teachers active in Greece in the fifth century BC.

the point at which this difference, which has always been assumed to be self-evident, finds itself erased or questioned. For from the moment when the incest prohibition can no longer be conceived within the nature/culture opposition, it can no longer be said to be a scandalous fact, a nucleus of opacity within a network of transparent significations. The incest prohibition is no longer a scandal one meets with or comes up against in the domain of traditional concepts; it is something which escapes these concepts and certainly precedes them—probably as the condition of their possibility. It could perhaps be said that the whole of philosophical conceptualization, which is systematic with the nature/culture opposition, is designed to leave in the domain of the unthinkable the very thing that makes this conceptualization possible: the origin of the prohibition of incest.

This example, too cursorily examined, is only one among many others, but nevertheless it already shows that language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique. Now this critique may be undertaken along two paths, in two 'manners.' Once the limit of the nature/culture opposition makes itself felt, one might want to question systematically and rigorously the history of these concepts. This is a first action. Such a systematic and historic questioning would be neither a philological nor a philosophical action in the classic sense of these words. To concern oneself with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy, to deconstitute them, is not to undertake the work of the philologist or of the classic historian of philosophy. Despite appearances, it is probably the most daring way of making the beginnings of a step outside of philosophy. The step 'outside philosophy' is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it.

The other choice (which I believe corresponds more closely to Lévi-Strauss's manner), in order to avoid the possibly sterilizing effects of the first one, consists in conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed to them: there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. This is how the language of the social sciences criticizes *itself*. Lévi-Strauss thinks that in this way he can separate *method* from *truth*, the instruments of the method and the objective significations envisaged by it. One could almost say that this is the primary affirmation of Lévi-Strauss; in any event, the first words of the *Elementary Structures* are: 'Above all, it is beginning to emerge that this distinction between nature and society ("nature" and "culture" seem preferable to us today), while of no acceptable historical significance, does contain a logic, fully justifying its use by modern sociology as a methodological tool.'[iv]

Lévi-Strauss will always remain faithful to this double intention: to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value he criticizes.

On the one hand, he will continue, in effect, to contest the value of the nature/culture opposition. More than thirteen years after the *Elementary Structures*, *The Savage Mind* faithfully echoes the text I have just quoted: 'The opposition between nature and culture to which I attached much importance at one time . . . now seems to be of primarily methodological importance.' And this methodological value is not affected by its 'ontological' nonvalue (as might be said, if this notion were not suspect here): 'However, it would not be enough to reabsorb particular humanities into a general one. This first enterprise opens the way for others which . . . are incumbent on the exact natural sciences: the reintegration of culture in nature and finally of life within the whole of its physico-chemical conditions.'[v]

On the other hand, still in *The Savage Mind*, he presents as what he calls *bricolage* what might be called the discourse of this method. The *bricoleur*, says Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses 'the means at hand,' that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogenous—and so forth. There is therefore a critique of language in the form of *bricolage*, and it has even been said that *bricolage* is critical language itself. I am thinking in particular of the article of G. Genette, 'Structuralisme et critique littéraire', published in homage to Lévi-Strauss in a special issue of *L'Arc* (no. 26, 1965), where it is stated that the analysis of *bricolage* could 'be applied almost word for word' to criticism, and especially to 'literary criticism'.

If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*. The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it 'out of nothing', 'out of whole cloth', would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea; and since Lévi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that *bricolage* is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*. As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain *bricolage* and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of *bricoleurs*, then the very idea of *bricolage* is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down.

This brings us to the second thread which might guide us in what is being contrived here.

Lévi-Strauss describes *bricolage* not only as an intellectual activity but also as a mythopoetical activity. One reads in *The Savage Mind* 'Like *bricolage* on the technical plane, mythical reflection can reach brilliant unforeseen results on the intellectual plane. Conversely, attention has often been 'drawn to the mythopoetical nature of *bricolage*.'[vi]

But Lévi-Strauss's remarkable endeavor does not simply consist in proposing, notably in his most recent investigations, a structural science of myths and of mythological activity. His endeavor also appears—I would say almost from the outset—to have the status which he accords to his own discourse on myths, to what he calls his 'mythologicals'. It is here that his discourse on the myth reflects on itself and criticizes itself. And this moment, this critical period, is evidently of concern to all the languages which share the field of the human sciences. What does Lévi-Strauss say of his 'mythologicals'? It is here that we rediscover the mythopoetical virtue of *bricolage*. In effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia* [beginning]. The theme of this decentering could be followed throughout the 'Overture' to his last book, *The Raw and the Cooked*. I shall simply remark on a few key points.

1. From the very start, Lévi-Strauss recognizes that the Bororo myth which he employs in the book as the 'reference myth' does not merit this name and this treatment. The name is specious and the use of the myth improper. This myth deserves no more than any other its referential privilege: 'In fact, the Bororo myth, which I shall refer to from now on as the key myth, is, as I shall try to show, simply a transformation, to a greater or lesser extent, of other myths originating either in the same society or in neighboring or remote societies. I could, therefore, have legitimately taken as my starting point any one representative myth of the group. From this point of view, the key myth is interesting not because it is typical, but rather because of its irregular position within the group.'[vii]

2. There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and nonexistent in the first place. Everything begins with structure, configuration, or relationship. The discourse on the acentric structure that myth itself is, cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. It must avoid the violence that consists in centering a language which describes an acentric structure if it is not to shortchange the form and movement of myth. Therefore it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical discourse, to renounce the *epistēmē* which absolutely requires, which is the absolute requirement that we go back to the source, to the center, to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on. In opposition to *epistemic* discourse, structural discourse on myths—*mythological* discourse—must itself

be *mythomorphic*. It must have the form of that of which it speaks. This is what Lévi-Strauss says in *The Raw and the Cooked*, from which I would now like to quote a long and remarkable passage:

> The study of myths raises a methodological problem, in that it cannot be carried out according to the Cartesian principle of breaking down the difficulty into as many parts as may be necessary for finding the solution. There is no real end to methodological analysis, no hidden unity to be grasped once the breaking-down process has been completed. Themes can be split up *ad infinitum*. Just when you think you have disentangled and separated them, you realize that they are knitting together again in response to the operation of unexpected affinities. Consequently the unity of the myth is never more than tendential and projective and cannot reflect a state or a particular moment of the myth. It is a phenomenon of the imagination, resulting from the attempt at interpretation; and its function is to endow the myth with synthetic form and to prevent its disintegration into a confusion of opposites. The science of myths might therefore be termed 'anaclastic', if we take this old term in the broader etymological sense which includes the study of both reflected rays and broken rays. But unlike philosophical reflection, which aims to go back to its own source, the reflections we are dealing with here concern rays whose only source is hypothetical. . . . And in seeking to imitate the spontaneous movement of mythological thought, this essay, which is also both too brief and too long, has had to conform to the requirements of that thought and to respect its rhythm. It follows that this book on myths is itself a kind of myth.[viii]

This statement is repeated a little farther on: 'As the myths themselves are based on secondary codes (the primary codes being those that provide the substance of language), the present work is put forward as a tentative draft of a tertiary code, which is intended to ensure the reciprocal translatability of several myths. This is why it would not be wrong to consider this book itself as a myth: it is, as it were, the myth of mythology.'[ix] The absence of a center is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author: 'Thus the myth and the musical work are like conductors of an orchestra, whose audience becomes the silent performers. If it is now asked where the real center of the work is to be found, the answer is that this is impossible to determine. Music and mythology bring man face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows are actualized. . . . Myths are anonymous.'[x] The musical model chosen by Lévi-Strauss for the composition of his book is apparently justified by this absence of any real fixed center of the mythical or mythological discourse.

Thus it is at this point that ethnographic *bricolage* deliberately assumes its mythopoetic function. But by the same token, this function makes the philosophical or epistemological requirement of a center appear as mythological, that is to say, as a historical illusion.

Nevertheless, even if one yields to the necessity of what Lévi-Strauss has done, one cannot ignore its risks. If the mythological is mythomorphic, are all discourses on myths equivalent? Shall we have to abandon any epistemological requirement which permits us to distinguish between several qualities of

discourse on the myth? A classic, but inevitable question. It cannot be answered—and I believe that Lévi-Strauss does not answer it—for as long as the problem of the relations between the philosopheme or the theorem, on the one hand, and the mytheme or the mythopoem, on the other, has not been posed explicitly, which is no small problem. For lack of explicitly posing this problem, we condemn ourselves to transforming the alleged transgression of philosophy into an unnoticed fault within the philosophical realm. Empiricism would be the genus of which these faults would always be the species. Transphilosophical concepts would be transformed into philosophical naivetés. Many examples could be given to demonstrate this risk: the concepts of sign, history, truth, and so forth. What I want to emphasize is simply that the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way*. The risk I am speaking of is always assumed by Lévi-Strauss, and it is the very price of this endeavor. I have said that empiricism is the matrix of all faults menacing a discourse which continues, as with Lévi-Strauss in particular, to consider itself scientific. If we wanted to pose the problem of empiricism and *bricolage* in depth, we would probably end up very quickly with a number of absolutely contradictory propositions concerning the status of discourse in structural ethnology. On the one hand, structuralism justifiably claims to be the critique of empiricism. But at the same time there is not a single book or study by Lévi-Strauss which is not proposed as an empirical essay which can always be completed or invalidated by new information. The structural schemata are always proposed as hypotheses resulting from a finite quantity of information and which are subjected to the proof of experience. Numerous texts could be used to demonstrate this double postulation. Let us turn once again to the 'Overture' of *The Raw and the Cooked*, where it seems clear that if this postulation is double, it is because it is a question here of a language on language:

> If critics reproach me with not having carried out an exhaustive inventory of South American myths before analyzing them, they are making a grave mistake about the nature and function of these documents. The total body of myth belonging to a given community is comparable to its speech. Unless the population dies out physically or morally, this totality is never complete. You might as well criticize a linguist for compiling the grammar of a language without having complete records of the words pronounced since the language came into being, and without knowing what will be said in it during the future part of its existence. Experience proves, that a linguist can work out the grammar of a given language from a remarkably small number of sentences. . . . And even a partial grammar or an outline grammar is a precious acquisition when we are dealing with unknown languages. Syntax does not become evident only after a (theoretically limitless) series of events has been recorded and examined, because it is itself the body of rules governing their production. What I have tried to give is an outline of the syntax of South American mythology. Should fresh data come to hand,

they will be used to check or modify the formulation of certain grammatical laws, so that some are abandoned and replaced by new ones. But in no instance would I feel constrained to accept the arbitrary demand for a total mythological pattern, since, as has been shown, such a requirement has no meaning.[xi]

Totalization, therefore, is sometimes defined as *useless*, and sometimes as *impossible*. This is no doubt due to the fact that there are two ways of conceiving the limit of totalization. And I assert once more that these two determinations coexist implicitly in Lévi-Strauss's discourse. Totalization can be judged impossible in the classical style: one then refers to the empirical endeavor of either a subject or a finite richness which it can never master. There is too much, more than one can say. But nontotalization can also be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of *play*. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say—rigorously using that word whose scandalous signification is always obliterated in French—that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*.[xii] The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. Although Lévi-Strauss in his use of the word 'supplementary' never emphasizes, as I do here, the two directions of meaning which are so strangely compounded within it, it is not by chance that he uses this word twice in his 'Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss', at one point where he is speaking of the 'overabundance of signifier, in relation to the signifieds to which this overabundance can refer':

> In his endeavor to understand the world, man therefore always has at his disposal a surplus of signification (which he shares out amongst things according to the laws of symbolic thought—which is the task of ethnologists and linguists to study). This distribution of a *supplementary* allowance [*ration supplémentaire*]—if it is permissible to put it that way—is absolutely necessary in order that on the whole the available signifier and the signified it aims at may remain in the relationship of complementarity which is the very condition of the use of symbolic thought.[xiii]

(It could no doubt be demonstrated that this *ration supplémentaire* of signification is the origin of the *ratio* itself.) The word reappears a little further on, after Lévi-Strauss has mentioned 'this floating signifier, which is the servitude of all finite thought':

> In other words—and taking as our guide Mauss's precept that all social phenomena can be assimilated to language—we see in *mana, Wakau, oranda* and other notions of the same type, the conscious expression of a semantic function, whose role it is to permit symbolic thought to operate in spite of the contradiction which is proper to it. In this way are explained the apparently insoluble antinomies attached to this notion. . . . At one and the same time force and action, quality and state, noun and verb, abstract and concrete, omnipresent and localized—*mana* is in effect all these things. But is it not precisely because it is none of these things that *mana* is a simple form, or more exactly, a symbol in the pure state, and therefore capable of becoming charged with any sort of symbolic content whatever? In the system of symbols constituted by all cosmologies, *mana* would simply be a zero symbolic value, that is to say, a sign marking the necessity of a symbolic content *supplementary* [my italics] to that with which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required, provided only that this value still remains part of the available reserve and is not, as phonologists put it, a group-term.

Lévi-Strauss adds the note:

'Linguists have already been led to formulate hypotheses of this type. For example: "A zero phoneme is opposed to all the other phonemes in French in that it entails no differential characters and no constant phonetic value. On the contrary, the proper function of the zero phoneme is to be opposed to phoneme absence." (R. Jakobson and J. Lutz, 'Notes on the French Phonemic Pattern', *Word* 5, no. 2 [August 1949]:155). Similarly, if we schematize the conception I am proposing here, it could almost be said that the function of notions like *mana* is to be opposed to the absence of signification, without entailing by itself any particular signification.'[xiv]

The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented.*

It can now be understood why the concept of play is important in Lévi-Strauss. His references to all sorts of games, notably to roulette, are very frequent, especially in his *Conversations,*[xv] in *Race and History,*[xvi] and in *The Savage Mind.* Further, the reference to play is always caught up in tension.

Tension with history, first of all. This is a classical problem, objections to which are now well worn. I shall simply indicate what seems to me the formality of the problem: by reducing history, Lévi-Strauss has treated as it deserves a concept which has always been in complicity with a teleological and eschatological metaphysics, in other words, paradoxically, in complicity

with that philosophy of presence to which it was believed history could be opposed. The thematic of historicity, although it seems to be a somewhat late arrival in philosophy, has always been required by the determination of Being as presence. With or without etymology, and despite the classic antagonism which opposes these significations throughout all of classical thought, it could be shown that the concept of *epistēmē* has always called forth that of *historia*, if history is always the unity of a becoming, as the tradition of truth or the development of science or knowledge oriented toward the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self. History has always been conceived as the movement of a resumption of history, as a detour between two presences. But if it is legitimate to suspect this concept of history, there is a risk, if it is reduced without an explicit statement of the problem I am indicating here, of falling back into an ahistoricism of a classical type, that is to say, into a determined moment of the history of metaphysics. Such is the algebraic formality of the problem as I see it. More concretely, in the work of Lévi-Strauss it must be recognized that the respect for structurality, for the internal originality of the structure, compels a neutralization of time and history. For example, the appearance of a new structure, of an original system, always comes about—and this is the very condition of its structural specificity—by a rupture with its past, its origin, and its cause. Therefore one can describe what is peculiar to the structural organization only by not taking into account, in the very moment of this description, its past conditions: by omitting to posit the problem of the transition from one structure to another, by putting history between brackets. In this 'structuralist' moment, the concepts of chance and discontinuity are indispensable. And Lévi-Strauss does in fact often appeal to them, for example, as concerns that structure of structures, language, of which he says in the 'Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss' that it 'could only have been born in one fell swoop':

> Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance on the scale of animal life, language could only have been born in one fell swoop. Things could not have set about acquiring signification progressively. Following a transformation the study of which is not the concern of the social sciences, but rather of biology and psychology, a transition came about from a stage where nothing had a meaning to another where everything possessed it.[xvii]

This standpoint does not prevent Lévi-Strauss from recognizing the slowness, the process of maturing, the continuous toil of factual transformations, history (for example, *Race and History*). But, in accordance with a gesture which was also Rousseau's and Husserl's, he must 'set aside all the facts' at the moment when he wishes to recapture the specificity of a structure. Like

Rousseau, he must always conceive of the origin of a new structure on the model of catastrophe—an overturning of nature in nature, a natural interruption of the natural sequence, a setting aside *of* nature.

Besides the tension between play and history, there is also the tension between play and presence. Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. If Lévi-Strauss, better than any other, has brought to light the play of repetition and the repetition of play, one no less perceives in his work a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech—an ethic, nostalgia, and even remorse, which he often presents as the motivation of the ethnological project when he moves toward the archaic societies which are exemplary societies in his eyes. These texts are well known.[xviii]

Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays without security. For there is a *sure* play: that which is limited to the *substitution* of *given* and *existing, present*, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout his entire history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche pointed the way, does not seek in ethnography, as Lévi-Strauss does, the 'inspiration of a new humanism' (again citing the 'Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss').

There are more than enough indications today to suggest we might perceive that these two interpretations of interpretation—which are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an

obscure economy—together share the field which we call, in such a problematic fashion, the social sciences.

For my part, although these two interpretations must acknowledge and accentuate their difference and define their irreducibility, I do not believe that today there is any question of *choosing*—in the first place because here we are in a region (let us say, provisionally, a region of historicity) where the category of choice seems particularly trivial; and in the second, because we must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance*[5] of this irreducible difference. Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation,* and *labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of child-bearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.

Notes

[i] The reference, in a restricted sense, is to the Freudian theory of neurotic symptoms and of dream interpretation in which a given symbol is understood contradictorily as both the desire to fulfill an impulse and the desire to suppress the impulse. In a general sense the reference is to Derrida's thesis that logic and coherence themselves can only be understood contradictorily, since they presuppose the suppression of *différance*, 'writing' in the sense of the general economy. Cf. 'La pharmacie de Platon,' in *La dissemination*, pp. 125–6, where Derrida uses the Freudian model of dream interpretation in order to clarify the contractions embedded in philosophical coherence. [Translator's Note]

[ii] *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Wightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 14. [Translation somewhat modified.]

[iii] *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Bell, John von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 8.

[iv] Ibid., p. 3.

[v] *The Savage Mind* (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 247.

[vi] Ibid., p. 17.

[vii] *The Raw and the Cooked*, p. 2.

[viii] Ibid., pp. 5–6.

[ix] Ibid., p. 12.

[x] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

[xi] Ibid., pp. 7–8.

[5] Derrida's term punningly unites the senses of 'to differ' and 'to defer'.

[xii] This double *sense* of supplement—to supply something which is missing, or to supply something additional—is at the center of Derrida's deconstruction of traditional linguistics in *De la grammatologie*. In 'The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau' Derrida expands the analysis of Lévi-Strauss begun in this essay in order further to clarify the ways in which the contradictions of traditional logic 'program' the most modern conceptual apparatuses of linguistics and the social sciences. [Translator's Note]

[xiii] 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss', in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: P.U.F., 1950), p. xlix.

[xiv] Ibid., pp. xlix–l.

[xv] George Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

[xvi] *Race and History* (Paris: Unesco Publications, 1958).

[xvii] 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss,' p. xlvi.

[xviii] The reference is to *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John Russell (London: Hutchinson, 1961). [Translator's Note]

Heroic Ethnocentrism

The Idea of Universality in Literature

*by Charles Larson**

In the fall of 1962, when I began teaching English literature to high school students in Nigeria, I encountered a number of stumbling blocks, which I had in no way anticipated—all of them cultural, experiential. This was not a matter of science or technology and their various by-products as I had anticipated ('What is a flush toilet?') but, rather, matters related to what I have learned to call culturally restricted materials. It was enough, to be sure, just for my African students to read through a 450-page Victorian novel (required reading in those days for the British-administered school certificate examinations); and, as I later learned, in the lower levels at least, students were accustomed to taking several months or even the greater part of a year to read through and discuss the plot line of a single novel. Length alone was enough to get them, since English was their second language and the problem of vocabulary was especially troublesome. But once the problems of language, vocabulary and verbosity had been overcome, reading through the words became a less difficult process than understanding what the words themselves related—the 'experience of literature' as we are wont to say.

'Excuse me, sir, what does it mean "to kiss"?' That was a much more difficult question to answer than the usual ones relating to the plot or the characters of the novel—a real shock when it was brought to my attention that I had a rather naïve boy in my class. So I brushed the question off until it was

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repeated a number of times and I slowly began to realize that all of my students had no real idea of what it meant to kiss. This seemed an extremely odd thing to me because most of my students were upper-form boys in their late teens—some in their early twenties—and I had, of course, heard them talking on occasion about their girl friends. It was also rumoured that several of the boys were married, although by school regulations they were not supposed to be. Nevertheless, that question and others of a like nature kept recurring—in part, no doubt, because we were reading Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Why did Hardy's characters get so flustered when they were kissed (or more likely, when they weren't kissed)? When I asked one of the European-educated African teachers why my students always seemed ready to return to that same question, I was more than surprised to learn that Africans, traditionally at least, do not kiss; to learn that what I thought was 'natural' in one society is not natural at all, but learned, that is, cultural. Not all peoples kiss. Or, stated more appropriately, not all peoples have learned to kiss. (When I later attended American movies with Africans, I could understand why the audience often went into hysterics at the romantic scenes in the films.)

How was one to read a Thomas Hardy novel with all those frustrated kisses without ever having been kissed? How was I to explain something like this to my African students? Or, to limit my experience to a more technical matter concerning the novel's form which also perplexed my students, what about those long passages of description for which Hardy is so celebrated? My African students couldn't understand what page after page of description of the countryside had to do with the plot of the novel. What they had given me, as I later learned, was another clue to the differing ways in which culture shapes our interpretations of literature. It was not until I seriously began studying the African novel itself, however, that I could put all of those pieces together; just as the questions about those kisses revealed something about my African students' cultural background, so too, did their concern about the descriptive passages of Hardy's book. The fact that descriptive passages were virtually nonexistent in African fiction initially seemed particularly puzzling to me, since the first generation of African Anglophone novelists, at least, had been brought up almost entirely on the Victorian novel. Whereas other elements of the Victorian novel had found their way into the African novel, description had not. Could it be that this omission in the African novel revealed something basically different between African and Western attitudes toward nature, toward one's environment?

Kissing and description, attitudes toward love and nature—are these attitudes so different for the African? Is the African way of life less sophisticated than our own? Or is the belief that these supposedly 'universal' attitudes should be the same as ours the naïve one? Is this what we really mean when we talk about 'universality' in literature—if someone does not react to something in our literature the same way that we do, then he is to be considered

inferior? Perhaps the term itself is meaningless. After all, people love and die in every culture. Their reactions to these events in their lives, however, may be significantly different from our own. And these reactions, in turn, shape their interpretations of literature.

For the most part, the term 'universal' has been grossly misused when it has been applied to non-Western literature, because it has so often been used in a way that ignores the multiplicity of cultural experiences. Usually, when we try to force the concept of universality on someone who is not Western, I think we are implying that our own culture should be the standard of measurement. Why else would we expect all peoples to react in the same way that we do? . . . But let us return to those so-called universal experiences of all literature and illustrate some of the ways in which they may be radically different—at least for the African.

In his preface to Tsao-Hsueh-Chin's eighteenth-century Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Mark Van Doren says, 'The greatest love stories have no time or place.' I frankly doubt this, in spite of other Western literary critics, who have also said that the most common theme in literature is love. (Leslie Fiedler, in his *Collected Essays*, for instance.) After reading dozens and dozens of contemporary African novels, I can in no way accept Van Doren's or Fiedler's assertions. There is at least one whole section of the world where the love story is virtually nonexistent. I can think of no contemporary African novel in which the central plot or theme can be called a 'love story,' no African novel in which the plot line progresses because of the hero's attempt to acquire a mate, no African novel in which seduction is the major goal, no African novel in which the fate of the lovers becomes the most significant element in the story. No African novel works this way because love as a theme in a Western literary sense is simply missing. Romantic love, seduction, sex—these are not the subjects of African fiction. In fact, in most contemporary African novels women play minor parts; the stories are concerned for the most part with a masculine world. There may be marriage, bride price and an occasional *tête à tête* but that is not the concern of the novel: it is always something else. There are no graphic descriptions of erotic love, there are no kisses, no holding hands. There is, in short, no love story as we have come to think of it in Western fiction. Not even the unrequited lover pining away. African fiction simply is not made of such stuff. . . .

Western romance is only one theme that may puzzle the African reader. He may have trouble understanding the lack of concern about death in some Western novels, too. Or, what is more likely, the Western reader may totally miss the significance of a death in a piece of African fiction that he is reading. A. Alvarez, in his fine book, *The Savage God*, says that 'perhaps half the literature of the world is about death.' Yet our society has worked so hard to neutralize the shock of death that it is quite possible for us to miss the emotional overtones of a piece of African writing in which death occurs. Sembene Ousmane's celebrated short story, 'Black Girl' ('La noire de . . .') is one such

example. The story concerns a young Senegalese girl named Diouana, who moves to Antibes when the French family she has worked for in Senegal returns to France. Ousmane begins his story by projecting us into Diouana's thoughts, illustrating her excitement and fascination at being able to have such a wonderful experience: the chance to live in France. But Diouana's dreams shortly become a nightmare. Overworked, isolated from her fellow Africans, called a nigger by the four children in the French family, after some months Diouana commits suicide by slashing her wrists in the bathtub. The Western reader may think that Ousmane's story is simply another rather melodramatic account of racial prejudice—which it is, in part. But it is also a story about modern slavery, and what that situation will drive the sane person into doing: taking his own life. Just as slaves jumped overboard to their deaths in the ocean in order to escape slavery in the New World, Diouana takes her own life to find release from her own enslaved situation. But this is only a part of it, for in committing suicide—one of the strongest taboos in many African societies—she has only temporarily released herself. She has trapped her ancestors, broken the cycle of life, and, if she is an only child, she has ended the family lineage. She has, in short, committed a terrible abomination, and the African reading the conclusion to Ousmane's story is horrified by what she has done. It is, therefore, the religious overtone relating to ancestral worship that the Western reader will probably be completely unaware of. . . .

The hero concept—the belief in the individual who is different from his fellowmen—is [also] almost totally alien to African life; and, as an extension of this, the hero in contemporary African fiction is for the most part non-existent. The hero is almost nonexistent in contemporary Western literature too, but his descendant, the anti-hero, the isolated figure, is a force to be reckoned with. This is not true of African fiction, however. Rather, it is the group-felt experience that is all important: what happens to the village, the clan, the tribe. . . .

One begins to wonder if two peoples as widely different as Africans and westerners will ever be able to read each other's literature and fully understand it. This is not, however, the question I started out to ask. Literature is not so limiting that only one interpretation is possible. We cannot all be both African and westerner, black and Caucasian. What is important, it seems to me, is that when we read a piece of non-Western literature we realize that the interpretation we make of it may be widely different from what the artist intended, and contrarily, that we should not expect people who are not of our own culture and heritage to respond in the same way that we do to our own literature. The time has come when we should avoid the use of the pejorative term 'universal.' What we really mean when we talk about universal experiences in literature are cultural responses that have been shaped by our own Western tradition.

Although most of the examples I have used in this essay are African in origin, I would hazard a final conjecture that the experience of other non-Western literatures (Chinese and Japanese, for example) will also support

this belief that the word 'universal' is, indeed, limited. . . . For better or for worse, each of us was born into an ethnocentrically sealed world. The purpose of any piece of literature, no matter what culture it was produced in, is to show us something we were previously unaware of. Just as literature is a bridge connecting a life lived with a life not lived, so, too, all literature that is effective is a voyage into a previously untraveled world.

Criteria of Negro Art

So many persons have asked for the complete text of the address delivered by Dr. Du Bois at the Chicago Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that we are publishing the address here.[1]

I do not doubt but there are some in this audience who are a little disturbed at the subject of this meeting, and particularly at the subject I have chosen. Such people are thinking something like this: "How is it that an organization like this, a group of radicals trying to bring new things into the world, a fighting organization which has come up out of the blood and dust of battle, struggling for the right of black men to be ordinary human beings—how is it that an organization of this kind can turn aside to talk about Art? After all, what have we who are slaves and black to do with Art?"

Or perhaps there are others who feel a certain relief and are saying, "After all it is rather satisfactory after all this talk about rights and fighting to sit and dream of something which leaves a nice taste in the mouth."

Let me tell you that neither of these groups is right. The thing we are talking about tonight is part of the great fight we are carrying on and it represents a forward and an upward look—a pushing onward. You and I have been breasting hills; we have been climbing upward; there has been progress and we can see it day by day looking back along blood-filled paths. But as you go through the valleys and over the foothills, so long as you are climbing, the direction,—north, south, east or west,—is of less importance. But when gradually the vista widens and you begin to see the world at your feet and the far horizon, then it is time to know more precisely whither you are going and what you really want.

What do we want? What is the thing we are after? As it was phrased last night it had a certain truth: We want to be Americans, full-fledged Americans, with all the rights of other American citizens. But is that all? Do we want simply to be Americans? Once in a while through all of us there flashes some clairvoyance, some clear idea, of what America really is. We who are dark can see America in a way that white Americans can not. And seeing our country thus, are we satisfied with its present goals and ideals?

[1]*The Crisis*; the address was delivered in 1926.

In the high school where I studied we learned most of Scott's "Lady of the Lake"[2] by heart. In after life once it was my privilege to see the lake. It was Sunday. It was quiet. You could glimpse the deer wandering in unbroken forests; you could hear the soft ripple of romance on the waters. Around me fell the cadence of that poetry of my youth. I fell asleep full of the enchantment of the Scottish border. A new day broke and with it came a sudden rush of excursionists. They were mostly Americans and they were loud and strident. They poured upon the little pleasure boat,—men with their hats a little on one side and drooping cigars in the wet corners of their mouths; women who shared their conversation with the world. They all tried to get everywhere first. They pushed other people out of the way. They made all sorts of incoherent noises and gestures so that the quiet home folk and the visitors from other lands silently and half-wonderingly gave way before them. They struck a note not evil but wrong. They carried, perhaps, a sense of strength and accomplishment, but their hearts had no conception of the beauty which pervaded this holy place.

If you tonight suddenly should become full-fledged Americans; if your color faded, or the color line here in Chicago was miraculously forgotten; suppose, too, you became at the same time rich and powerful:—what is it that you would want? What would you immediately seek? Would you buy the most powerful of motor cars and outrace Cook County?[3] Would you buy the most elaborate estate on the North Shore? Would you be a Rotarian or a Lion or a What-not of the very last degree?[4] Would you wear the most striking clothes, give the richest dinners and buy the longest press notices?

Even as you visualize such ideals you know in your hearts that these are not the things you really want. You realize this sooner than the average white American because, pushed aside as we have been in America, there has come to us not only a certain distaste for the tawdry and flamboyant but a vision of what the world could be if it were really a beautiful world; if we had the true spirit; if we had the Seeing Eye, the Cunning Hand, the Feeling Heart; if we had, to be sure, not perfect happiness, but plenty of good hard work, the inevitable suffering that always comes with life; sacrifice and waiting, all that—but, nevertheless, lived in a world where men know, where men create, where they realize themselves and where they enjoy life. It is that sort of a world we want to create for ourselves and for all America.

After all, who shall describe Beauty? What is it? I remember tonight four beautiful things: The Cathedral at Cologne,[5] a forest in stone, set in light and changing shadow, echoing with sunlight and solemn song; a village of the

[2]A poem in six cantos about early-16th-century knights and ladies (1810), by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832).

[3]County in which Chicago is located.

[4]The Rotary and Lions clubs are national service organizations; Freemasons are described as achieving certain degrees.

[5]Magnificent Gothic cathedral in Cologne, Germany, begun in 1248 and consecrated in 1322.

Veys[6] in West Africa, a little thing of mauve and purple quiet, lying content and shining in the sun; a black and velvet room where on a throne rests, in old and yellowing marble; the broken curves of the Venus of Milo;[7] a single phrase of music in the Southern South—utter melody, haunting and appealing, suddenly arising out of night and eternity, beneath the moon.

Such is Beauty. Its variety is infinite, its possibility is endless. In normal life all may have it and have it yet again. The world is full of it; and yet today the mass of human beings are choked away from it, and their lives distorted and made ugly. This is not only wrong, it is silly. Who shall right this well-nigh universal failing? Who shall let this world be beautiful? Who shall restore to men the glory of sunsets and the peace of quiet sleep?

We black folk may help for we have within us as a race new stirrings, stirrings of the beginning of a new appreciation of joy, of a new desire to create, of a new will to be; as though in this morning of group life we had awakened from some sleep that at once dimly mourns the past and dreams a splendid future; and there has come the conviction that the Youth that is here today, the Negro Youth, is a different kind of Youth, because in some new way it bears this mighty prophecy on its breast, with a new realization of itself, with new determination for all mankind.

What has this Beauty to do with the world? What has Beauty to do with Truth and Goodness—with the facts of the world and the right actions of men? "Nothing," the artists rush to answer. They may be right. I am but an humble disciple of art and cannot presume to say. I am one who tells the truth and exposes evil and seeks with Beauty and for Beauty to set the world right. That somehow, somewhere eternal and perfect Beauty sits above Truth and Right I can conceive, but here and now and in the world in which I work they are for me unseparated and inseparable.

This is brought to us peculiarly when as artists we face our own past as a people. There has come to us—and it has come especially through the man we are going to honor tonight[8]—a realization of that past, of which for long years we have been ashamed, for which we have apologized. We thought nothing could come out of that past which we wanted to remember; which we wanted to hand down to our children. Suddenly, this same past is taking on form, color and reality, and in a half shamefaced way we are beginning to be proud of it. We are remembering that the romance of the world did not die and lie forgotten in the Middle Age; that if you want romance to deal with you must have it here and now and in your own hands.

[6]One of the Mandingo peoples of Senegal, West Africa.

[7]Famous classical statue of Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love (2d c. B.C.E. copy of a 4th c. original), now armless.

[8]Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), to whom the NAACP in 1926 awarded the Spingarn Medal for African American achievement, was an African American educator and historian who in 1916 founded the *Journal of Negro History*.

I once knew a man and woman. They had two children, a daughter who was white and a daughter who was brown; the daughter who was white married a white man; and when her wedding was preparing the daughter who was brown prepared to go and celebrate. But the mother said, "No!" and the brown daughter went into her room and turned on the gas and died. Do you want Greek tragedy swifter than that?

Or again, here is a little Southern Town and you are in the public square. On one side of the square is the office of a colored lawyer and on all the other sides are men who do not like colored lawyers. A white woman goes into the black man's office and points to the white-filled square and says, "I want five hundred dollars now and if I do not get it I am going to scream."

Have you heard the story of the conquest of German East Africa?[9] Listen to the untold tale: There were 40,000 black men and 4,000 white men who talked German. There were 20,000 black men and 12,000 white men who talked English. There were 10,000 black men and 400 white men who talked French. In Africa then where the Mountains of the Moon raised their white and snow-capped heads into the mouth of the tropic sun, where Nile and Congo rise and the Great Lakes swim, these men fought; they struggled on mountain, hill and valley, in river, lake and swamp, until in masses they sickened, crawled and died; until the 4,000 white Germans had become mostly bleached bones; until nearly all the 12,000 white Englishmen had returned to South Africa, and the 400 Frenchmen to Belgium and Heaven; all except a mere handful of the white men died; but thousands of black men from East, West and South Africa, from Nigeria and the Valley of the Nile, and from the West Indies still struggled, fought and died. For four years they fought and won and lost German East Africa; and all you hear about it is that England and Belgium conquered German Africa for the allies!

Such is the true and stirring stuff of which Romance is born and from this stuff come the stirrings of men who are beginning to remember that this kind of material is theirs; and this vital life of their own kind is beckoning them on.

The question comes next as to the interpretation of these new stirrings, of this new spirit: Of what is the colored artist capable? We have had on the part of both colored and white people singular unanimity of judgment in the past. Colored people have said: "This work must be inferior because it comes from colored people." White people have said: "It is inferior because it is done by colored people." But today there is coming to both the realization that the work of the black man is not always inferior. Interesting stories come to us. A professor in the University of Chicago read to a class that had studied literature a passage of poetry and asked them to guess the author. They guessed a goodly company from Shelley and Robert Browning down to

[9]Du Bois recounts events of World War I.

Tennyson and Masefield. The author was Countée Cullen.[10] Or again the English critic John Drinkwater[11] went down to a Southern seminary, one of the sort which "finishes" young white women of the South. The students sat with their wooden faces while he tried to get some response out of them. Finally he said, "Name me some of your Southern poets." They hesitate. He said finally, "I'll start out with your best: Paul Laurence Dunbar"![12]

With the growing recognition of Negro artists in spite of the severe handicaps, one comforting thing is occurring to both white and black. They are whispering, "Here is a way out. Here is the real solution of the color problem. The recognition accorded Cullen, Hughes, Fauset, White[13] and others shows there is no real color line. Keep quiet! Don't complain! Work! All will be well!"

I will not say that already this chorus amounts to a conspiracy. Perhaps I am naturally too suspicious. But I will say that there are today a surprising number of white people who are getting great satisfaction out of these younger Negro writers because they think it is going to stop agitation of the Negro question. They say, "What is the use of your fighting and complaining; do the great thing and the reward is there." And many colored people are all too eager to follow this advice; especially those who are weary of the eternal struggle along the color line, who are afraid to fight and to whom the money of philanthropists and the alluring publicity are subtle and deadly bribes. They say, "What is the use of fighting? Why not show simply what we deserve and let the reward come to us?"

And it is right here that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People comes upon the field, comes with its great call to a new battle, a new fight and new things to fight before the old things are wholly won; and to say that the Beauty of Truth and Freedom which shall some day be our heritage and the heritage of all civilized men is not in our hands yet and that we ourselves must not fail to realize.

There is in New York tonight a black woman molding clay by herself in a little bare room, because there is not a single school of sculpture in New York where she is welcome. Surely there are doors she might burst through, but when God makes a sculpture He does not always make the pushing sort of person who beats his way through doors thrust in his face. This girl is working her hands off to get out of this country so that she can get some sort of training.

There was Richard Brown.[14] If he had been white he would have been alive today instead of dead of neglect. Many helped him when he asked

[10]African American poet (1903–1946); his first book, *Color* (1925), used classical models such as the sonnet. Du Bois locates him in the company of the English poets Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), Robert Browning (1812–1889), Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), and John Masefield (1878–1967).

[11]English poet, dramatist, and critic (1882–1937).

[12]African American short story writer and poet (1872–1906).

[13]Walter White (1893–1955), NAACP leader and novelist. LANGSTON HUGHES (1902–1967), poet, fiction writer, and playwright. Jessie Redmon Fauset (ca. 1884–1961), novelist and editor.

[14]An African American artist (d. 1917).

but he was not the kind of boy that always asks. He was simply one who made colors sing.

There is a colored woman in Chicago who is a great musician. She thought she would like to study at Fontainbleau this summer where Walter Damrosch[15] and a score of leaders of Art have an American school of music. But the application blank of this school says: "I am a white American and I apply for admission to the school."

We can go on the stage; we can be just as funny as white Americans wish us to be; we can play all the sordid parts that America likes to assign to Negroes; but for any thing else there is still small place for us.

And so I might go on. But let me sum up with this: Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans? Now turn it around. Suppose you were to write a story and put in it the kind of people you know and like and imagine. You might get it published and you might not. And the "might not" is still far bigger than the "might." The white publishers catering to white folk would say, "It is not interesting"—to white folk, naturally not. They want Uncle Toms, Topsies,[16] good "darkies" and clowns. I have in my office a story with all the earmarks of truth. A young man says that he started out to write and had his stories accepted. Then he began to write about the things he knew best about, that is, about his own people. He submitted a story to a magazine which said, "We are sorry, but we cannot take it." "I sat down and revised my story, changing the color of the characters and the locale and sent it under an assumed name with a change of address and it was accepted by the same magazine that had refused it, the editor promising to take anything else I might send in providing it was good enough."

We have, to be sure, a few recognized and successful Negro artists; but they are not all those fit to survive or even a good minority. They are but the remnants of that ability and genius among us whom the accidents of education and opportunity have raised on the tidal waves of chance. We black folk are not altogether peculiar in this. After all, in the world at large, it is only the accident, the remnant, that gets the chance to make the most of itself; but if this is true of the white world it is infinitely more true of the colored world. It is not simply the great clear tenor of Roland Hayes[17] that opened the ears of America. We have had many voices of all kinds as fine as his and America was and is as deaf as she was for years to him. Then a foreign land heard Hayes and put its imprint on him and immediately America with all its imitative snobbery woke up. We approved Hayes because London, Paris and Berlin approved him and not simply because he was a great singer.

[15]German American conductor and composer (1862–1950). Fontainbleau: Fontainebleau, a French resort.

[16]Uncle Tom and Topsy are African American characters, a saintly and an impish slave, respectively, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

[17]African American singer of classical works and spirituals (1887–1976), the son of former slaves.

Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before. And what have been the tools of the artists in times gone by? First of all, he has used the Truth—not for the sake of truth, not as a scientist seeking truth, but as one upon whom Truth eternally thrusts itself as the highest handmaid of imagination, as the one great vehicle of universal understanding. Again artists have used Goodness—goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor and right—not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest.

The apostle of Beauty thus becomes the apostle of Truth and Right not by choice but by inner and outer compulsion. Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognize an ideal of justice.

Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.

In New York we have two plays: "White Cargo" and "Congo."[18] In "White Cargo" there is a fallen woman. She is black. In "Congo" the fallen woman is white. In "White Cargo" the black woman goes down further and further and in "Congo" the white woman begins with degradation but in the end is one of the angels of the Lord.

You know the current magazine story: A young white man goes down to Central America and the most beautiful colored woman there falls in love with him. She crawls across the whole isthmus to get to him. The white man says nobly, "No." He goes back to his white sweetheart in New York.

In such cases, it is not the positive propaganda of people who believe white blood divine, infallible and holy to which I object. It is the denial of a similar right of propaganda to those who believe black blood human, lovable and inspired with new ideals for the world. White artists themselves suffer from this narrowing of their field. They cry for freedom in dealing with Negroes because they have so little freedom in dealing with whites. DuBose Heyward writes "Porgy"[19] and writes beautifully of the black Charleston underworld. But why does he do this? Because he cannot do a similar thing for the white people of Charleston, or they would drum him out of town. The only chance he had to tell the truth of pitiful human degradation was to tell it of colored people. I should not be surprised if

[18] *Kongo* (1926), by Kilbourn Gordon and Chester DeVonde. *White Cargo: White Cargo: A Play of the Primitive* (1925), by Leon Gordon.

[19] The 1925 novel by Heyward (1885–1940) that was the basis for the later opera *Porgy and Bess*.

Octavus Roy Cohen[20] had approached the *Saturday Evening Post* and asked permission to write about a different kind of colored folk than the monstrosities he has created: but if he has, the *Post* has replied. "No. You are getting paid to write about the kind of colored people you are writing about."

In other words, the white public today demands from its artists, literary and pictorial, racial pre-judgment which deliberately distorts Truth and Justice, as far as colored races are concerned, and it will pay for no other.

On the other hand, the young and slowly growing black public still wants its prophets almost equally unfree. We are bound by all sorts of customs that have come down as second-hand soul clothes of white patrons. We are ashamed of sex and we lower our eyes when people will talk of it. Our religion holds us in superstition. Our worst side has been so shamelessly emphasized that we are denying we have or ever had a worst side. In all sorts of ways we are hemmed in and our new young artists have to go fight their way to freedom.

The ultimate judge has got to be you and you have got to build yourselves up into that wide judgment, that catholicity of temper[21] which is going to enable the artist to have his widest chance for freedom. We can afford the Truth. White folk today cannot. As it is now we are handing everything over to a white jury. If a colored man wants to publish a book, he has got to get a white publisher and a white newspaper to say it is great; and then you and I say so. We must come to the place where the work of art when it appears is reviewed and acclaimed by our own free and unfettered judgment. And we are going to have a real and valuable and eternal judgment only as we make ourselves free of mind, proud of body and just of soul to all men.

And then do you know what will be said? It is already saying. Just as soon as true Art emerges; just as soon as the black artist appears, someone touches the race on the shoulder and says, "He did that because he was an American, not because he was a Negro; he was born here; he was trained here; he is not a Negro—what is a Negro anyhow? He is just human; it is the kind of thing you ought to expect."

I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same ways, as the art that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new.

I had a classmate once who did three beautiful things and died. One of them was a story of a folk who found fire and then went wandering in the

[20]South Carolina playwright, novelist, short story writer, and humorist (1891–1959).

[21]Range of disposition.

gloom of night seeking again the stars they had once known and lost; suddenly out of blackness they looked up and there loomed the heavens; and what was it that they said? They raised a mighty cry: "It is the stars, it is the ancient stars, it is the young and everlasting stars!"

1926

Queer Theory

by Annamarie Jagose

Annamarie Jagose

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> *The appeal of 'queer theory' has outstripped anyone's sense of what exactly it means.*
>
> —Michael Warner

A response to this piece has been received from C. W. Young.

Once the term 'queer' was, at best, slang for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse. In recent years 'queer' has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. The rapid development and consolidation of lesbian and gay studies in universities in the 1990s is paralleled by an increasing deployment of the term 'queer'. As queer is unaligned with any specific identity category, it has the potential to be annexed profitably to any number of discussions. In the history of disciplinary formations, lesbian and gay studies is itself a relatively recent construction, and queer theory can be seen as its latest institutional transformation.

Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability—which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect—queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Institutionally, queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Whether as transvestite performance or academic deconstruction, queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of any 'natural' sexuality, it calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as 'man' and 'woman'.

The recent intervention of this confrontational word 'queer' in altogether politer academic discourses suggests that traditional models have been ruptured. Yet its appearance also marks a continuity. Queer theory's debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities develops out of a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of the post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions. Queer is not always seen, however, as an acceptable elaboration of or shorthand for 'lesbian and gay'. Although many theorists welcome queer as 'another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual' (de Lauretis, 1991:iv), others question its efficacy.[1] The most commonly voiced anxieties are provoked by such issues as whether a generic masculinity may be reinstalled at the heart of the ostensibly gender-neutral queer; whether queer's transcendent disregard for dominant systems of gender fails to consider the material conditions of the west in the late twentieth century; whether queer simply replicates, with a kind of historical amnesia, the stances and demands of an earlier gay liberation; and whether, because its constituency is almost unlimited, queer includes identificatory categories whose politics are less progressive than those of the lesbian and gay populations with which they are aligned.

Whatever ambivalences structure queer, there is no doubt that its recent redeployment is making a substantial impact on lesbian and gay studies. Yet, almost as soon as queer established market dominance as a diacritical term, and certainly before consolidating itself in any easy vernacular sense, some theorists are already suggesting that its moment had passed and that 'queer politics may, by now, have outlived its political usefulness'.[2] Does queer become defunct the moment it is an intelligible and widely disseminated term? Teresa de Lauretis, the theorist often credited with inaugurating the phrase 'queer theory', abandoned it barely three years later, on the grounds that it had been taken over by those mainstream forces and institutions it was coined to resist.

Explaining her choice of terminology in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994), de Lauretis writes: "As for 'queer theory', my insistent specification *lesbian* may well be taken as a taking of distance from what, since I proposed it as a working hypothesis for lesbian and gay studies in this very journal (*differences*, 3.2), has very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry'.[3] Distancing herself from her earlier advocacy of queer, de Lauretis now represents it as devoid of the political or critical acumen she once thought it promised.

In some quarters and in some enunciations, no doubt, queer does little more than function as shorthand for the unwieldy lesbian and gay, or offer itself as a new solidification of identity, by kitting out more fashionably an otherwise unreconstructed sexual essentialism. Certainly, 'its sudden and often uncritical adoption has at times foreclosed what is potentially most significant—and necessary—about the term'.[4] Queer retains, however, a conceptually unique potential as a necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation. Admittedly not discernible in every mobilisation of queer,

this constitutes an alternative to de Lauretis's narrative of disillusionment. Judith Butler does not try to anticipate exactly how queer will continue to challenge normative structures and discourses. On the contrary, she argues that what makes queer so efficacious is the way in which it understands the effects of its interventions are not singular and therefore cannot be anticipated in advance. Butler understands, as de Lauretis did when initially promoting queer over lesbian and gay, that the conservative effects of identity classifications lie in their ability to naturalise themselves as self-evident descriptive categories. She argues that if queer is to avoid simply replicating the normative claims of earlier lesbian and gay formations, it must be conceived as a category in constant formation:

> [It] will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively.[5]

In stressing the partial, flexible and responsive nature of queer, Butler offers a corrective to those naturalised and seemingly self-evident categories of identification that constitute traditional formations of identity politics. She specifies the ways in which the logic of identity politics—which is to gather together similar subjects so that they can achieve shared aims by mobilising a minority-rights discourse—is far from natural or self-evident.

In the sense that Butler outlines the queer project—that is, to the extent that she argues there can't be one—queer may be thought of as activating an identity politics so attuned to the constraining effects of naming, of delineating a foundational category which precedes and underwrites political intervention, that it may better be understood as promoting a non-identity—or even anti-identity—politics. If a potentially infinite coalition of sexual identities, practices, discourses and sites might be identified as queer, what it betokens is not so much liberal pluralism as a negotiation of the very concept of identity itself. For queer is, in part, a response to perceived limitations in the liberationist and identity-conscious politics of the gay and lesbian feminist movements. The rhetoric of both has been structured predominantly around self-recognition, community and shared identity; inevitably, if inadvertently, both movements have also resulted in exclusions, delegitimation, and a false sense of universality. The discursive proliferation of queer has been enabled in part by the knowledge that identities are fictitious—that is, produced by and productive of material effects but nevertheless arbitrary, contingent and ideologically motivated.

Unlike those identity categories labelled lesbian or gay, queer has developed, out of the theorising of often unexamined constraints in traditional identity politics. Consequently, queer has been produced largely outside the registers of recognition, truthfulness and self-identity.

Queer, then, is an identity category that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilising itself. It maintains its critique of identity-focused movements by understanding that even the formation of its own coalitional and

negotiated constituencies may well result in exclusionary and reifying effects far in excess of those intended.

Acknowledging the inevitable violence of identity politics and having no stake in its own hegemony, queer is less an identity than a *critique* of identity. But it is in no position to imagine itself outside that circuit of problems energised by identity politics. Instead of defending itself against those criticisms that its operations inevitably attract, queer allows such criticisms to shape its—for now unimaginable—future directions. 'The term', writes Butler, 'will be revised, dispelled, rendered obsolete to the extent that it yields to the demands which resist the term precisely because of the exclusions by which it is mobilized'. The mobilisation of queer—*no less than the critique* of it—foregrounds the conditions of political representation: its intentions and effects, its resistance to and recovery by the existing networks of power.

For Halperin, as for Butler, queer is a way of pointing ahead without knowing for certain what to point at. '"Queer" . . . does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions', writes Halperin[6]; "rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogenous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance". Queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming: "utopic in its negativity, queer theory curves endlessly toward a realization that its realization remains impossible".[7] The extent to which different theorists have emphasised the unknown potential of queer suggests that its most enabling characteristic may well be its potential for looking forward without anticipating the future. Instead of theorising queer in terms of its opposition to identity politics, it is more accurate to represent it as ceaselessly interrogating both the preconditions of identity and its effects. Queer is not outside the magnetic field of identity. Like some postmodern architecture, it turns identity inside out, and displays its supports exoskeletally. If the dialogue between queer and more traditional identity formations is sometimes fraught—which it is—that is not because they have nothing in common. Rather, lesbian and gay faith in the authenticity or even political efficacy of identity categories and the queer suspension of all such classifications energise each other, offering in the 1990s—and who can say beyond?—the ambivalent reassurance of an unimaginable future.

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See the discussion on Global Queer in emuse and Dennis Airman's target essay On Global Queering.

A response to this piece has been received from C. W. Young.

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John Keats and Nature, an Ecocritical Inquiry

Interiorising Exteriorities, Exteriorising Interiorities and the Dynamics of Becoming: An Ecocritical Inquiry on John Keats

by Charles Ngiewih TEKE, PhD

The hush of natural objects opens quite
To the core: and every secret essence there
Reveals the elements of good and fair
Making him see, where Learning hath no light.

This essay attempts a critical study of the poetry of John Keats (1795–1821) with regard to ecological consciousness which plays a central role in the understanding of the aesthetic, philosophical and ethical ramifications of his theory of the imagination, with the philosophy of becoming largely seen in his apprehension of poetic and philosophical maturity as an evolving process rather than a completely accomplished task. This internalisation and exteriorisation therefore centre on a dialogic stance which I term 'eco-psycho-aesthetics'. Even if Keats's conception of nature has affinities with spirituality as discerned in the works of Romantics like William Wordsworth (1770–1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), the intention of this write-up is not primarily the fullness of spiritual experience in nature. [1]

Writing to Fanny Brawne in February 1820, Keats said,

> If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory—but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd. (Selected letters, 422)

Another instance is the self-chosen inscription on Keats's tomb, which states,

Here lies one whose name was writ in water.

These are some of the comments that the proponents of Deconstruction cannot identify with Keats's idealism, and will principally capitalise on to substantiate their contention that Keats's ironic and self-contradictory character makes him a Deconstructionist.

The argument here is that these remarks, within the context of becoming, should not be taken to represent Keats's ironic and paradoxical consciousness in the strict rhetorical implications of the words, nor his contradictory stance in life. They positively point to the fact that he was conscious of poetic expression as an aesthetic process rather than a final achievement. By 1820, he had no doubt written mature poetry, but his sense of aesthetic and philosophic vision was not satisfactory. Nature plays a vital role in the understanding of his aesthetic ambitions and achievements.

The major question is, how does Keats's eco-consciousness engender his aesthetic and philosophical expression and speculations? Nature is apprehended by Coleridge, for example, from a pantheistic and monistic dimension as a universal force which sheds light on man's spirituality. This means, in other words, that the question is examined from an eco-metaphysical dimension. Becoming can be seen critically as a constructive deferral of spiritual idealism, the argument being that the visionary experiences encapsulated in texts are an indicator of supra-textual readings and therefore not closures but dynamic open-endedness. Is this the case with Keats?

Though there are a number of characteristic features in Keats's poetry which affiliate with Coleridge and Wordsworth, his nature-consciousness will be seen to take a slightly different turn. Keats's poetry and prose show proof of certain monistic traits common in the two elder poets, justifying the assertion that he can be discussed within the mainstream of Romantic idealism with regard to nature, even if he does not handle the matter in a like manner.

It can be argued equally that his poetry lends credence to apprehend nature from an organicist viewpoint. Yet, his eco-poetics, as we intend to analyse, does not place priority on the visionary and transcendental and, therefore, the dominant spiritual dimension of nature is not like that of his elder colleagues, for it tends to reduce nature primarily within the confines of his aesthetic quest rather than brood over it fundamentally as a universal force or the basis of his spiritual longings.

Keats saw the secret of creative genius as an exquisitely purged sympathy with nature. Apprehending nature and aesthetic creativity as an ever-increasing and progressive moment of life that was shaping itself, Keats infused most of his poetry with this apprehension. Equally evident in his epistolary self-consciousness, were important philosophical remarks

on the imagination that connect with nature, and point to the thread of thought of his elder colleagues as indicated above.

An examination of poems like 'The Poet,' 'Sleep and Poetry,' 'I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill,' 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket,' 'Ode on a Nightingale,' 'Bright Star, I would I were Steadfast as thou art,' *Endymion*, 'Epistle to Dear Reynolds,' and 'Ode to Autumn,' all exemplify Keats's self-conscious use of nature imagery into the fabric of his aesthetics and to an extent his apprehension of natural phenomena as therapeutic to human health.

'The Poet' conveys a strong Romantic flare for nature. The adulation of nature situates its vitality to man's psycho-somatic existence:

> At Morn, at Noon, at Eve, and Middle Night,
> He passes forth into the charmed air'
> With talisman to call up spirits rare
> From plant, cave, rock and fountain.—*To his sight*
> *The hush of natural objects opens quite*
> *To the core: and every secret essence there*
> *Reveals the elements of good and fair*
> *Making him see, where Learning hath no light.*
> Sometimes, above the gross and palpable things
> Of this diurnal ball, his spirit flies
> On awful wing; and with its destin'd skies
> Holds premature and mystic communings:
> Till such unearthly intercourses shed
> A visible halo round his mortal head.

With regard to Romantic idealism, there are undoubtedly elements here that show Keats's enthusiasm for nature. The italicised section evinces both the physical and metaphysical dimension of nature. The last lines can also be argued to demonstrate a transcendental bent. The maturing creative and philosophical mind benefits immensely from natural landscape more than from institutionalised learning. The title is an important clue to the question of eco-psycho-aesthetics. The psychological relationship between the poet and nature provides creative material. In terms of aesthetics one would describe this as the internalisation of natural imagery and exteriorisation through poetry.

In 'Sleep and Poetry' Keats's basic interest has to do with the mapping of his artistic ambition, which entails a gradual and spiral movement towards aesthetic vision and excellence. One of the developmental phases in this progression has to do with eco-consciousness. Nature therefore undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in his poetics of becoming a self-portrayed artist.

Keats begins the poem with a series of rhetorical questions, relating nature to his philosophical and psycho-aesthetic apprehension of sleep. As the poem's title indicates, sleep and poetry are highly intertwined, sleep seen here not as a psycho-somatic state of dormancy, but as a psycho-aesthetic state which generates and enhances creative productivity. Keats no doubt adulates nature's beauty and grandeur. Nature serves as a kind of nativity, a muse or a springboard to the poet's artistic quest, whereby he shows the

consciousness that he has to pass through the realms of Flora and Pan, which represent nature-poetry, before continuing to more complex levels of awareness and creativity:

> O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
> Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed
> That my own soul has to itself decreed.
> Then I will pass the countries that I see
> In long perspective, and continually
> Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I'll pass
> O Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,
> Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
> And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
> (L. 96–104)

Flora and Pan here refer to Keats's mediation of artistic creativity and Greek mythology. Though Keats's scheme considers nature not so noble as the other phases of this development, he does not undermine nature, for nature imagery recurs and serves an important thematic purpose in most of his poetry.

'I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill' was written in the same year as 'Sleep and Poetry,' and once more echoes Keats's concern for nature. The poem is fused with nature images over which the poet is contemplating not only on aesthetic but apparently spiritual vision:

> I gazed awhile, and felt as light, and free
> As though the fanning wings of Mercury
> Had played upon my heels: I was light-hearted,
> And many pleasures to my vision started;
> (L. 23–26)

This excerpt suggests an experience with a mystical and sublime aspect, what he even later qualifies as a natural sermon (L. 71). The inspiring component of nature is noted with the rhetorical question that the poet asks,

For what has made the sage or poet write/But the fair paradise of Nature's light?" (L. 125–126)

Keats goes further to describe the healing power of nature, showing that nature is not merely concerned with the aesthetic act of writing poetry, but could serve a medical purpose to whoever is open and receptive to it:

> The breezes were etheral, and pure,
> And crept through half closed lattices to cure
> The languid sick; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
> And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.
> Soon they awoke cleared eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,
> Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting:
> (L. 221–226)

The Romantic symbol of the breeze and its impact on the creative imagination, common in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, is here evoked. One also notices that Keats is obviously expressing sensitivity to the way air affects bodily health. It therefore connects with physio- and psycho-pathology, which Keats had studied in his medical training, and points to the therapeutic or pharmaceutical importance of nature to the body and soul. This ecotherapeutic perspective is not just a Coleridgean connection, but brings to mind post-Novalian philosophy.

Novalis (Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenburg 1772–1801) was very preoccupied with the pharmaceutical operations of nature in human life, a celebration of both the psychic and somatic nature of man. He adopted a homeopathic tradition to explain his metaphysics of nature and human consciousness, stressing that nature is a pharmaceutical principle, a poison and a healer. He saw illness as a positive prerequisite for wholeness and the soul as the embodiment of the ambivalence of the pharmaceutical principle.

There is a connection between Novalis and Keats in this phenomenon. [2] In fact, Keats's broodings over nature actually point to a number of concerns that are intricately related to his study of medical sciences and his philosophy of the imagination. The nature of the Romantic imagination here is its aesthetic implications and how it connects inextricably with his progressive philosophy of life. The concern here is not unrelated to Keats's imaginative view of art, expressed in a letter to George and Thomas Keats, dated December 21, 1817.

> The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth (John Keats: Letters, 370)

Keats's notion of beauty and truth is highly inclusive. That is, it blends all life's experiences or apprehensions, negative or positive, into a holistic vision. Art and nature, therefore, are seen as therapeutic in function.

Keats's views on nature are not to be found only in his poetry but also in his letters. Writing to Tom (1818), he associates nature with poetic inspiration and expression. In other letters to George and Thomas Keats (1817), he talks of the negative capability of the poet that calls for a synaesthetic and empathic vision in life, to Reynolds (1818), he asserts the conviction that all departments of knowledge are to be seen as excellence and calculated towards a great whole, to John Taylor (1818), he outlines certain axioms of poetry among which is the notion that if poetry comes not naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. All these connect the imagination with nature-consciousness and demonstrate an affinity with the Plotinist or Spinozist monism inherent in Wordsworth and Coleridge. But the major issue lies in apprehending nature as part of the creative process rather than the poet's adherence to nature's spirituality.

In the letter to Tom, more specifically, Keats's description of the Scottish landscape is vital in the understanding of the importance he attributed to the subject:

> What astonish me more than anything is the tone, the colouring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; if I may say so, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The spaces, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. I shall learn poetry here and henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavour of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into etheral existence for the relish of one's fellows. (John Keats: Letters, 402)

What one can discern here about Keats's strong sense of perception and imaginative intensity is that nature's material does not contribute only to the aesthetic composition of poetry, but poetry that delineates a deep apprehension of life and existence. One sees a strand of ekphrasis, as the observation and internalisation of the scenery urges the search for an appropriate language for utterance. So the letter sheds light on the epistemological and ontological implications of Keats's nature-consciousness. In this sense mature poetry has to be infused with complex insights of human existence.

In 'Ode to a Nightingale' one can discern the consciousness of the use of nature, symbolised in the bird and its melodious song, not only for poetic composition, but also for advancing the poet's philosophical speculations. Both bird and song represent natural beauty, the poetic expression of the non-verbal song signalling the harmony of nature. Apart from the ecstasy that the bird's song generates, the unseen but vivid pictorial description of the surrounding landscape adds to the bliss and serenity of the atmosphere:

> I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
> Nor what soft incense hangs upon the bough,
> But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
> Wherewith the seasonable month endows
> The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
> White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
> Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
> And mid-May's eldest child,
> The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
> The murmurous haunt of lies on summer eves.
> (Stanza V, L. 41–50)

These lines express the splendour of spring while foreshadowing the approach of summer, which will have its own store of nature beauty and luxury. As earlier said, nature here seems to be a springboard for intense speculations in the face of the impermanence and mutability of life which strongly preoccupies the poet.

To put it in other words, the song seems to engender a phenomenological process of self-transformation or a psychological metamorphosis that enhances a deep desire for the eternal and unalterable through death. Yet the poet submits to a stoical fortitude, apparently emphasising the material and sensuous realm of existence rather than the struggle to maintain a permanent and idealistic state. This has often been problematised as imaginative failure, or as a characteristic Keatsian trademark of ambivalence between reality and imaginative illusion.

Joseph Swann's "Shelley, Keats and Coleridge: The Romantics as Deconstructionists" (1995) has dismissed the hermeneutic and phenomenological basis of reading this poem. He argues that the language of the ode is physical and highly characterised by impenetrability. In his deconstructionist position Swann contends that the subject matter of the poem is knowing and unknowing, the death of meaning that is immanent in every word, the dark otherness in the objects we meet, and the inescapable eroticism of speech (94). Keatsian ambivalence, accordingly, undermines any recourse to meaningful discourse.

The issue, as to why this happens as exemplified in the last stanza of the poem, is a philosophical and spiritual disposition that should be discussed within the context of Romantic idealism however problematic it was.

Though greatly infused with natural description, two important extracts from *Endymion* can best illustrate Keats's ontological perception and understanding of nature:

> Wherein lies Happiness? In that which becks
> Our ready minds to fellow divine;
> A fellowship with divine essence, till we shine
> Full alchymized and free of space. Behold
> The clear Religion of Heaven . . .
> (*Endymion* I. 777–781)
>
> . . .
>
> at the tip top,
> There hangs by unseen film, an orbed drop
> Of light, and that is love: Its influence,
> Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
> At which we start and fret; till in the end,
> Melting into its radiance, we blend,
> Mingle, and so become a part of it . . .
> (*Endymion* I. 805–811)

These excerpts bear a close affinity with Coleridge's Neo-Platonist views and therefore connect a common thread of thought between the two poets. The first lines may be rightly read as Keats's affirmation of his belief in Platonic or transcendental reality, given that they express in like manner the workings of the imagination as an associative and spiritual faculty. Divine

fellowship with essence will be suggested as partaking in all life processes and principles in nature. Essence can be interpreted here to stand for the Logos, or transcendent reality in which all fuse in momentary imaginative experiences or in the final outcome of becoming, Being.

Keats uses chemical theory to advance an aesthetic and philosophical disposition. Alchemy has to do with the chemical process of transformation from a base to a higher substance. His use of ethereal existence in the letter excerpt above also strengthens his scientific analogies to matters of art, aesthetics, philosophy and spirituality. Keats apprehends artistic creativity to work on this same principle. So his allusions to science are not to be seen in empirical terms, but in imaginative, aesthetic and philosophical terms. To put it in other words, sense impressions are imaginatively concentrated and distilled. This leads to higher forms, ethereal forms and finally to aesthetic maturity and philosophical acuity.

The second excerpt also gives an insight into what Keats seemed to have been propagating in his nature-mystic thought. It aptly justifies the struggle at wholeness and unity exemplified with the verbs melting, blending, mingling, and becoming. All of these verbs are dynamic verbs, suggesting a conscious awareness of process and the active interaction between psyche and nature. These words all relate to Coleridge's definition of the secondary imagination and the poet in ideal perfection, where we find counterparts such as partake, synthesise, diffuse, dissipates, and dissolve which share the same characteristic features discussed above.

The basic premise of the imagination as inspiration and at the same time a base for epistemological and ontological investigation, therefore, becomes justified. Reality, as it were, is sanctioned by the philosophical injunction of becoming, since life is seen as a continuous process rather than a static or an end product. To put it differently, a certain goal is perceived which cannot be interpreted from the poems as achieved but rather as an anticipated end.

The poem which Keats wrote that has attracted much attention with regard to nature is 'To Autumn.' However, the controversy surrounding it is a result of the different theoretical and critical perspectives that are employed to read and interpret it. The historicists see it as a veiled expression of Keats's revolutionary ideals, and, therefore, a kind of poetic-historical treatise. Nicholas Roe's *Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997), and particularly "John Keats's 'Green World:' Politics, Nature and the Poems" (2000), offer a good example of such a historical reading. Roe's approach, for example, has explored nature imagery, not in terms of artistic, aesthetic or spiritual longings, but in terms of Keats's socio-political consciousness of England, whereby nature (in connection with the glorification of Greek Flora and Pan) is seen as a symbolic representation of the ideas of liberty, peace, and freedom.

The structuralists see it as a culminating expression of artistic vision and maturity, arguing that the ripeness expressed in it is an explicit or implicit translation of aesthetic achievement and grandeur. Helen Vendler's *The Odes*

of John Keats (1981) insightfully handles this argument, contending that the poem is a structural culmination of the other odes in terms of ideological as well as aesthetic vision. Keats is seen to have attained full poetic vision here.

The Deconstructionists read and interpret the poem as an exemplification of self/text-deconstruction by Keats, pressing home the contention that any possible pattern of meaning is destroyed by the text of the poem itself. So the poem subverts and undermines its very own intention of communicating thought/meaning, however perceived. This critical judgement can be found in Susan Wolfson's *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (1987) and James O'Rourke's *Keats's Odes and Contemporary Criticism* (1998).

Romantic visionary criticism has analysed the poem from within its interpretative matrix from principally two angles, either on the grounds of archetypal criticism with regard to the cyclical pattern of the seasons therein implied, or from a monistic perspective dealing with the unification and wholeness of nature.

What is certain is that the poem can be seen as expressing Keats's organicist conception of life and poetic expression as process, which correlates with the latter visionary view stated above. Keats was obviously still conscious of not having written much for posterity. It should therefore be re-iterated that the aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual implications or dispositions of the poem can be interpreted with regard to the question of becoming rather than the view that it represents Keats's full imaginative vision and achievement as the Romantic visionary critics or structuralists would expound.

This interpretation is connected with the philosophical speculations that run through 'The Human Seasons' and the sonnet 'After dark vapours have oppress'd our plains.' They all complement the seasons with meditation and contemplation on life and death. 'The Human Seasons,' for instance, reads thus:

> Four seasons fill the measure of the year;
> There are four seasons in the mind of man:
> He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
> Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
> He has his Summer, when luxuriously
> Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
> To ruminate and by such dreaming nigh
> His nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
> His soul has its Autumn, when his wings
> He furleth close; contented so to look
> On mist in idleness—to let fair things
> Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
> He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
> Or else he would forgo his mortal nature.

This poem's intricate relating of the seasons with the different phases of human life which culminates with death, clearly implicates Keats's concern

in 'To Autumn.' So another argument on the Autumn poem can contend to see it as a subtle imaginative and philosophical rendition of Keats's premonition about death, a death into life. Suffice here to say that he compounds ecological phenomenon with death, which to him is a welcome relief rather than a negative moment of existence, since he undoubtedly believes in a blissful post-corporeal existence.

To put it differently, Keats is attempting to de-centre the traditional notion of the cycle of the seasons to which particular characteristic features have been ascribed. Not only is Autumn a season of ripeness and fruitfulness. All the other seasons can philosophically or metaphorically serve the same capacity of one another from a creative and aesthetic perspective. That is, they can be artistically inspiring while engendering deep philosophical and spiritual matters of life and death, each season can be spring as well as death. The critical stance taken here is that ecology has a mutually enriching and rewarding relationship with ethics and psychology. Dissociating any realm of human activity from ecological diversity seems impossible.

'On the Grasshopper and Cricket' and 'Bright Star, would I were stedfast as thou art' are two of Keats's sonnets that necessitate critical investigation with reference to the present debate on nature. In the former poem, Keats advances statements that go beyond the deceptive simplicity of the poem's title:

> The poetry of earth is never dead:
> When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
> And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
> From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
> That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
> In Summer's luxury,—he has never done
> With his delights; for when tired out with fun
> He rests at ease beneath some pleasant heed.
> The poetry of earth is ceasing never.
> On a lone winter evening, when the frost
> Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
> The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
> And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
> The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

The poet's ecological assertion that the poetry of earth cannot be exhausted is a reverberation of the Spinozist idea that we cannot have enough of the great treasures of nature. Poetic composition can be inspired by any season, given the apprehension that any season can be a generative and creative spring. This current thematic issue, already mentioned above, takes a seemingly simplistic dimension in this poem. The grasshopper and cricket are nature's elements that signal and convey different time axes in terms of the changing seasons. In comparison to the nightingale poem, one sees the blend of aesthetics and nature, and at the same time an insight to philosophical and spiritual dispositions.

The latter poem is concerned with an elemental image, the star. The star engenders the atmosphere that characterises the poem's meditative and contemplative mode. The poet's desire to be as steadfast as the star is obviously a consequence of his willingness to get away from "time's bitter tides". This is not because of any illusory or escapist tendency, but because he anticipates a realm of existence that surpasses pain and despair.

Susan Wolfson's *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997) furthers her deconstructionist stance adopted in *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (1987). In the latter work, she claimed that Keats's poetry is overpowered with questioning without providing any centres of meaning since any attempted meaning leads to an interpretive impasse. In the former she emphasises the view that Keats's lyrics show how the poetry's forms undermine the claims of form to create a privileged autonomy. With regard to 'Bright Star,' she argues that the dash at the end "refuses a closure of form" to register "the radical insecurities of experience" (187). In other words, the poem only confirms unreadability and undecidability.

It should be reiterated that Keats's philosophical conception of life was based on suffering and agony. These were necessary qualities that strengthened metaphysical longing and capacity. Romantic idealism favoured this hermeneutic and phenomenological outlook on life. At this juncture, we want here to address and emphasise the question of the poem's inspiration by the natural phenomenon, the luminous star. Keats here clearly utilises and reduces nature to his distinctive aesthetic and philosophical ambitions. He does not seem to treat it as a universal force as Coleridge or Wordsworth persistently does in his pantheistic and monistic engagements even though it has been illustrated that there are strands of Coleridgean and Wordsworthian consciousness in his work. But his recourse to nature points strongly to his consciousness of process, given his understanding of it as constituting the path that leads to a more mature aesthetic vision and philosophical speculation in life. A considerable part of Keats's poetry undoubtedly demonstrates how internalising ecology engenders reorientation and maturity in aesthetic longings.

The foregoing analyses have pointed to nature consciousness in Keats's poetic practices. Existing critical readings have not paid much attention to this phenomenon in Keats, and the present arguments cannot claim to have attempted an exhaustive view on the matter. Though Keats's poetry indicates the difficulties of tracing a clear line between aestheticism and spirituality, the arguments here are more inclined to aestheticism and philosophy rather than spirituality, given that Keats consciously uses nature to satisfy the former end even though this poetry gives allowance to the interpretation of the latter.

He undoubtedly utilises and reduces nature. Yet, one can argue that his nature poetry does not only limit itself to an individualised train. There are certainly strands of pantheistic and monistic readings in his work, pointing

to the shared affinities between him and the mainstream philosophical and spiritual thought of the likes of Coleridge and Wordsworth. This is an issue that is open to further critical debate.

The suggestion here would be that a more in-depth and exhaustive study of Keats and the environment can be the subject of another research endeavour. It would then be possible to know from a broader perspective if he persistently handles the subject with the subtle complexity with which the First Generation Romantic poets did, given that his nature poetry is obviously not mere aesthetics.

The argument is that Keats's interiorising and exteriorising of nature, even though largely discussed here in view of establishing his poetics of becoming as aesthetic development and philosophical maturity, corresponds with Coleridge's or Worsdworth's primacy of self in the universalism of his pantheistic and monistic philosophy.

For example Keats's aesthetic speculations in poems like 'Sleep and Poetry,' 'I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill' and 'The Fall of Hyperion' demonstrate certain important strands of similarities with Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' at the levels of aestheticism and spirituality. As 'Kubla Khan' depicts the antithetical nature of aesthetic and spiritual enthusiasm, vision and continuity, so do Keats's nature poems. They can be read and interpreted eco-critically. They delineate primarily his aesthetic and philosophical engagements in his constructive quest. Keats himself consciously mapped his aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual development with expressions like "the realm of Flora and Pan", "the chamber of maiden thought", "the dark chambers", "the vale of tears", "the spiritual yeast and ferment", "the chambers of light" and "the vale of soul making".

Endnotes

1. I have argued Keats's spirituality on the grounds of Gnosticism in Towards a Poetics of Becoming: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's and John Keats's Aesthetics Between Idealism and Deconstruction (2006). This is handled in Chapter Six "Keats and the Gnostic Tradition: Inner-Self Searching and Becoming" (339–420). There is textual evidence, no doubt, in establishing a link between Keats's nature poetry and the nature poets on grounds of spirituality and transcendentality.
2. See, for example, David Farrell Knell's Contagion, Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism (1998), 35–70. There is no complete and available copy of Novalis's work in English, but his basic ideas share an affinity with most of his German counterparts, especially on the concept of nature and self. He however adds a dimension to his analyses that introduces the question of nature, poetry, imagination and psychopathology. It is important to add here that Novalis's influence was felt greatly in American Transcendentalism/Romanticism than might have been the case in England. He is also very common in French philosophical circles.

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GLOSSARY

absolutist critic One who believes that there is one and only one theory or set of principles a reader may use when interpreting a text.

actual reader A term devised by Wolfgang Iser to distinguish between two kinds of readers: the **implied reader** and the actual reader. The actual reader is the person who physically picks up a text and reads it. According to Iser, the actual reader comes to the text shaped by cultural and personal norms and prejudices.

aesthetic experience The effects produced in and on an individual when contemplating a work of art. See **aesthetic reading.**

aesthetic reading A term used by Louise M. Rosenblatt in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978) to describe the act of reading or the process whereby a reader transacts with a text. During this event, the "object of aesthetic contemplation is what readers make of their responses to the artistic stimulus, no matter whether this be a physical object, such as a statue, or a set of verbal symbols. Readers contemplate their own shaping of their responses to the text." The term refers to each reader's personal response to a text and how individual readers find and create meaning when transacting with printed material. Such a process assumes an active role on the part of the reader to create meaning or individual interpretations with and from a text.

aesthetics The branch of philosophy that deals with the concept of the beautiful and strives to determine the criteria for beauty in a work of art. It asks such questions as the following: Where is the source of beauty? In the object? In the perceiver? What is beauty? and How is beauty recognized?

aesthetic theory A systematic, philosophical body of beliefs concerning how meaning occurs and functions in texts, especially the element of beauty or pleasure.

affective fallacy A term used by New Critics to explain that a reader's emotional response to a text is neither important nor equivalent to its interpretation. Believing those who evaluate a work of art on the basis of its emotional effect on its perceiver to be incorrect, New Critics assert that the affective fallacy confuses what a poem is (its meaning) and what it does. The term was first introduced by William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, who believed that a poem's meaning was determined solely from a **close reading** of a text.

affective stylistics A term coined by the reader-oriented critic Stanley Fish to describe his reading strategy (also referred to as **reception aesthetics**). Fish believes that the meaning of a text resides in the reading community to which the reader belongs, what Fish calls the **interpretive community.** The interpretation of a text, therefore, depends on a reader's subjective experience in one or more of these interpretive communities.

African-American criticism An approach to literary analysis that develops a black aesthetics to be applied when interpreting African-American writings. One of its leading advocates, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., believes such an aesthetics provides a new theoretical framework for developing and analyzing the ever-growing and popular African-American canon. In this new framework, Gates insists that African-American literature be viewed as a form of language, not as a representation of social practices or culture. According to Gates, a black aesthetics must be derived from the black tradition itself and must include what he calls "the language of blackness, the signifying difference which makes the black tradition our very own." Gates asserts the **"double-voicedness"** of African-American literature, declaring that

this literature draws upon two voices and cultures, the white and the black. It is the joining of these two discourses, says Gates, that produces the uniqueness of this literature. See **cultural studies** and **postcolonialism.**

aggressive instinct According to Freud, one of two instincts housed in the unconscious, the other being the sexual instinct, or libido. Although these two instincts can work harmoniously, often they act as enemies. See **destructive instinct.**

alienation effect A term coined by the Marxist theater critic Bertolt Brecht to describe his technique to interrupt the theater audience's normal expectations when viewing a drama. For example, in the middle of a drama, Brecht may have one of the actors directly appeal to the audience via song or speech to keep the audience constantly aware of the moral and social issues to which they are being exposed.

allegoric reading A reading in which one character, place, or idea represents another. The characters, events, or places within a text represent meanings independent of the action in the surface story. These interpretations are most often religious, but may also be moral, political, personal, or satiric.

allophone The family of nearly identical speech sounds that comprise a **phoneme.** For example, the sound of the *p* in *pit* and the *p* in *spit* are allophones or slight variants of the phoneme /p/.

alterity A term used by postcolonialists to refer to the state or quality of a person being labeled "different" or "other." This sense of otherness excludes the individual from a position of power and labels the person as inferior, subhuman, savage, and oftentimes evil.

Amazon feminism A contemporary approach to feminist criticism that is dedicated to female images, either fictional or real, in literature and art that emphasize the physiques of female athletes and physical equality of both males and females. It argues that no mention of gender should arise when discussing such topics as occupations. No characteristics exist that are peculiarly masculine or feminine.

ambiguity Commonly defined as a stylistic error in everyday speech in which a word or expression has multiple meanings. Since the publication of William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and the specialized use of this term adopted by New Criticism, ambiguity is now synonymous with *plurisignation,* both terms implying the complexity and richness of poetic language that allows for a word or expression to simultaneously have two or more distinct meanings. New Critics believe that ambiguity becomes one of the chief tools that good poets use intentionally and effectively to demonstrate the multiple valid meanings of a word or expression. See **connotation** and **denotation.**

anal stage Sigmund Freud's second stage of child development in which the anus becomes the object of pleasure when the child learns the delights of defecation.

analytical psychology Founded and developed by Carl Gustav Jung, this system of psychology is akin to psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the functions that the conscious and the unconscious play in influencing human behavior. Emphasizes humankind's racial origins and adapts the use of the free-association technique in studying an individual's problems.

Anglo-American feminisms A contemporary feminist theory and criticism authored by British and American feminist critics, notably Virginia Woolf, Judith Fetterley, Annette Kolodny, Nina Baym, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and others.

anima A term used by Carl Jung in mythic criticism to describe the archetype of the feminine in the male.

animus A term used by Carl Jung in mythic criticism to describe the archetype of the masculine in the female.

anti-cathexes A term used by Freud in his economic model of the unconscious. In this model the pleasure principle is held in check by the anti-cathexes, an anticharge of energy governed by the reality principle that inhibits free rein of the pleasure principle in an individual's psyche.

antiromance phase One of four phases that comprise Northrop Frye's concept of the *monomyth*, or the complete story of literature. This phase or season in literary works tells the story of bondage, imprisonment, frustration, and fear.

antithesis According to the German philosopher Georg Hegel, for every **thesis** presented, there exists a counterstatement, or antithesis. Out of debate and discussion of the thesis and antithesis, a new idea, called the **synthesis**, develops.

aporia Postmodernism's undecidability about the nature of reality and the interpretation of texts. This term is also used in deconstruction theory denoting paradoxes, contradictions, and other puzzling statements that cannot be resolved—apparent contradictions.

appetencies A term brought into literary criticism via the writings of the formalist critic I. A. Richards. According to Richards, human beings are basically bundles of desires called *appetencies*. Richards believes that to achieve psychic health, every person must balance these desires by creating a personally acceptable vision of the world. Whereas religion once provided this vision, Richards declares that poetry can now best harmonize and satisfy humankind's appetencies and create a fulfilling and intellectually acceptable worldview. See **formalism.**

applied criticism Applies the theories and tenets of theoretical criticism to a particular work of art. Also known as *practical criticism*. In applied criticism, the critic defines the standards of taste and explains, evaluates, or justifies a particular text.

archetypal criticism An approach to literary analysis that applies the theories of Carl Jung, Northrop Frye, and other critics to literary analysis. An archetypal critic studies images or patterns of repeated human experiences **(archetypes)** found within a specific text and common to other works of art.

archetype A recurrent plot pattern, image, descriptive detail, or character that evokes from the reader strong but illogical responses. This term was brought into literary criticism via the psychological writings of Carl Jung. Jung believed that the mind was composed of three parts: the *personal conscious*, the *personal unconscious*, and the **collective unconscious.** Lying deep within the mind in the collective unconscious is the collective knowledge of humanity, the memories of humanity's past. Formed through the repeated experiences of humankind, this knowledge can be tapped through images of birth, death, rebirth, the seasons, and so forth within a text and can cause profound emotions to surface within a reader.

arche-writing (archi-écriture) A term used by the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (1974) to assert that language is a kind of writing. Derrida maintains that writing cannot be reduced to letters or other symbols inscribed on a page. Rather, writing is directly related to what Saussure believed to be the basic element of language: difference. We can know a word because it differs from another word. The word *tall* could just as easily have become *sall* in American English. This freeplay or element of undecidability in any system of communication Derrida defines as writing.

Aristotelian poetics The name given to the underlying principles of interpretation found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this work, Aristotle states the first definition of tragedy. The *Poetics* has now become the cornerstone of Western literary criticism.

artifact Any product of artistic endeavor, such as a poem, a novel, a painting, a short story, and so on. The word implies that the artistic endeavor can be analyzed or studied to ascertain its meaning because an artifact "something created by humans," and therefore is an analyzable entity or object.

aspirated A linguistic term designating a sound such as the *p* in *pat*, in which a brief delay occurs before pronouncing the vowel sound with an accompanying release of air.

attentive reading Coined by the post-Althusserian Marxist critic Pierre Macherey to describe a type of reading that reveals the multiple ideologies operating in given text. These ideologies often work directly against what the writer assumes he or she is saying or writing.

autotelic artifact A term used by New Critics that refers to the existence of a text. For the New Critics, a text exists in its own right as an autonomous object that can be analyzed.

bad critic A term used by New Critics for the kind of critic who insists on imposing extrinsic evidence such as historical or biographical information upon a text to discover its meaning.

Bakhtin Circle A group of Russian scholars and critics, including Mikhail Bakhtin, who addressed the social and cultural influences of the Russian Revolution and its rule under Joseph Stalin. The group met from 1913 until 1929, first at Vitebsk and then Leningrad, Russia, and included Bakhtin, P. N. Medvedev, V. N. Voloshinov, and others.

base A term used by Karl Marx to designate the economic structure of society. According to Marx, the various methods of economic production and the social relationships they engender form the base. In the United States, for example, Marxism asserts that the capitalists exploit the working classes, determining for them their salaries and their working conditions; their salaries and working conditions are the base.

binary operations (binary oppositions) A term introduced into literary theory by Jacques Derrida to represent the conceptual oppositions on which he believes Western **metaphysics** is based, such as light/dark, good/bad, and big/small.

biological model A term coined by the feminist critic Elaine Showalter to describe one of four models or ways to construct a female framework for analyzing women's literature, a process termed **gynocriticism.** This model emphasizes how the female body marks itself on a text by providing a host of literary images along with a personal, intimate tone.

black arts movement Spans the decade from 1965 to 1975, beginning with the assassination of Malcolm X, and advocates black power or militant advocacy of armed self-defense while inspiring a renewal and pride in African heritage and asserting the goodness and beauty of all things black. Its chief spokesperson was the Greenwich Village beat poet Amiri Baraka and its literary magazine, *Cricket*.

bourgeoisie According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), this term refers to the social elite, or members of the upper class, who control and define the economic base of society through economic policies and the production of goods. The bourgeoisie also defines a society's superstructure and its **hegemony.**

canon The collected works of an author or of a tradition.

capitalist Another name given to the bourgeoisie by Marx and Engels. The capitalists in society enslave the working class (the **proletariat**) through economic policies and the production of goods.

carnival Coined by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin to describe some novels' polyphonic style—that is, some novels have a carnival sense of the world, a sense of joyful abandonment in which many different voices are simultaneously heard and directly influence their hearers (and readers). Each participant in the novel tests both the ideas and the lives of other participants, creating a somewhat seriocomic environment. This notation of carnival is one of Bakhtin's most significant contributions to literary theory.

carnivalistic Coined by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin to describe a sense of joyful relativity in a **polyphonic** novel caused by the readers' watching multiple characters influence each other with their particular understanding of truth. See **carnival.**

castration complex According to Sigmund Freud, if a child's sexual development is to proceed normally, each must pass through the castration complex. Boys know they have a penis like their fathers, but their mother and sisters do not. What stops the male child from having incestuous desires for his mother is fear of castration by his father. The child, therefore, represses his sexual desire, identifies with his father, hopes to possess a woman as his father now possesses his mother, and unconsciously makes a successful transition to manhood. The female child realizes that, like her mother, she is already castrated. Knowing that her father possesses what she desires (a penis), she turns her attention away from her mother and toward her father. After unsuccessfully attempting to seduce her father, she returns to her mother, identifies with her, and successfully makes her transition to womanhood.

catalyst An agent or element that causes, but is not affected by, a reaction.

catharsis A term used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* in discussing the nature and function of tragedy. Although its meaning is highly controversial and by no means clear, *catharsis* had both a medical and a religious meaning in Aristotle's day. Medically the word referred to a body's discharge of excess elements during sickness and its subsequent return to health. In a religious sense, the word referred to the soul's method of purification, freeing itself from the body and becoming unfettered. As to its use in tragedy, Aristotle wrote, "Through tragedy, then, the audience's emotions would somehow be purified." How this process actually occurs is debatable.

cathexes Coined by Freud to describe an individual's instinctual and psychic energy, its chief aim being to maximize the pleasure sensed and desired by the **pleasure principle** in the human psyche.

chora A term used by the feminist critic Julia Kristeva to refer to the continuous flow of fluidity or rhythm that characterizes the **imaginary order** of psychic development.

close readers A term used by the New Critics for the kind of reader or critic who applies the principles of **New Criticism** to a text to arrive at an interpretation. Implied in the term is a close and detailed reading and analysis of the text itself to derive its meaning without historical, authorial, or cultural input.

close reading A term used by the New Critics for the kind of reading or analysis of a text that applies the principles of **New Criticism.** Implied in the term is a close and detailed analysis of the text itself (its verbal qualities) to arrive at an interpretation without referring to historical, authorial, or cultural concerns. A close reading of a text became the hallmark of the New Critics' methodology. Sometimes referred to as *explication de texte* in French literary studies.

collective meaning A term used by the reader-oriented, subjective critic David Bleich as a substitute for the word *interpretation*. According to Bleich, a text's meaning is developed when a reader works in cooperation with other readers to achieve the text's collective meaning, or its interpretation. Bleich argues that only when each reader is able to articulate his or her individual responses within a group about the text can the group, working together, negotiate meaning and arrive at the text's collective meaning.

collective unconscious A term brought into literary criticism via the psychology of Carl Jung. The collective unconscious is that part of the psyche that contains the cumulative knowledge, experiences, and images of the human race. This knowledge evidences itself as "primordial images" in humankind's religions, myths, dreams, and literature and can be tapped by writers through the use of **archetypes.**

concretized A term used by reader-oriented critics for the phenomenological process whereby the text registers upon the reader's consciousness. See **phenomenology.**

condensation A term used by Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis and dream interpretation to designate the process whereby one compacts a feeling or emotion toward a person or group and objectifies it into a simple sentence, phrase, or symbol.

connotation The implied meaning of a word, as opposed to its dictionary definition. See **denotation.**

conscious A term brought into literary criticism via the psychoanalysis of Carl Jung that refers to one of the three parts of the human psyche, a person's waking state. The term was also used by Sigmund Freud to define the rational and waking part of the human psyche. See **personal unconscious** and **collective unconscious.**

cultural criticism A term used interchangeably with **cultural studies** in Great Britain.

cultural feminism Also known as radical feminism. This kind of feminist criticism asserts that personality and biological differences exist between men and women. Its main tenet is that women are inherently and biologically kinder and gentler than men. According to cultural feminists, women's gentler and kinder ways should be highlighted and celebrated because women's ways are better than men's.

cultural materialism The British branch of cultural poetics. Compared with New Historicism or the American branch of Cultural Poetics, cultural materialism is overtly political and cultural in its aims. Adherents of this critical methodology (mainly Marxists) believe we should read the works of the established canon "against the grain." By doing so, critics can expose the political unconscious of the text and debunk the social and political myths created by the bourgeoisie.

cultural model One of four models developed by the feminist critic Elaine Showalter to construct a female framework for analyzing women's literature known as **gynocriticism.** The cultural model investigates how society shapes women's goals, responses, and points of view.

Cultural Poetics According to Stephen Greenblatt, one of its founders, Cultural Poetics is now the preferred name for **New Historicism.** See **cultural materialism.**

cultural studies The body of literary theorists, philosophers, and critics who study the works of **subaltern writers** such as Africans, Australians, Native Americans, women, and others who are suppressed and repressed by their dominant cultures. These writers are now taking their place at the literary table, where they can present their understanding of reality, of society, and of personal self-worth. Some scholars divide this broad group into three categories: **postcolonialism, African-American criticism,** and **gender studies.**

decolonization A term used in postcolonialism to describe Great Britain's slowly disappearing political, social, economic, and ideological domination of its former colonies at the beginning of the twentieth century.

deconstruction Introduced in America in 1966 in a speech given by Jacques Derrida at Johns Hopkins University, this poststructural approach to literary analysis is best considered a strategic device for interpreting a text rather than a critical theory, school of criticism, or philosophy. Such theories, schools of criticism, and philosophies, Derrida asserts, must identify with a body of knowledge that they decree to be true or, at least, to contain truth. The idea that truth or a core of metaphysical ideals can be definitely believed, articulated, and supported is exactly what Derrida and deconstructionists wish to "deconstruct."

Considered to be the most intellectually formidable approach to literary analysis, deconstruction bases its ideas on the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and his assertion that language is a system based on differences; for example, we know the difference between the sounds /b/ and /p/ because we have heard both and can note the difference. Derrida enlarges this concept of difference by declaring that how we come to know concepts is also a matter of difference.

Denying any center of truth, such as God, humanity, or the self, deconstruction maintains that we can never be certain about our values, beliefs, and assumptions. If this is the case, then we can never be certain about a text's meaning, and we can, therefore, never declare a text to have but one meaning. The "undecidability" of a text's meaning is the cardinal rule of deconstruction.

deconstruction theory An approach or strategy for reading devised by the French literary critic Jacques Lacan to discover "how" a text means by asking a different set of questions than structuralist critics do. Its aim is to show that what a text claims it says and what it actually says are discernibly different. See **deconstruction.**

defamiliarization A term coined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. It is the process of making strange (see **ostranenie**) the familiar or putting the old in a new light or in a new sphere of perception. Through poetic diction or word choice, a poet "makes strange" the poetic line or word, slowing down the act of perception, thereby forcing readers to reexamine the word, line, image, or any other poetic device. In so doing, readers experience a small part of their world in a new way by intensifying the act of perception.

denotation The dictionary definition of a word, as distinct from its **connotation,** or its suggestive or emotional meaning.

Descriptive grammar A linguistic approach to the study of a language's grammar that examines the structure of a language—its words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and so forth—as used by the speakers of that language. Descriptive grammarians then formulate rules about the

language's structure without reference to "good" or "bad" usage. Descriptive grammar avoids establishing norms of correctness as does **prescriptive grammar.**

destructive instinct Also known as the **aggressive instinct,** this term was coined by Freud to describe the two basic instincts housed in a human's unconscious. More frequently than not, the destructive instinct attacks the **eros or sexual instinct** (later called the **libido** by Freud). According to Freud, the unconscious houses our biographical memories along with suppressed and unresolved conflicts.

devices A word used by the Russian Formalists to denote the internal mechanics of a work of literature, especially its poetic language. These devices are an integral part of the work's **form.**

diachronic A term used in linguistics to designate a process of language study in which language change is traced over long expanses of time. Such study can discover, for example, how a particular phenomenon in one language has changed through several centuries and whether a similar change could be noted in other languages. (The term is also used in other fields in which cultural phenomena are studied as they occur or change over time.)

dialectical criticism A term coined by the Marxist postcolonialist critic Fredric Jameson that refers to his belief that all critics must be consciously aware of their own ideology when analyzing a text, what Jameson calls **"dialectical self-awareness."**

dialectical materialism A term used to refer to the core beliefs of **Marxism** as defined by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and in *The German Ideology* (1846). For Marx and Engels, "Consciousness does not determine life: life determines consciousness." In other words, our ideas and concepts about ourselves are fashioned in everyday discourse in the language of real life and are not derived from any spiritual reality. The basis of reality is material; no spiritual reality exists. In addition, the economic means of production within a society—its **base**—engenders and controls all human institutions and ideologies—the **superstructure.**

dialectical self-awareness A term brought into Marxist criticism by the American critic Fredric Jameson to assert that all readers or critics must be consciously aware of their own ideology when analyzing a text.

dialectic First used by the Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato to describe a form of logical argumentation involving conflicting ideas and propositions. The German philosopher Georg Hegel borrows its form to establish his **thesis–antithesis–synthesis** dynamic.

dialogic A concept developed by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin that declares that all language is a dialogue in which a speaker and a listener form a relationship. All language, argues Bakhtin, is the product of at least two people.

dialogic heteroglossia Coined by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin, this concept literally means "many voices in multiple conversations" and explains Bakhtin's idea that multiple conversations occur in all texts. No text is a monologue. See **dialogic.**

dialogic utterance Coined by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin, this term asserts that each individual speech act is oriented toward a particular listener or audience and demonstrates the relationship that exists between the speaker and listener.

dialogized heteroglossia A term coined by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin that for Bakhtin characterizes the novel. Within the novel, multiple worldviews and a variety of experiences are continually dialoguing with each other, resulting in multiple interactions, some of which are real and others of which are imagined.

diction A term used by all schools of literary criticism referring to an author's or speaker's word choice.

différance Introduced by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, *différance* is derived from the French word *différer*, meaning (1) to defer, postpone, or delay and (2) to differ, to be different from. Derrida deliberately coined this word to be ambiguous, taking on both meanings simultaneously. One of the keys to understanding deconstruction, *différance* is Derrida's "What if?" question. What if there is no ultimate truth? What if there is no essence, being, or inherently

unifying element in the universe? What then? Derrida's answer is that all meaning or interpretations of a text are *undecidable* because a text can have innumerable meanings and interpretations.

discourse A way of seeing and thinking about the world. Bounded by ideology, culture, education, politics, and a variety of other influences, *discourse* refers not only to speech patterns but also to a particular mindset secured by philosophical assumptions that predispose a person to interpret the world in a particular fashion.

displacement A term used by Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis to designate the process whereby we suppress wishes and desires that are too difficult for our psyches to handle by concealing them in symbols that take the place of the original desire. Our unconscious mind may switch, for example, a person's hatred of another onto a rotting apple in a dream.

double consciousness A postcolonial term used synonymously with **unhomeliness.**

double-voicedness A term coined by the African-American literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to assert that African-American literature draws upon two voices and cultures, the white and the black. According to Gates, this joining of the two distinct discourses produces the uniqueness of African-American literature.

dynamic model The earliest of Sigmund Freud's models of the human psyche; with it, Freud declared that our minds are based in a dichotomy consisting of the *conscious* (the rational) and the *unconscious* (the irrational).

ecocomposition. A term coined by ecocritics in which the principles of ecocriticism are directly applied in a composition classroom. Through journal and/or memoir writing, students develop ecosensitive human relationships. In addition, ecocomposition encourages environmental "life writings" by examining autobiographies through the lens of environmental concerns and by encouraging students themselves to write ecoaware autobiographies.

ecocriticism The most recent school of criticism to appear in literary studies, ecocriticism is best defined by Cheryll Glotfelty in her coauthored text, *The Ecocriticism Reader:* "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment."

economic model Sigmund Freud's later or revised model of the human psyche, which he developed after the dynamic model. In the economic model, Freud introduces two new concepts: the **pleasure principle** and the **reality principle.**

ecofeminism (or eco-feminism) A contemporary approach in feminist studies that assumes that patriarchal societies are relatively new and that society's original condition, known as feminist Eden, was matriarchal. Whereas patriarchal societies, say ecofeminists, are detrimental to women, children, and nature, matriarchal societies protect the environment, natural resources, and animal life while caring for women and children.

ecosphere A term used by ecocritics to highlight humanity's interconnectedness to all the earth's living organisms and the physical environment.

écriture féminine A term used in feminist criticism to refer specifically to "women's writing." Modern feminist critics speculate that a style of writing peculiar to women exists and that this *écriture féminine* is fundamentally different from the way men write and obtain meaning through the writing process.

efferent reading A term used by Louise M. Rosenblatt in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978) to refer to that type of reading "in which the primary concern of the reader is with what he or she will carry away from the reading." We read efferently, for example, when we read solely for information, as we do when we read the directions for heating a can of soup. During this process, we are interested in only newly gained information. Efferent reading is different from **aesthetic reading,** in which the reader "lives through" and experiences the reading process.

ego A term used by Sigmund Freud to designate the rational, logical, waking part of the psyche as differentiated from the **id** and the **superego.**

Electra complex The female version of the **Oedipus complex** as defined by Sigmund Freud. Freud borrows the name from Greek mythology: Electra, the sister of Orestes, aids him in killing

their mother, Clytemnestra, to avenge their father, Agamemnon, who Clytemnestra murdered. According to Freud, all girls must successfully negotiate the Electra complex to make the transition from girlhood to being a normal, mature woman. Like a boy, a young girl is erotically attracted to her mother and recognizes that her father is a rival for her mother's affection. Unconsciously the girl realizes she is already castrated, as is her mother. Because she knows her father possesses that which she desires, a penis, she turns her desires to him and away from her mother. After the seduction of her father fails, she turns back toward her mother and identifies with her, thus successfully negotiating the Electra complex.

eme A linguistic term used by Ferdinand de Saussure to designate the basic units or building blocks of language, such as phonemes, morphemes, words, and so on.

epic theater Developed by the playwright and Marxist critic Bertolt Brecht, the kind of theatrical theory and production that advocates an abandonment of the Aristotelian premise of unity of time, place, and action, including the assumption that the audience should be made to believe that what they are seeing is real. Epic theater seeks to create alienation effects such as interrupting the drama by a direct appeal to the audience via a song or speech to keep the audience constantly aware of the moral and social issues to which they are being exposed in the drama. Brecht believed that dramatists should not blindly accept bourgeois conventionality within the drama and should revolt and seize the modes of production within this genre.

epiphany A sudden understanding or insight, especially concerning a divine being or the essential nature of truth. The term is often used in its Christian sense, the first Epiphany having taken place on January 6 with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the form of the Magi, and thereafter observed as a holy day in the Christian Church. James Joyce is responsible for bringing this term into literary critical usage to mean a sudden, intuitive understanding of a person, situation, or object.

episteme A term borrowed from the French writer, philosopher, and critic Michel Foucault and used by New Historicists to define the unifying principle or pattern that develops in each historical epoch. Through language and thought, each period in history develops its own perceptions about the nature of reality (or what it defines as truth) and sets up its own standards of behavior.

epistemological Of or relating to the branch of philosophy called epistemology, which studies the nature of knowledge, especially its limits and validity.

erasure Coined by the French deconstructionist critic Jacques Derrida to describe the process of believing, if only temporarily and for the sake of investigation, that values and beliefs are stable and are objectively true. By positing the objective existence of such values and beliefs, Derrida declares that he can show through a deconstructive reading the absence of any definitive meaning for these values or beliefs.

eros Another name for the **sexual instinct,** one of two basic human instincts that, according to Freud, are housed in the unconscious.

esoteric work A text meant for private as opposed to public circulation.

essentialism The classical humanist belief that the true essence or identity of a person is composed of finite and fixed properties that make up the essential component of what it means to be human. Essentialists believe that to be human means having an unchangeable human nature, a true and invariable essence.

estrangement A term used by Russian Formalists to show poetic language's ability to make strange the familiar, thereby causing the readers of a text to reexamine the word or image and to experience it anew. See **defamiliarization** and **ostranenie.**

etymologically The adverbial form of etymology, or the process of tracing the historical development of a word, including its various meanings and forms, from the word's earliest recorded occurrence in a language to the present.

exoteric treatise A text meant for general publication.

expressive school Emphasizing the individuality of the artist and the reader's privilege to share in this individuality. Disavowing rhetorical or objective theories of art, expressive critics emphasize the subjective experience of sharing emotions. Wordsworth and other nineteenth-century Romantics are prime examples of this school of thought.

extrinsic analysis The process of examining elements outside the text (e.g., historical events and biographies) to uncover the text's meaning.

fabula A term coined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. According to Shklovsky, all prose narrative is composed of either fabula or **syuzhet.** Fabula is the raw material of the story and can be considered somewhat akin to the author's working outline that contains a story's chronological series of events.

fall phase According to the mythic critic Northrop Frye, all literature comprises one complete story called the **monomyth,** which is composed of four phases. One of these phases is the fall phase, which recognizes humanity's tendency to "fall" from happiness and freedom to disaster and bondage.

false consciousness A term used by Karl Marx to describe how the consciousness of the working class is shaped and controlled by the bourgeoisie. By defining what it means to be an individual and, thereby, prescribing its class consciousness, the bourgeoisie creates a false consciousness for the proletariat and perpetuates the dominant class's social structure.

female phase The name given by the feminist critic Elaine Showalter to the present state, direction, and concerns of contemporary feminist criticism, usually dated from 1970 to the present.

feminine phase The name given by the feminist critic Elaine Showalter to the first historical period of feminist theory and criticism, dating from 1840 to 1880.

feminism An approach to textual analysis having its roots in the Progressive Era in the early decades of the twentieth century. Some of its earliest and major philosophical tenets are articulated by the British feminist Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*, 1919) and the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949). Feminists assert that Western societies are patriarchal, or controlled by men. Either consciously or unconsciously, men have oppressed women, allowing them little or no voice in the political, social, or economic issues of their society. By not giving voice and, therefore, value to women's opinions, responses, and writings, men have suppressed the female, defined what it means to be feminine, and devoiced, devalued, and trivialized what it means to be a woman. Men have made women the "nonsignificant Other."

A goal of feminism is to change this degrading view of women so each woman will realize that she is a valuable person, possessing the same privileges and rights as every man. Women must define themselves and assert their own voices in politics, education, the arts, and all other areas of society. By debunking stereotypical images of women found throughout the literary canon, rediscovering and publishing texts written by females but suppressed by men, rereading the canonized works of male authors from a woman's point of view, and engaging in the discussion of literary theory, women can challenge the concept of male superiority and work toward creating equality between the sexes.

Because feminism is more an approach or mindset than a school of criticism, feminist theory and criticism have been embraced by scholars belonging to a variety of critical schools, such as Marxism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and New Historicism. Some of the leading twentieth-century feminists are Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Hélène Cixous, Sandra Gilbert, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

feminist phase The name given by the feminist critic Elaine Showalter to the second historical period of feminist theory and criticism, dating from 1880 to 1920.

foregrounding A term used by the Russian Formalists that refers to the language of a work of art. Literary language is different from everyday language. Unlike everyday conversation or language, literary language shouts, "Look at me; I am special." For example, when a poet writes, "The cow jumped over the moon," such language stands out and demands contemplation and analysis.

foregrounds The verb form of **foregrounding.**

forestructure The fund of past experiences (memories) that readers bring to the reading process.

form A term used by the Russian Formalists to denote the constituent parts—both linguistic and structural features—of a poem. Such features include the internal mechanics of the work itself, especially its poetic language (see **devices**). Also, *form* is a term used by the New Critics—adherents of New Criticism—to mean the overall effect a text creates. From this perspective, a text's form encompasses the actual structure of the text along with the text's overall effect on the reader. In New Critical theory, all the elements of a text work together to form a single, unified effect known as the text's form.

formalism A term used to designate critics (**formalists**) who rely on a work's form or structure to determine its meaning. The term is often applied to the Russian Formalists and New Critics, who insist that the interpretation of a work of art must evolve from the work's structure, not from extrinsic elements such as the author's life or historical context. For such critics, a work of art is an object in its own right that can be analyzed without referring to any extratextual evidence or sources such as history, politics, or sociology.

formalist Literary theorist and critic who emphasizes structural elements and techniques when interpreting a text. Such critics usually adhere to the principles of **formalism.**

fragmentation A term developed by Marxist critics to describe the fractured and fragmented nature of society caused by the workers' detachment from what they produce and from each other. See **alienation effect.**

Frankfurt school, the Neo-Marxist critics devoted to developing Western Marxist principles. These critics assert that the **superstructure** reflects the economic **base.** They also believe that a text reveals a culture's fragmentation, not its wholeness.

Freudian slips A term used in psychoanalysis to describe accidental slips of the tongue. According to Freud, these "disguised truths" are stored in our unconscious until, inadvertently, they slip into our conscious minds and pop out in statements in our speech.

gay and lesbian studies Beginning in the mid-1980s, this school of criticism borrows and develops the gender concerns of the feminist and gender critics and targets the heterosexual/homosexual binary, emphasizing sexual differences. Gay studies examines sexual differences applicable to the male, and lesbian studies, to the female. Both groups analyze the social structures that have defined gays and lesbians as deviant or abnormal, questioning how such definitions developed throughout history and seeking to know the reasons heterosexuality has been so positively defined but homosexuality has not.

gender studies A term sometimes used synonymously with *feminism;* however, this field of study broadens traditional feminist criticism to include an investigation of not only femaleness but also maleness. To the multivoiced feminist theories, gender studies adds the ever-growing and increasingly diverse concerns of black feminists, the ongoing concerns of French feminism, and the impact of poststructural theories on customary feminist issues.

good critic A term used by New Criticism to characterize the kind of critic who examines a poem's (or any text's) structure by scrutinizing its poetic elements, rooting out and showing its inner tensions, and demonstrating how the poem supports its overall meaning as the writer reconciles these tensions into a unified whole.

grammar The system of rules that governs the production and interpretation of language. **Prescriptive grammar** refers to matters of "correctness," such as not using the word *ain't* or saying "It is I" rather than "It is me." **Descriptive grammar** is the process of describing how actual speakers use their language for communication.

grammatical Of or referring to the rules of grammar that establish relationships among words or groups of words.

grammatical sentence See **sentence.**

grammatology The French deconstructionist Jacque Derrida's name for the science of writing and the investigation of the origin of language. Derrida argues for a redefining of writing, asserting that writing is a precondition for speech and occurs prior to it.

grapheme The symbols of a writing system (e.g., the letters of the alphabet) that represent a **phoneme.**

gynocriticism A term coined by the feminist scholar–critic Elaine Showalter that has become synonymous with the study of women as writers. It provides critics with four models about the nature of women's writing that help answer some of the chief concerns of feminist criticism. Each of Showalter's models are sequential, subsuming and developing the preceding model(s), to encompass the full analytic scope: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural.

gynocritics A term coined by the feminist scholar–critic Elaine Showalter to define the process of constructing "a female framework for analysis of women's literature to develop new models [of interpretation] based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt to male models and theories." See **gynocriticism.**

hailing the subject Coined by the Marxist critic Louis Althusser to describe the process whereby the dominant ideology forms the attitudes of people. See **interpellation.**

hamartia A term used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* to refer to the tragic hero's mistake or error that leads to a downfall. Literally, the word means "missing the mark" (from the Greek *hamartanein*, "to err"). Aristotle explains that the hero of a tragedy will commit an action or exhibit a frailty *(hamartia)* that will lead to a reversal of fortune.

hegemony A term used in Marxist criticism to refer to the system of beliefs, values, and meanings to which most people in a given society subscribe. Marxist critics assert that the dominant culture in a given society is under the control of the bourgeoisie. It is the bourgeoisie who controls and dictates the hegemony of a culture. According to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, a given society's hegemony may be successful but never complete. Rather than one all-encompassing ruling class, there usually exist several interconnected yet somewhat divergent classes, each influencing the superstructure at different times and in different ways. Marxist revolutions, then, can begin within alternative hegemonies rather than direct political action.

heresy of paraphrase A term used by New Critics to suggest that a work of art is not equal to its paraphrase. A poem, for example, is not the same as its paraphrased version because the paraphrased version will miss the poem's uniqueness, with its many connotations and various complexities of thought.

hermeneutical principles The rules governing the interpretation of a text. See **hermeneutics.**

hermeneutics First defined by religious scholars as the art and science of biblical interpretation, this term now refers to any theory and practice of interpretation. (From the Greek *hermeneutike*, meaning the "act of interpretation.")

hermeneutics of recovery The process of investigating how a text was received and evaluated by its contemporary readers.

hermeneutics of suspicion The process of investigating the implied assumptions—political, sexual, religious, linguistic, and so forth—of a text and its author.

heteroglossia Literally interpreted "other or different tongues" from the Russian word *raznorecie*, this term was coined by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin to demonstrate the multiple languages that operate in any given culture. For Bakhtin, all forms of social speech that people use in their daily activities constitute heteroglossia.

holistic approach An approach to literary study that investigates, analyzes, and interprets all elements of the artistic situation—text, author, historical context, and so on—instead of concentrating on one or more specific aspects.

horizon of expectations A term used by reader-oriented critic Hans Robert Jauss to refer to all of a historical period's critical vocabulary and assessments of a particular text. German phenomenologist Wolfgang Iser uses this same term to refer to those expectations each reader

creates concerning what will or may or should happen next in any given text. For Iser, a reader's horizon of expectations will frequently change to fit a text's particular situation. This term is also used by those who adhere to **reception theory.**

Hybridity A term used by the postcolonial theorist and critic Homi K. Bhabha to describe what happens when two cultures commingle. According to Bhabha, the nature and the characteristics of the newly created culture change each of the two cultures in a dynamic, interactive, tension-packed process Bhabha calls hybridity. Bhabha notes that "hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It's a social process. It's not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions."

hybridization A term used by the Russian Formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin for the clashing of two different languages in a single utterance. See **heteroglossia.**

hyperprotected cooperative principle The belief that published works are worthy to be called literature because they have been evaluated and declared literary texts by a group of well-informed people such as scholars, critics, and publishers.

id A term used by Sigmund Freud to designate the irrational, instinctual, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche as differentiated from the **ego** and **superego.**

ideal reader A term devised by the narratologist Gerald Prince to differentiate among the real, virtual, and ideal readers. According to Prince, the ideal reader is one who explicitly and implicitly understands all the nuances, terminology, and structure of a text. See **virtual reader** and **real reader.**

identity theme A term devised by the Freudian psychoanalyst Norman Holland, who argues that, at birth, all of us receive from our mothers a primary identity. Through each of our life's experiences, we personalize this identity, transforming it into our own individualized identity theme, which becomes the lens through which we see the world.

ideological state apparatus A term used by the Marxist critic Louis Althusser as a synonym for **hegemony,** the dominant class's ideology.

ideology A much-debated term in Marxist criticism, which often refers to a culture's collective or social consciousness (as opposed to the material reality on which experience is based)—that is, to the culture's internal awareness of a body of laws or codes governing its politics, law, religion, philosophy, and art to which that culture's bourgeoisie and its superstructure subscribe. For Marx and Engels, a culture's ideology is more frequently than not synonymous with "false consciousness" because it has been defined and established by the bourgeoisie and represents a set of false assumptions or illusions used by the elite to dominate the working classes and to maintain stability. An ideology, then, may be conscious or explicit (in precepts that state and shape a society's philosophy, laws, or acceptable customs), or it may be a somewhat vaguer and implicit understanding of its controlling beliefs (e.g., as in ceremony).

imaginary order According to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, one of three parts of the human psyche; it contains our wishes, fantasies, and images. In this preverbal state (from birth to age six months), Lacan believes humans are joyfully united with their mothers, receiving food, care, and all comforts from them and relying on images as a means of perceiving and interpreting the world. In this psychic stage of development, our image of ourselves is always in flux because we are not able to differentiate where one image stops and another begins.

implied reader A term devised by the German phenomenologist Wolfgang Iser to differentiate between two kinds of readers: the *implied reader* and the **actual reader.** According to Iser, the implied reader is the reader who "embodies all those predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Hence, the implied reader has his or her roots firmly planted in the structure of the text."

impressionistic critics Critics who believe that how we feel and what we personally see in a work of art are what really matter. Capturing what we see from a particular point of view and at

a specific moment in time is what is important, not an objective, lengthy investigation of text or an aesthetic object. The term *impressionism* was first used by nineteenth-century French painters such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir and referred to the impressions an object makes on the artist rather than the actual representation of an objective picture of that object.

inflection Used in linguistics to describe the various forms a word undergoes to mark changes in elements such as tense, number, gender, and mood. For example, the *-ed* in the word *worked* signals the past tense, and the *-s* in the word *dogs* signals the plural form of that word.

in medias res From the Latin, meaning "in the middle of things," this term refers to a story or narrative such as *The Iliad* that begins in the middle rather than at its chronological starting point in time.

intentional fallacy A term used by New Critics to refer to what they believe is the erroneous assumption that the interpretation of a literary work can be equated to the author's stated or implied intentions or private meanings. Claiming such external information to be irrelevant in ascertaining a text's meaning, New Critics base interpretation on the text itself. The term was first used by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946).

interpellation Also known as "hailing the subject," this term was coined by the Marxist critic Louis Althusser to refer to the process whereby the dominant **hegemony,** or prevailing ideology, forms the attitudes of people in society.

interpretive community A term coined by the reader-oriented critic Stanley Fish to designate a group of readers who share the same interpretive strategies.

intertextuality A term denoting that any given text's meaning or interpretation is related or interrelated to the meaning of all other texts. Hence, no text can be interpreted in isolation, and all texts are intertextual.

irony The use of words whereby a writer or speaker suggests the opposite of what is actually stated. According to New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, and I. A. Richards, irony is the key to the "dramatic structure" of poetry and unlocks the door to show how meaning is contained in and evolves from a poem's structure. New Critics believe a poem's meaning is structurally determined, created by the tension between the denotative meaning of a poem's words and their connotations, which are, in turn, determined by the context of that particular poem. Irony, then, is "an equilibrium of [these] opposing attitudes and evaluations," which ultimately determines the poem's meaning and is the master **trope** in New Criticism.

jouissance A term used by the psychoanalytic critic Jacques Lacan to refer to a brief moment of joy, terror, or desire that somehow arises from deep within the unconscious psyche and reminds us of a time of perfect wholeness when we were incapable of differentiating among images from the **real order.** See **imaginary order** and **symbolic order.**

language Defined by the linguist Thomas Pyles as "a systematized combination of sounds that have meaning for all people in a given cultural community." Broadly speaking, *language* may be considered any system of signs or codes that convey meaning, such as road signs, the language of fashion (wearing different clothes in different social settings), or even the language of eating.

langue The linguistic term used by Ferdinand de Saussure to refer to the rules that comprise a language or the structure of the language that is mastered and shared by all its speakers. By the age of five or six, children have mastered their language's langue, although they have not mastered the exceptions. For example, a six-year-old may say, "I drinked a glass of milk" and "I climbed a tree." Having mastered his or her langue, what the child has learned is that most English verbs form their past tense by adding *-d* or *-ed*. What the child has not mastered is the many exceptions to this rule, in this case, the past tense of the irregular verb *to drink*.

latent content A term used by Sigmund Freud in psychoanalytic dream interpretation. It is Freud's view that the ego (the rational part of the psyche) hides the true wish or *latent content* of our dreams, thereby allowing the dreamer to remember a somewhat changed and often radically different dream than the one that actually occurred.

écriture féminine See *écriture féminine*.

lexical Used in linguistics to refer to the base or root meaning of a word. For example, the word *love* is the base word in the following word model: *loves, loved, loving*.

lesbianization of language A term coined by the contemporary feminist critic Monique Wittig to challenge patriarchal assumptions embedded in the structure of language itself by experimenting with and hoping to eliminate pronouns and nouns that reflect gender.

lexicon The word stock or the entire vocabulary of a language.

libido A term used by Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis that has become synonymous with sexual drive. Freud used this designation to refer to the emotional energy that springs from primitive biological urges and is usually directed toward some goal.

linear A term used to refer to something that has a definite beginning, middle, and end. A philosophy of life or one's worldview, for example, may be considered linear.

linguistics The science of language and human speech, including the study of sounds, inflections, structure, and modification of language.

linguistic model A term coined by the feminist critic Elaine Showalter to describe one of the four ways for constructing a female framework for analyzing literature. Showalter's overall model is known as **gynocriticism.** The linguistic model particularly addresses the need for a female discourse, investigating the differences between how men and women use language. According to Showalter, women create and write in a language peculiar to their gender.

linguistic sign A term used in linguistics in reference to words. As used by Ferdinand de Saussure, a *sign* is composed of two parts: the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and the signified (the concept it represents). See **sign.**

literacy experience An event that occurs when a reader and print interact.

literariness A term used by the Russian Formalists to refer to the language used in a work of art. Such language calls attention to itself as language, thus **foregrounding** itself.

literacy experience A term used by the reader-oriented critic Louise Rosenblatt to explain what happens when a reader interacts with print. According to Rosenblatt, when a literacy experience or event occurs, the reader and the text transact, effectively shaping each other.

literary competence An internalized set of rules that govern a reader's interpretation of a text. The critic Jonathan Culler states that all readers possess literary competence, or the ability to make sense of a text.

literary critic One who interprets literature. This term often implies one who is an expert at interpreting a text. Anyone, however, who reads and offers an interpretation of a text is a practicing literary critic.

literary criticism According to the nineteenth-century English critic and writer Matthew Arnold, "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." Literary criticism is, therefore, a disciplined activity that attempts to study, analyze, interpret, and evaluate works of art.

literary theory A set of principles or assumptions on which our interpretation of a text is based. Our personal literary theory is our conscious or unconscious development of a mind-set—including values, aesthetic sense, and morals—concerning our expectations when reading any type of literature. By articulating this framework and piecing together the various elements of our practical criticism into a coherent, unified body of knowledge, we create a literary theory.

literature Derived from the Latin word *littera*, meaning "letter," the word *literature* refers primarily to the written word, especially prose or verse.

logocentrism A term used by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida that refers to Western culture's proclivity for desiring absolute truths, or what Derrida calls "centers." Logocentrism is the belief that an ultimate reality or center of truth can serve as the basis for all our thoughts and actions.

manifest content A term used by Sigmund Freud in psychoanalytic dream interpretation. Freud argues that the ego or the rational part of the psyche hides the true wish or **latent content** of our dreams and allows the dreamer to remember a somewhat changed and often radically different dream than what actually occurred. This changed dream is the manifest content that the dreamer remembers and tells his or her dream analyst.

market A term used by Marxist critics to define how successfully a commodity sells.

Marxism An approach to literary analysis founded on principles articulated by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Unlike other schools of criticism, Marxism is not primarily a literary theory but can be used to interpret a text. It is first a set of social, economic, and political ideas that its followers believe will enable them to interpret and change their world. Ultimate reality, they declare, is material, not spiritual. What we know beyond any doubt is that human beings exist and live in social groups. To understand ourselves and our world, we must first acknowledge the interrelatedness of all our actions within society. Once understood properly, we will note that our cultural and our social circumstances determine who we are. What we believe, what we value, and how we think are a direct result of our society, and that society, says Marxism, is built on a series of ongoing conflicts between the "haves" and the "have nots."

In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Engels and Marx declare that the "haves" (the capitalists or the *bourgeoisie*) have successfully enslaved the "have nots" (the working class or the *proletariat*) through economic policies and control of the production of goods. In addition, the bourgeoisie have established society's beliefs, values, and art. Now the proletariat must revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of its economic and political power and place the ownership of all property in the hands of the government, which will fairly distribute the people's wealth.

Because the bourgeoisie controls a society's art and its literature, Marxist critics believe they must move beyond the usual analysis of literary devices, themes, and style and concentrate on determining an author's worldview, the historical context of the work, and the sociological concerns of the text to see if such an analysis of the author's ideology advances either the bourgeoisie's or the proletariat's concerns.

Some of the leading Marxist critics of the twentieth century are Georg Lukács, Raymond Williams, Walter Benjamin, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton.

materialist feminisms One of four major categories of contemporary feminism that emphasizes goods and material reality. Includes critics such as Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, and Catherine Belsey.

metalanguage A language (words) used to describe or talk about language.

metaphor A figure of speech that directly compares two unlike objects (without using *like* or *as*), in which the qualities of one object are ascribed to the other. For example, in the sentence, "My love is a rose," the qualities of the rose are directly ascribed to "my love."

metaphysics A term derived from Aristotle's treatise *Metaphysica* (350 BCE), denoting a division of philosophy that studies the nature of *Being*. The term implies a reality beyond what we can see and experience with our five senses.

metaphysics of presence A term coined by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida to encompass ideas such as **logocentrism, phonocentrism,** the operation of **binary oppositions,** and other notions held in Western thought and culture about the nature of language and metaphysics. Derrida's objectives are to demonstrate the shaky foundations on which such beliefs have been established and then to thereby "deconstruct" or take apart what Western culture values and to show how such a deconstructive process will lead to new and exciting interpretations of a text.

metatheory An overarching or all-inclusive literary theory—that is, a theory of all theories—that can encompass all possible interpretations of a text suggested by its readers.

mimesis From the Greek, meaning "imitation." Often refers to Aristotle's theory of imitation. See **mimetic theory.**

mimetic Adjectival form for **mimetic theory.**

mimetic theory A term used in literary criticism to refer to art as an imitation or copy of various elements of the universe. In linguistics the mimetic theory of language asserts that words are symbols for things in the world—that is, each word has its own referent, or the object, concept, or idea that is represented or symbolized by that word. Accordingly, a word equals its **referent.**

minimal pair Two words that differ by one significant phonological sound. For example, *pit* and *bit* differ in only their first phonemes or significant first sounds.

mirror stage A term coined by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to describe what happens during the development of the human psyche sometime between six and eighteen months of age. According to Lacan, the human psyche consists of three parts or orders: the **imaginary,** the **symbolic,** and the **real.** During the latter part of development in the first order, the imaginary, Lacan asserts that we literally see ourselves in a mirror, and/or we may metaphorically see ourselves in our mother's image. Seeing this mirror image permits us to perceive images that have discrete boundaries, thereby allowing us to become aware of ourselves as independent beings who are separate from our mothers.

misogyny A term used in feminist criticism to refer to a hatred or distrust of women.

misspeaks According to the deconstructionist critic Jacques Derrida, at some point in all texts, the author loses control of language and says what was supposedly not meant to be said, thus "misspeaking." Such slips of the tongue usually occur in questions, figurative language, and strong declarations. By examining these slips and the **binary operations** that govern them, Derrida believes he is able to demonstrate the **undecidability** of a text's meaning.

modernism A literary movement in both England and the United States considered by some to have begun with the influence of the French symbolist poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Paul Valéry at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some assert that this period begins in 1914, with the start of World War I, and ends right after World War II; still others mark its ending around 1965.

However its span is dated, modernism is marked, as T. S. Eliot notes, by an impersonal view of humanity and produced a literature that is distinctly antiromantic and antiexpressionistic. In its ardent search for meaning through form, modernism typically uses hard, dry language that asserts that feelings and emotions are elicited by the text itself through the textual arrangement of its images. By rejecting a merely personal reading of a work, modernism declares that a text's meaning can be found by examining its structure, a technique that is especially true for poetry. The modernist period provides literary criticism with a formal explanation for how a poem or any other work of literature achieves or produces meaning through its form.

modernity A term used synonymously with the Enlightenment or Age of Reason (eighteenth century) by many critics who hold to two basic premises: a belief that reason is humankind's best guide to life and that science can lead humanity to a new "promised land."

monomyth A term used in the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye, who states that all literature comprises one complete and whole story called the monomyth. This monomyth can best be diagrammed as a circle containing four separate phases, with each phase corresponding to a season of the year and to peculiar cycles of human experiences. The phases are **romance** (the summer story of total happiness and wish fulfillment), **antiromance** (the winter story of bondage, imprisonment, frustration, and fear), **comedy** (the spring story that tells of our rise from frustration to freedom and happiness), and **tragedy** (the fall story, narrating our fall from happiness to disaster). According to Frye, all stories fall somewhere within these categories.

morpheme Used in linguistics to describe the smallest part of a word that has lexical or grammatical significance. For example, whereas the word *dog* contains one morpheme, {dog}, the word *dogs* contains two morphemes, {dog} and {-s}.

morphology Used in linguistics to describe the process of word formation, such as compound words and inflections.

mythemes A term coined by the structuralist critic Claude Lévi-Strauss that refers to the many recurrent themes running through humankind's countless myths. These basic structures, he maintains, are similar to the individual sounds of language, the primary building blocks of language itself. Like these sounds, mythemes find meaning in and through their relationships within the mythic structure, not in their own individuality. The meaning of any individual myth depends on the interaction and order of the mythemes found within the story.

mythic criticism Criticism that examines archetypes and archetypal patterns to explain the structure and significance of texts. This type of criticism was especially emphasized by Carl Jung and Northrop Frye. See **archetypal criticism.**

narratee A term used by the structuralist and narratologist Gerald Prince to refer to the person to whom the narrator of a text is speaking. It is Prince's view that the narratee is not the actual person reading the text but, in fact, is produced by the narrative itself.

narrateme A term synonymous with **narrative function.**

narrative functions According to the Russian narratologist Vladimir Propp, all folk or fairy tales are composed of a sequence of thirty-one fixed elements, or narrative functions, that occur in the same order in all fairy tales. Each function identifies predictable patterns that central characters will enact to further the plot of the story.

narratologist A particular kind of structuralist who uses the principles of **narratology** to interpret texts.

narratology A form of structuralism espoused by Gerald Prince, Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette that illustrates how a story's meaning develops from its overall structure (its *langue*) rather than from each individual story's isolated theme. To ascertain a text's meaning, narratologists emphasize grammatical elements such as verb tenses and the relationships and configurations of figures of speech within the story.

naturalism A term that refers to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century view of life that emphasizes the importance of scientific thought and determinism in literary study. A naturalistic critic views humans as animals who respond in deterministic ways to their environments and internal drives.

neoplatonic A term used to describe any philosophical system that closely resembles that established by Plato, thus the prefix *neo*, meaning "new." The term originated in the third century in Alexandria in a philosophical system that mixed Asian, Platonic, and Christian beliefs.

neurosis A nervous disorder that has no known bodily or physical cause that can lead to a variety of physical and psychological abnormalities.

New Criticism A loosely structured school of criticism that dominated American literary criticism from the early 1930s to the 1960s. Named after John Crowe Ransom's 1941 book *The New Criticism,* the theory is based on the view that a work of art or a text is a concrete object that can, like any other concrete object, be analyzed to discover its meaning independent of its author's intention or the emotional state or values of either its author or reader. For **New Critics,** a poem's meaning must reside within its own structure (in New Criticism, the word *poem* refers to any text, not only a poem). By giving a poem a **close reading,** the New Critics believe they can determine a text's correct meaning.

Often referred to as "the text and text alone" approach to literary analysis, New Criticism has found many practitioners, such as John Crowe Ransom, René Wellek, W. K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren. With the publication of Brooks and Warren's 1938 college text *Understanding Poetry,* New Criticism became the dominant approach to textual analysis until the 1960s.

New Critics Critics who use the doctrines, assumptions, and methodology of **New Criticism** in their literary analysis.

New Historicism The American branch of Cultural Poetics. Appearing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, New Historicism is one of the most recent approaches to textual analysis. Led by such

scholars as Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose. New Historicism challenges the "old historicism" founded in nineteenth-century thought, which declares that history serves as a background to literature; history, as written, is an accurate view of what really occurred, and historians can articulate a unified and internally consistent worldview of any people, country, or era.

New Historicism declares that all history is subjective; historians can never provide us with the truth or give us a totally accurate picture of past events or the worldview of a people. Similar to language, history is but one of many **discourses**, or ways of viewing the world. By viewing history as one of several important discourses that directly affect the interpretation of a text, New Historicists assert that their approach provides its followers with a practice of literary analysis that highlights the interrelatedness of all human activities, admits its own prejudices, and gives a more complete understanding of a text than do the old historicism and other interpretive approaches.

Adherents to the multiple approaches to textual analysis inherent in New Historicism now prefer to call this approach **Cultural Poetics**, emphasizing and noting the multiple factors that help determine a text's meaning. Its British counterpart is known as **cultural materialism.**

New Humanists A school of twentieth-century American literary critics who value the moral qualities of art. Declaring that human experience is basically ethical, these critics demand that literary analysis should be based on the moral values exhibited in a text.

noematic The complexities of the objective world—its cultural, social, religious, and political realities—as detailed by an individual or class of writers.

noetic A term that refers to the subjective qualities of authors as exhibited in their writings.

nonpolyphonic novels A term coined by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin to refer to those novels in which their authors know the ending of the novel when they first begin to write the novel itself. In such novels, the writer knows all the characters' actions and choices along with the work's entire structure. In addition, the author's understanding of truth is exhibited throughout the text. See **polyphonic novels.**

objective correlative A term coined by T. S. Eliot that refers to a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, or reactions that can serve to awaken in the reader the emotional response that the author desires without being a direct statement of that emotion.

objective theory of art A term introduced by M. H. Abrams that declares that the literary work itself is an object. Every work of art is a public text that can be understood by applying the standards of public discourse, not the private experience, intentions, and vocabulary of its author or a particular audience.

objet petit a A term used by Jacques Lacan to refer to those images that we discover in our **mirror stage** of psychic development. These images are separate from ourselves, such as bodily wastes, our mother's voice and breasts, and our own speech sounds, and they become for us symbols of lack that will plague us our entire lives.

Oedipus complex According to Sigmund Freud's theory of child development, all children between the ages of three and six develop sexual or libidinal feelings toward the parent of the opposite sex and hostile feelings toward the parent of the same sex. In boys this is known as the *Oedipus complex*, named after the legendary Theban Oedipus, who murdered his father and married his mother. In girls this period is called the **Electra complex,** named after the legendary Electra, who avenged her father's death by killing her mother and her mother's lover.

One, The The term used by Plato to describe his concept of spiritual reality. Plato says The One possesses ontological status, existing whether any mind posits its existence or reflects its attributes. It is composed of three elements: absolute beauty, truth, and goodness. The term was more clearly defined several hundred years later by Plotinus.

ontological Relating to or based on being or existence. The term is used by New Critics in recognition of their belief that a work of art is a concrete entity (one that really exists) and can be analyzed and dissected like any other object to ascertain its meaning.

ontological critic A critic who uses the assumptions of New Criticism and believes that a text is a concrete entity—like a painting, vase, or door lock—that can be analyzed to ascertain its meaning.

oral phase The first stage of child development as postulated by Sigmund Freud. In this stage, children suck at their mothers' breasts to be fed, but simultaneously the child's sexuality or libido is activated. Our mouths become erotogenic zones that will later cause us to enjoy sucking our thumbs and, still later, kissing.

organic unity A term describing the concept that a text's structure is similar to a living plant, with all its parts supporting each other and living in a complex interrelationship. First advanced by the nineteenth-century poet-critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the concept of the organic unity of a work of art declares that each part of a text reflects and helps support the text's central idea, or as the New Critics would call it, the work's chief **paradox.** No part of a text is superfluous, but similar to a living organism, each part serves to enhance the whole. The whole is, therefore, greater than the sum of its parts.

Orientalism A term introduced to postcolonial theory by Edward Said that refers to the creation of non-European stereotypes that suggest "Orientals," or Asians, are indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented.

ostranenie A term used by Russian Formalists that translates as "making strange." Through syntax, rhyme, and other literary devices, poetic diction or language has the capacity to "make strange" familiar words, thereby causing readers to reexamine and experience afresh a word, image, or symbol. See **defamiliarization.**

Other A term used in feminist criticism (the "not-male" and thus unimportant) and postcolonialism (the colonized) to mean "different from" and unimportant, that which is dominated.

paradox A term used by the New Critics (especially Cleanth Brooks) to help explain the nature and essence of poetry. According to Brooks, scientific language must be precise and exact. On the other hand, poetry's chief characteristic is its many rich connotations, not the scientific denotations of words. The meaning of a poem is, therefore, built on paradox, a juxtaposition of connotations and meanings that all support the poem's central idea. Language, assert the New Critics, is complex and can sustain multiple meanings. According to Brooks, "the language of poetry is the language of paradox."

parapraxes A term coined by Sigmund Freud for slips of tongue, failures of memory, acts of misplacing an object, and other so-called mistakes we make, all of which can be directly traced to our unconscious desires, wishes, or intentions.

parole A linguistic term used by Ferdinand de Saussure and others to refer to an individual's actual speech utterances, as opposed to langue, the rules that comprise a language. An individual can generate countless examples of parole, but all are governed by the language's structure, its langue. For Saussure and other linguists, the proper study of linguistics is the system—the **langue**—not parole.

patriarchal A term used by feminist critics and others to describe a society or culture dominated by men; the adjective form of **patriarchy.**

patriarchy A societal or social organization in which men hold a disproportionate amount of power. In such a society, men define what it means to be human, including what it means to be female.

penis envy According to Sigmund Freud, the unfulfilled desire all women have for a penis; this desire causes them to possess a sense of lack throughout their lives. See **Electra complex.**

personal conscious A term used in psychoanalytic criticism to refer to the part of the human psyche that directly perceives and interacts with the external world. It is sometimes referred to as the *waking state* because the personal conscious is the image or thought of which we are aware at any given moment.

personal unconscious A term brought into literary criticism via the psychology of Carl Jung. According to Jung, the personal unconscious exists directly below the surface of the conscious and contains elements of private affairs that occur daily in each of our lives. Therefore, the personal unconscious is peculiar to one individual and not shared with any other.

personification A figure of speech that attributes human qualities to animals, ideas, or inanimate objects.

phallic stage The last stage of child development as theorized by Sigmund Freud. In this stage the child's sexual desire or libido is directed toward the genitals.

phallic symbol A term used in psychoanalytic criticism to describe the male's symbol of power as represented by any penislike image whose length exceeds its diameter, such as a tower, a sword, a knife, or a pen.

phallocentric A term used to describe any form of criticism, philosophy, or theory dominated by men and, thus, governed by a male way of thinking.

phallocentrism The belief that the **phallus** is the source of power in culture and literature; usually accompanied by male-centered, male-dominant patriarchal assumptions.

phallus A symbol or representation of the penis. In much psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Jacques Lacan's ideas), the phallus becomes a **transcendental signified** and the ultimate symbol of power. Although neither males nor females can ever possess the phallus and, therefore, can never be complete or whole, males do have a penis and so have a slight claim to such power.

phenomenology Founded by Edmund Husserl, a modern philosophical tendency that emphasizes the perceiver. Objects exist and achieve meaning if and only if we register them on our consciousness. Phenomenological critics are concerned with the ways that our consciousness perceives works of art.

philologist The name given to a linguist before the mid-twentieth century. A philologist is one who describes, compares, and analyzes the languages of the world to discover their similarities and relationships.

philology The science of linguistics before the mid-twentieth century; in current usage, the term refers to historical and comparative **linguistics.** Typically, whereas philology approached the study of language diachronically, present-day linguistics uses both the **diachronic** and **synchronic** approaches.

phoneme A linguistic term for the smallest distinct and significant sounds that comprise a language. Phonemes are the primary building blocks of language. American English, for example, contains approximately forty-five phonemes, such as /p/, /b/, and /k/.

phonetically The adverbial form of **phonetics.**

phonetics The study of how sounds are classified, described, and transcribed within a particular language.

phonocentrism A term coined by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida that asserts that Western culture *privileges* or prefers speech over writing. See **privileged.**

phonologically The adverbial form of **phonology.**

phonology The study of the various sound changes in a word or a particular language, often including the study of **phonetics.**

pleasure principle Introduced by Sigmund Freud in his economic model of the human psyche and defined as that part of the human psyche that craves only pleasures and desires instantaneous satisfaction of instinctual drives. It ignores moral and sexual boundaries established by society.

poem A term used by Louise M. Rosenblatt that refers to the creation of a new interpretation each time a reader transacts with a text, whether it is a first reading or any of countless rereadings of the same text. The interpretation becomes the poem, the new creation. New Critics generically also use this term to refer to any literary work.

Poetics Written by Aristotle, the earliest known work containing a definition of **literature**, particularly the genre of **tragedy.**

poetics A term used by the Russian Formalists to mean an analysis of a literary work's constituent parts, including all its linguistic and structural features. See **form.**

poetikes The Greek word meaning "things that are made or crafted." In critical theory, this word refers to Aristotle's text *Poetics*, which contains the components or "crafted parts" of a tragedy.

political unconscious A term coined by the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson. Borrowing Freud's idea of a repressed unconscious, Jameson posits the existence of a political unconscious, or repressed conditions of exploitation and oppression. The function of literary analysis, Jameson declares, is to uncover the political unconscious present in a text.

polyphonic novel A term coined by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin to describe those novels for which their authors had no prescribed outcome or overall structural outline before writing the texts. The "truth" that the novel expresses is an active creation in the consciousness of the author, the reader, and the characters interacting as equal participants. For Bakhtin, the truth or worth of a polyphonic novel requires a plurality of consciousnesses; it is not solely the working out of the author's worldview. See **nonpolyphonic novel.**

postcolonial criticism Criticism that investigates ways that texts bear traces of colonialism's ideology and interpret such texts as challenging or promoting the colonizer's purposes and hegemony. Those who engage in this type of criticism analyze canonical texts from colonizing countries.

postcolonial feminism A type of feminist criticism that embraces the theories and practices of **postcolonialism.** Postcolonial feminism rejects the phallocentric, patriarchal system established by white males and recognizes that it is engaged in a political and social struggle against male dominance. Postcolonial feminists liken themselves to colonized subjects who are defined by the "male gaze" and are thus reduced to stereotypes and subjected to the long-lasting social and economic effects of colonialism. These critics reject the term *woman*, believing that such usage defines females by only their sex.

postcolonialism or **post-colonialism** One of the most recent approaches to literary analysis to appear on the literary scene. Postcolonialism concerns itself with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and South America, which were once dominated by but remained outside of the white, European males' cultural, political, and philosophical tradition. Postcolonialism usually excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints.

Often referred to as "third-world literature" by Marxist critics—a term many other critics think pejorative—postcolonialism investigates what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accompanying ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other. Postcolonial theorists include Fredric Jameson, Georg Gugelberger, Edward W. Said, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, Frantz Fanon, Ian Adam, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and others.

postcolonial theory A strain of **postcolonial criticism** that moves beyond the bounds of literary studies and investigates social, political, and economic concerns of the colonized and the colonizer.

postist critics Critics who "come after" structuralism, such as *post*modernists, *post*structuralists, and *post*colonialists.

postmodern feminisms One of four categories of contemporary feminist theory dating from 1990 to the present; includes theorists and critics such as Jane Gallop, Judith Butler, Uma Narayan, and Mary Daly.

postmodernism A term often used synonymously with deconstruction and poststructuralism. First used in literary circles in the 1930s, the term gained in popularity during the late 1960s

and 1970s. Presently it connotes a group of philosophers, literary critics, and contemporary scholars that denies the existence of objective reality. For these thinkers, reality is a human construct shaped by each individual's dominant social group.

poststructuralism A term applied to a variety of literary theories and practical criticisms developed after structuralism. Dating from the late 1960s, poststructuralism is often used synonymously with *deconstruction*, although *poststructuralism* is much broader and includes such critical schools of thought as feminism, psychoanalysis (especially the ideas of Jacques Lacan), Marxism or any of its revisionist forms, New Historicism, and others.

Theoretically speaking, structuralism posits the objective reality of the text—that is, structuralists believe that one can examine a text using a standard and objective methodology and arrive at a definitive interpretation. Poststructuralists, on the other hand, often assert the **undecidability** of a text's meaning and declare that a text may not in and of itself have any objective reality. Poststructuralists also question the long-held assumptions of the processes involved in both reading and writing and of the metaphysics of language.

poststructuralist feminisms One of four terms used to categorize contemporary feminist critics who use psychoanalytic, deconstruction, postcolonial, and other methodologies, such as Luce Irigaray, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Monique Wittig.

practical critic Critic who applies the theories and tenets of theoretical criticism to a particular work of art. Practical critics often define standards of taste and explain, evaluate, or justify a particular text.

practical criticism See **applied criticism.**

preconscious A term used by Sigmund Freud in his typographical model of the human psyche to refer to the part of the psyche that is the storehouse of memories and which the conscious part of the mind allows to be brought to consciousness without disguise in some other form. These memories are manageable in the consciousness without "masking."

prescriptive grammar Rules sanctioned or authorized by grammarians who believe educated people should speak and write in the correct way (i.e., the correct way specifically defined by these grammarians).

private symbol See **symbol.**

privileged A term introduced into literary criticism by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida. According to Derrida, Western society bases its values and metaphysical assumptions on opposites, such as good/bad, light/dark, and true/false. In each of these pairs, Derrida asserts, Western culture values or *privileges* the first element and devalues or *unprivileges* the second.

production theory A term developed by the Marxist critic Louis Althusser that rejects the assumption of **reflection theory** that the **superstructure** must directly reflect the base. Althusser asserts that literature should not be strictly relegated to the superstructure; furthermore, he believes that the superstructure can and does influence the base.

proletariat A term used by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to refer to the working class of society. According to Marxist theory, the **bourgeoisie** (or upper class) oppresses and enslaves the proletariat by controlling the economic policies and the production of goods. The bourgeoisie, not the proletariat, defines and articulates a society's ideology.

prosody The mechanical or structural elements that comprise poetry, such as rhythm, meter, rhyme, stanza, diction, alliteration, and so forth. Used synonymously with *versification*.

psychoanalysis A method first used by Sigmund Freud in treating emotional and psychological disorders. During this type of therapy, the psychoanalyst has the patient talk freely about his or her childhood experiences and dreams.

psychoanalytic criticism The application of the methods of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis to interpreting works of literature. Because this approach to literary analysis attempts to explain the hows and whys of human actions without developing an aesthetic theory, a variety

of critical approaches such as Marxism, feminism, and New Historicism use psychoanalytic methods in their interpretations without violating their own theoretical assumptions.

Central to psychoanalytic criticism is Freud's assumption that all artists are neurotic. Unlike other neurotics, the artist escapes many of the outward manifestations and results of **neurosis** by finding in the act of creating art a pathway back to saneness and wholeness.

Freud believes that a literary text is really an artist's dream or fantasy. A text, then, can be analyzed like a dream. Freud assumes that the dream is a disguised wish. Just as if he were counseling a patient and trying to uncover the meaning of the disguised wish as it evidences itself in a dream, Freud believes we must apply the principles and methodology of psychoanalysis to a text to uncover its real meaning.

Although psychoanalytic criticism was founded by Freud, other critics, such as Carl Jung, Northrop Frye, and Jacques Lacan, have revised and expanded Freud's theories and developed their own methodologies for literary analysis.

psychoanalytic model One of four approaches to feminist criticism devised by Elaine Showalter under the umbrella name **gynocriticism** to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature. This model analyzes the female psyche and demonstrates how such an analysis affects the writing process, emphasizing the flux and fluidity of female writing as opposed to male writing's rigidity and structure.

psychobiography A method of interpreting texts that uses biographical data of an author gained through biographies, personal letters, lectures, and other sources to construct the author's personality, with all its idiosyncrasies, internal and external conflicts, and neuroses.

public symbol See **symbol.**

queer theory One of the most recent schools of literary criticism (1991–present), it questions the terms we use to describe ourselves such as *heterosexual* or *homosexual*. Such words, claims queer theory, are socially constructed and do not define who we are. Disavowing **essentialism** and embracing **social constructivism,** queer theory assumes that our personal identities are unstable and in constant flux. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, one of queer theory's leading theorists, declares, "All people are different." What it means to be male or female is always in flux. Queer theory challenges the assumptions of sexual identity, gender, and sexual difference, maintaining that our identities are connected to what we do and who we are, not to our supposed essence. Our identities are not the cause of our performances. Who we are is performative; that is, what we ourselves declare ourselves to be.

race Used in postcolonial theory to refer to a class of people based on physical and cultural distinctions.

reader-oriented criticism Rising to prominence in literary analysis in the early 1970s, reader-oriented criticism asserts that the reader is active, not passive, during the reading process. Both the reader and the text transact and share a transactional experience: The text acts as a stimulus for eliciting various experiences, thoughts, and ideas of the reader, those found in both real life and reading experiences. Simultaneously, the text shapes the reader's experiences, selecting, limiting, and ordering the ideas that best conform to the text. The resulting interpretation is a new creation called a *poem*. For reader-oriented critics, the reader + the text = the poem, the poem being another name for the text's interpretation or meaning.

reader-oriented critics These critics ask a variety of theoretical questions, such as, What is a text? Who is the reader? Does the reader or the text or some combination of both determine the text's interpretation? What part does the author play in a work's interpretation? and perhaps most important, What is the reading process?

Composed of a diverse group of critics that emphasizes different elements of the reading process, reader-oriented critics include Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Wolfgang Iser, Louise Rosenblatt, Norman Holland, and David Bleich. See **poem.**

real order According to Jacques Lacan, the third stage of psychic development, which consists of the physical world, including the material universe and everything in it. It also

symbolizes everything a person is not. Objects within the real order continually function as symbols of primordial lack, leading to psychic fragmentation.

real reader A term devised by the narratologist Gerald Prince to differentiate among the three kinds of readers—real, virtual, and ideal—to whom the narrator is speaking, the **narratee.** According to Prince, the real reader is the person actually reading the book. See **virtual reader** and **ideal reader.**

reality principle Introduced by Sigmund Freud in his economic model of the human psyche. Freud defines the reality principle as that part of the human psyche that holds the pleasure principle in check. The reality principle recognizes the need for societal standards and regulations on a person's desire for pleasure. See **pleasure principle.**

reception aesthetics Another term for **affective stylistics.**

reception theory A term used by reader-oriented critics to discuss how their theoretical assumptions are applied to textual analysis. A text's meaning, they argue, must be derived both from the present reader's personal response and from a critical examination of the history of the reception of the text through time, including contemporary critics of the author of the text in addition to critics living at the present moment.

referent In linguistics, the entity—object, state of affairs, and so forth—in the external world that is represented or symbolized by a word or term. For example, the referent for the word *desk* is the object *desk.*

reflection theory One of the earliest theories developed by Marxist critics to explain the relationship between a society's base and its superstructure. A position held by Karl Marx early in his career, this theory asserts that the base or economic structure of society directly affects and determines a society's values; social, political, educational, and legal institutions; art; and beliefs—or, taken collectively, what Marx calls a society's **superstructure.** Simply put, the superstructure reflects or mirrors the **base.** Although a few Marxist critics still hold to this position, most now assert that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is much more complex than originally believed. The term **vulgar Marxism** is used to describe the form of Marxism that still holds to the reflection theory.

reflectionism See **reflection theory.**

relativism The belief held by some literary critics that a text has an infinite number of valid interpretations.

relativistic critic Critic who uses various and even contradictory theories in critiquing a work of art.

rhetoric Often defined as the art of speaking and writing effectively. Founded in Greece by Corax of Syracuse in the fifth century BCE, rhetoric set forth the principles and rules of composition for speech. Today the term is used by such critics as Kenneth Burke, Northrop Frye, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida and refers to patterns of structure found within texts. It has become the basis for much modern criticism.

rhetorical criticism A form of criticism that emphasizes the techniques and devices writers use to manipulate readers to interpret the writers' works in preconceived ways, emphasizing the art and techniques of persuasion.

romance phase One of four phases used by Northrop Frye, a mythic critic, to explain the one complete or whole story of literature, the **monomyth.** In the monomyth the romance phase is the "summer" story when all our wishes are fulfilled and we achieve total happiness.

Romanticism A literary movement that dates to the publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. As a reaction against the eighteenth-century Age of Reason, Romanticism asserts that the world is similar to a living plant, ever growing, becoming, and aspiring. Denying reason as the sole path to truth, Romanticists declare that intuition can lead them to an understanding of themselves and their world. Individual concerns, the emotions, and the imagination are to be valued. As an approach to a

text, Romanticism concerns itself with the artist's feelings and attitudes exhibited within the work of art.

Russian Formalism A school of criticism that flourished in the former Soviet Union from 1914 until its banishment by the Soviet government in 1930. Composed of two separate groups of scholars, writers, and theorists—the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language—the Russian Formalists declared the autonomy of literature and poetic language. The proper study of literature, they asserted, was literature, not psychology, biography, sociology, politics, or history. To study literature is to study **poetics**, the actual form and constituent parts of a work of literature, a text's internal devices.

Using the principles of science, the Russian Formalists believed that to study a literary work is to study its **literariness**, or the language used in the text. Unlike everyday speech, literary language **foregrounds** itself, shouting, "Look at me; I am special." Through structure, imagery, syntax, and a host of other literary devices, literary language has the capacity to make strange ordinary words, putting them in a new light, a process called **defamiliarization**. Such **estrangement** causes readers to slow down their perception of the word or image and experience afresh that word or image.

Because the Russian Formalists were not willing to view literature through the Stalinist regime's political and ideological perspectives, the former Soviet government disbanded their literary groups. Their influence flourished in the former Czechoslovakia in the writings of the Prague Linguistic Circle and indirectly influenced Anglo-American New Criticism.

sadistic-anal phase Another term for Freud's **anal stage** in a child's development.

schools of criticism A group of critics who share common concerns about reading, writing, and interpretation. Examples of such schools are New Criticism, reader-oriented criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, New Historicism, and ecocriticism.

semanalysis A new science developed by the psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva, who believes that during the Lacanian premirror stage of development, a child experiences a lack or separation from the mother, who shapes meaning and gives significance, moving from this lack to desire. An emotional force tied to our instincts, called **semiotique**, develops. Using these ideas, Kristeva explores how signification or meaning continues to develop throughout our entire lives.

semantic features Used in linguistics to refer to those properties of words that help identify the different shades of meaning and relationships a word may have to surrounding phrases, clauses, and sentences.

semantics Used in linguistics to denote the study of how words combine to make meaning within a language.

semiology Proposed by the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure, this new science would study how we create meaning through **signs** or codes in all our social behavioral systems. Because language was the chief and most characteristic of these systems, Saussure declared that it was to be the main branch of this new science. Although semiology never became the important new science Saussure envisioned, a similar science, **semiotics**, did develop and is still practiced today.

semiotic interpretation A reading of signs to determine a text's interpretation. Developed by structuralist anthropologists, psychoanalysts, and literary critics, **semiotics** maintains that we all master codes or signs in our culture that allow us to interpret the culture and texts. Signs can be a direct means of communication, such as a stop sign, or indirect, such as winking, hugging, or waving.

semiotique A term coined by the psychoanalytic feminist critic Julia Kristeva to refer to an emotional force that is tied to our instincts and exists in the prosody of language rather than symbols.

semiotics Founded by Charles Sanders Peirce and developing at the same time as Ferdinand de Saussure's proposed science of semiology, semiotics borrows linguistic methods used by Saussure and applies them to all meaningful cultural phenomena. Semiotics declares that meaning in society can be systematically studied, in terms of both how this meaning occurs and the

structures that allow it to operate. Because it employs methods used by structuralism, *semiotics* and *structuralism* are often used interchangeably today. However, whereas semiotics denotes a particular field of study, structuralism is more an approach to literary analysis.

sentence A group of words that expresses a complete thought and conforms to the established syntactic structures of a language.

separatist feminism A contemporary feminist criticism that advocates separation from men, either total or partial, and assumes that women must first see themselves in a different context—separating themselves from men, at least for a while—before they can discover who they are as individuals. Such a separation is the necessary first step to achieving personal growth and individuality.

sexual instinct Another name for **eros**, one of two basic instincts that Freud asserts are part of everyone's unconscious. Later in his career, Freud referred to this term as **libido**.

sexual politics A term introduced by Kate Millett with her text *Sexual Politics* (1969). The term has become synonymous with the second wave of feminism, which asserts that economic inequality and ideological indoctrination have been the chief causes of women's oppression and places patriarchy at the center of the feminist movement. Thanks to Millet, the term also denotes distinctions between sex and gender, the first being biological and the latter being psychological. Conforming or not conforming to prescribed cultural sex roles dictated by society becomes part of what Millet dubs sexual politics.

The term has also been used by Annette Kolodny to assert that feminist critics must accept a pluralistic approach to literary criticism. Kolodny assumes that any given text has the possibility of many different readings; such an approach, she argues, is both useful and illuminating.

sign A linguistics term first used by the French structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure to denote the definition for a word. For Saussure, a word represents an abstract concept, not a **referent** in the objective world or a symbol that supposedly equals something else. A word is a sign (something that has meaning) composed of both a **signifier** and a **signified.**

signification A term used in literary criticism, theories of reading, and linguistics to denote the process by which we arrive at meaning through linguistic signs or other symbolic means.

signified A term used by the French structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure that denotes one part of a word. Saussure proposed that all words are actually signs composed of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The signified is the concept to which the signifier—a written or spoken word or sound—refers. Similar to the two sides of a sheet of paper, the linguistic sign is the union of the signifier and the signified.

signifier A term used by the French structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure that denotes one part of a word. The signifier is the spoken or written constituent, such as the sound /t/ and the orthographic (written) symbol *t*. See **signified** and **sign.**

simile A figure of speech that compares two unlike objects using the word *like* or *as*, such as "His nose is like a cherry." The objects being compared cannot be from the same class. For example, the statement "London is like Paris" contains no simile because the objects being compared are from the same class (i.e., both are cities).

social constructivism A theory concerning the nature of humanity that rejects the classical humanist's concept of **essentialism.** Social constructivism argues that there exists no inner core of human essence that can be defined with finite terms. All terms used to describe people are socially constructed and steeped in ideological assumptions; these terms must be deconstructed before they can be reconstructed. Words such as *homosexual, heterosexual, male,* and *female* are laced with societal prejudices and must be reexamined. For social constructivists, the meaning of these words is always in flux.

spring phase According to the mythic critic Northrop Frye, all literature tells one story, the **monomyth,** which consists of four phases. The spring phase relates the story of humanity's release from frustration and anxiety to freedom and happiness.

structural model Another name for the **tripartite model** of Freud's model of the human psyche consisting of the **conscious, preconscious,** and **unconscious.**

structuralism An approach to literary analysis that flourished in the 1960s. By using the techniques, methodologies, and vocabulary of linguistics as articulated by Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralism offers a scientific view of how we achieve meaning not only in literary works but also in all forms of communication and social behavior.

Structuralists believe that codes, signs, and rules govern all social and cultural practices, including communication, the "language" of sports, friendships, education, and literature. Structuralists want to discover the codes that they believe give meaning to all our social and cultural customs. The proper study of meaning and, therefore, reality is an examination of the system behind these practices, not the individual practices themselves.

For structuralist critics, the proper study of literature becomes a study of the conditions surrounding the act of interpretation itself, not an in-depth investigation of an individual work. Structuralists believe that a study of the grammar, or the system of rules that govern literary interpretation, becomes the critic's primary task.

Practiced by such critics as Jonathan Culler, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette, structuralism challenges New Criticism's methodology for finding meaning within a text.

structuralist narratology A form of structuralism defined as the science of narrative and used by such critics as Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette. **Narratologists** illustrate how a story's meaning develops from its overall structure, including elements such as theme, persona, voice, style, grammatical structure, and tone.

structural linguistics A term used synonymously with linguistics, the science of language.

stylistics A form of **structuralism** that interprets a text on the basis of its style—that is, diction, figurative language, syntax, vocabulary, sentence structure, and others.

subaltern writers A term coined by the Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci to refer to writers among those classes of people who are not in control of a culture's ideology or its hegemony. These writers, such as African-Americans, provide new ways to see and understand cultural forces at work in literature and in ourselves.

superego A term used by Sigmund Freud to designate that part of the psyche that acts like an internal censor, causing us to make moral judgments in light of social pressures, as differentiated from the **id** and the **ego.**

superstructure A term used by Karl Marx to designate that part of a culture that contains the social, legal, political, and educational systems along with the religious beliefs, values, and art of a society and which embodies a society's ideology that is controlled by the dominant social class, or the bourgeoisie. By controlling the **base,** the bourgeoisie determines a society's superstructure and, thus, controls and oppresses the working class, or proletariat. See **Marxism.**

supplement A term coined by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida to explain the relationship between two parts of any hierarchy upon which Western culture bases its metaphysics. For example, Derrida says Western society values light over dark. The exact relationship between light and dark, Derrida asserts, is not totally clear. Derrida uses the term *supplement* to refer to the unstable relationship between the two elements contained in this hierarchy. Rather than being two totally separate entities, light and dark supplement each other. Who, for example, can declare it to be light or dark when it is dusk? Each term thus helps define the other and is necessary for the other to exist.

supplementation The act of supplementing. See **supplement.**

symbol An image that represents something else and that can have multiple interpretations. There are two types: a *public symbol* embodies universal meaning, such as a rose representing love or water symbolizing life, and a *private symbol* obtains its meaning from the way in which it is used in a text, such as the scarlet *A* in Nathaniel Hawthorne's romance *The Scarlet Letter.*

symbolic order According to Jacques Lacan, the symbolic order is the second phase of our psychic development, during which we learn language. In this stage we also learn to differentiate between genders, master gender differences, and learn cultural norms and laws. Furthermore, we learn that our fathers represent these cultural norms, and thus we master a male view of the world.

synchronic A linguistic term introduced by the French structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure and used to designate a process of language analysis that studies one language at one particular time in its evolution, emphasizing how that language functions, not its historical development through a long expanse of time. See **diachronic.**

syntax The study of the grammatical structure of a sentence, particularly the arrangement of words or word order. Used in linguistics to describe the rules governing the arrangement of words in phrases, clauses, and sentences.

synthesis A term used by the German philosopher Georg Hegel to explain how new ideas occur. According to Hegel, a **thesis** is presented, followed by a counterstatement, the **antithesis.** What develops from the ensuing debate or discussion is a new idea called the synthesis.

syuzhet A termed coined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. According to Shklovsky, all prose narrative has two aspects: fabula or syuzhet. Syuzhet (or plot) consists of all the literary devices a writer uses to transform the story (see **fabula**) into plot. By using such literary devices as digressions, surprises, disruption, and so forth, the writer alters the fabula, making the text a work of literature that now has the potential "to make strange" the language of the text and render a fresh view of the text's language, the reader's world, or both. See **defamiliarization.**

teleological The adjective of the philosophical term *teleology*, the study of the evidence of design in the natural world. It denotes a worldview or philosophy of life that asserts a purposeful going forward toward some known end, especially one relating to nature.

tension A term used in literary criticism that is synonymous with conflict. It designates the oppositions or conflicts operating with a text.

text A term used by the Russian Formalists to mean a unified collection of various literary devices and conventions that can be objectively analyzed.

theoretical criticism Type of criticism that formulates the theories, principles, and tenets of the nature and value of art. By citing general aesthetic and moral principles of art, theoretical criticism provides the necessary framework for **practical criticism.**

thesis A term developed by the German philosopher Georg Hegel to explain how new ideas occur. Hegel asserts that a thesis (a statement) is presented, followed by a counterstatement, the **antithesis.** The new idea that will emerge from the debate or logical argument is the **synthesis.**

thick description Coined by the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz and brought into literary criticism via **Cultural Poetics,** this term is used by cultural poetics critics to describe the seemingly insignificant but abundant details present in any cultural practice. By focusing on these details, Cultural Poetics critics believe they can reveal the inherent contradictory forces at work within a culture.

third-world feminism A term synonymous with **postcolonial feminism.**

third-world studies A term coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy at the beginning of the twentieth century. The term is no longer in use and has been replaced by **postcolonialism.**

touchstone theory According to Matthew Arnold, a nineteenth-century critic, essayist, poet, and teacher, scholars and critics must "have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry." By comparing the newly written lines by contemporary poets to the classical poems that contain elements of the "sublime," the critic will instantly know whether a new poem is good or bad. Having mastered the "masters," good critics will themselves be touchstones, instantly knowing whether a contemporary

work is good. In Arnold's theory the critic functions as an authority on values, culture, and tastes, becoming a watchdog for high culture and its literature.

toxic consciousness Coined by the ecocritic Cynthia Deitering, this term refers to those works of literature that highlight apocalyptic themes in postindustrial ecosystems.

traditional historical approach Methodology of interpretation that asserts that a critic place a work in its historical setting, paying attention to the author's life, the time period in which the work was written, and the cultural milieu of both the text and the author.

tragedy Although the term is used in many different ways, in literary criticism, the term chiefly refers to Aristotle's definition found in the *Poetics*. Tragedy is "an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language of linguistic adornment, applied separately in the various parts of the play; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the **catharsis** of such pitiable and fearful incidents." See **hamartia.**

transactional A term introduced by Louise M. Rosenblatt to describe the process or event that takes place at a particular time and place when a reader transacts with a text. According to Rosenblatt, the text and the reader condition each other because the text acts as a stimulus or a blueprint for eliciting various experiences, thoughts, and ideas of the reader—those found in both real life and in reading experiences. The result of this experience or "aesthetic transaction" is the creation of a **poem,** or what has been traditionally called the interpretation. See **aesthetic reading** and **transactional experience.**

transactional experience According to the reader-oriented critic Louise M. Rosenblatt, both the reader of a text and the text itself transact (not interact) during the reading process. The text acts as a stimulus for eliciting various experiences, thoughts, and ideas from the reader, those found in both our everyday existence and in reading experiences. Simultaneously the text shapes the reader's experiences, selecting, limiting, and ordering the ideas that best conform to the text. This overall event or act is what Rosenblatt dubs the **transactional** experience.

transcendental signified A term introduced into literary criticism by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida. In trying "to turn Western metaphysics on its head," Derrida asserts that from the time of Plato to the present, Western culture has been founded upon a classic, fundamental error: the search for a transcendental signified, an external point of reference upon which one may build a concept or philosophy. Once found, this transcendental signified would provide ultimate meaning. It would guarantee a "center" of meaning, allowing those who believe in it to structure their ideas of reality around it. According to Derrida, Western metaphysics has invented a variety of such centers, including God, reason, origin, being, truth, humanity, and the self.

tripartite model Sigmund Freud's most famous model of the human psyche. In this model Freud divides the psyche into three parts: the **id,** the **ego,** and the **superego.**

trope A term synonymous with a figure of speech or a word or phrase not meant to be taken literally. The term has now been used by several schools of criticism in a variety of specialized meanings.

typographical model A model of the human psyche devised by Sigmund Freud. In this model Freud divides the psyche into three parts: the **conscious, preconscious,** and **unconscious.**

unconscious A term used in Freudian psychoanalysis to refer to the part of the human psyche that receives and stores our hidden desires, ambitions, fears, passions, and irrational thoughts.

undecidability A term used by deconstructionists and other postmodern critics to decree that a text's meaning is always in flux, never final. Accordingly, foreclosure of meaning for any text is impossible. See **aporia, arche-writing, deconstruction, misspeaks,** and **poststructuralism.**

unfinalizability A term devised by the Russian Formalists to assert that people can never be fully known, either to themselves or anyone else.

ungrammatical A term used to refer to words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that do not conform to the grammatical rules of a language.

unhomeliness A term coined by the postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha that refers to the way a colonial subject perceives the world as divided between two antagonistic cultures: those of the colonizer and of the indigenous community. This "**double consciousness**" often leaves the colonial subject feeling caught between two cultures, with neither of them providing a sense of belonging; the subject lacks the experience of having a "home" culture.

unprivileged A term introduced into literary criticism by the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida. According to Derrida, Western society bases its values and its metaphysical assumptions on opposites, such as good/bad, light/dark, and true/false. In each of these pairs, Derrida asserts that Western culture values or *privileges* the first element, while devaluing or *unprivileging* the second. See **privileged** and **binary operations.**

unvoiced In linguistics, any sound made without vibrating the vocal folds, such as /t/, /p/, and /k/.

Verhältnisse According to Marxist critics, everything, including our social lives, exists in a dynamic relationship—a Verhältnisse—with each other. For Marxist critics, nothing exists in isolation.

Vermittlung A term used in Marxist criticism to assert the interrelatedness of all things, everything exists in a dynamic relationship mediated by social forces.

virtual reader A term devised by the narratologist Gerald Prince to differentiate among the *real, virtual,* and *ideal readers.* According to Prince, the virtual reader is the reader to whom the author believes he or she is writing. See **real reader** and **ideal reader.**

voiced In linguistics, any sound in which the vocal folds are brought close together and made to vibrate, causing air to pass between them, such as /b/, /d/, and /g/.

vulgar Marxism A form of Marxism that holds to the **reflection theory** concerning the relationship of the base to the superstructure. Vulgar Marxism asserts that the superstructure directly reflects or mirrors the base.

wage slaves Another term for the **proletariat** in Marxist criticism.

Weltanschauung The German word for **worldview.**

worker's paradise, the According to Karl Marx, the ultimate goal of society is to reach its highest stage, the worker's paradise, in which benevolent self-rule will be established.

worldview According to James Sire in his text *The Universe Next Door* (1997), the set of assumptions or presuppositions that we all hold, either consciously or unconsciously, about the basic makeup of our world.

Wortkunst The German word for *literature* that implies that the imaginative and creative aspects of literature are its essential components.

yonic symbol A term used in psychoanalytic criticism for any female symbol, such as a flower, a cup, a cave, or a vase.

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