In The Name Of Allah Most Gracious Most Mercifvl

King Faisal University
Deanship of E-Learning and Distance Education

Literary Criticism and Theory

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The Content of material

By
Heart story

Course Introduction

Literary Criticism and Theory

Course Description:

This course exposes students to the main schools of literary and cultural theory. It offers students a survey of critical approaches to literature starting with Plato and Aristotle, and moving through the main schools that have added their contribution in the modern era:

Russian Formalism, Prague School Semiotics,

French Structuralism, Deconstruction,

Post-Colonialism New Historicism.

Objectives

This course helps students understand the conditions that allowed textual interpretation and literary theory to emerge and evolve in Western cultures and how this tradition of textual interpretation and literary theory, in turn, shaped modern Western cultures and its value systems.

Teaching Methods

Heart story

The following methods will be used in this course:

1. Lectures
2. Powerpoint Presentations
3. Online Live Sessions

Textbook:

Enright and Chickera. *English Critical Texts*. Oxford University Press, 1962.

Selden, Roman and Widdowson, Peter. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 3rd ed. 1993.

Payne, Michael, ed. *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. 1996.

Bertens, Han. *Literary Theory*: Basics. 2001.

You can study from the lectures; the book are only for further reading.

Weekly Lectures:

Week 1: The Story behind the Stories – Rome and Greece

Week 2: The Story behind the Stories – Europe and the Classics

Week 3: Criticism in Greece - Plato on Poetry (*Republic* III, X)

Week 4: Criticism in Greece - Aristotle on Tragedy (*The Poetics*)

Week 5: Latin Criticism - Horace, Quintilian, Longinus

Week 6: European Criticism - Humanism and Classicism

Week 7: Russian Formalism

Week 8: Prague School of Semiotics

Week 9: Structuralism and Narratology – Barthes, Gennette, Greimas

Week 10: Post-Structuralism – Michel Foucault

Week 11: Post-Structuralism – Jacques Derrida

Week 12: Orientalism – Edward Said

Week 13: New Historicism – Raymond Williams

Week 14: Revisions.

Evaluation:

1. **Participation**:	**30%**
- Attendance	10%
- Assignments	10%
- Topics Discussions	10%
2. **Final exam**	**70%**
Total:	**100%**

Lecture 1

The Stories Behind the Stories **1**

Greece and Rome

- Literature and literary criticism in Western cultures cannot be understood without understanding its relationship to classical antiquity – Greek and Roman. Why?
- Because European and Western literature and cultures were produced as a recreation, a revival of the classical cultures of Greece and Rome.
- From the 16th to the 20th centuries, Western cultures considered Greece and Rome the most perfect civilizations, and Western drama, poetry, literary criticism, art, education, politics, fashion, architecture, painting, sculpture were ALL produced in imitation of classical antiquity (Greece and Rome).
- But the West's relationship with antiquity is not simple. It is full of contradictions and ambivalence.

Two aspects to this relationship need to be illustrated.

1. Rome's ambivalent relationship to Greece (Lecture 1)

2. The West's ambivalent relationship to classical antiquity (Lecture 2)

Roman poet Horace writes:

"Captive Greece took its wild conqueror captive"

Source: Horace, "A Letter to Augustus," in *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 94.

Horace expresses a sense of inferiority and ambivalence because Rome conquered Greece politically and militarily but Rome could never produce a refined culture (poetry, philosophy, rhetoric, etc) like Greece.

We find this sense of ambivalence and inferiority everywhere in Roman (Latin) literature: in Horace, Quintilian, Seneca, etc.

The Romans conquered Greece militarily, but they always felt that the culture of Greece remained infinitely more sophisticated and refined in poetry, in philosophy, in rhetoric, in medicine, in architecture, in painting, in manners and in refinement. Hence the sense of inferiority.

Seneca, for example, writes:

"No past life has been lived to lend us glory, and that which has existed before us is not ours."

"[A] man who follows another not only finds nothing; he is not even looking."

Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* (44).

Source *Seneca:* *Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard Gummere (Cambridge, MA and London: Heinemann and Harvard University Press), 1920.

For centuries, education in Rome consisted simply in IMITATING Greek masterpieces in literature, rhetoric, painting, etc. Horace, for example, advised his readers to simply imitate the Greeks and never try to invent anything themselves because their inventions will be weak and unattractive:

But he that hopes to have new words allowed

Must so derive them from the Grecian spring

As they may seem to flow without constraint….

New subjects are not easily explained,

And you had better choose a well-known theme

Than trust to an invention of your own;

For what originally others write

May be so well disguised, and so improved,

That with some justice it may pass for yours;

But then you must not copy trivial things,

Nor word for word too faithfully translate.

(Source: *Latin Literature: An Anthology*, Michael Grant, ed., Penguin, 1979, pp. 214-5

The Romans so desperately wanted to imitate the Greeks and so constantly failed to match them. The reason is simple. Imitation cannot produce originality. As Seneca puts it with bitterness, “a man who follows another not only finds nothing; he is not even looking.”

The Romans were a simple rural and uncultivated people who became successful warriors, and at the height of their success when they ruled the biggest empire in the world, they still felt that they were inferior culturally to their small province Greece.

This situation strongly affected how culture was produced in Rome and will also strongly affect how culture will be produced later in Europe and the West

Lecture 2

The Stories Behind the Stories **2**

Rome and Europe

In the Renaissance, Europeans rediscovered the books of the Greeks and Romans and that allowed them to develop a literature and a culture. The period is called the Renaissance because across Europe people wanted to **"revive"** the ancient learning of Rome and Greece.

During the Renaissance, Europe was far less sophisticated than Rome and Greece were. There were no written languages in Europe. The only written language was Latin and people who could read Greek, like Erasmus, were very rare. So we have an under-developed continent, largely illiterate that all of a sudden discovers a vast legacy from the ancient world – hundreds and hundreds of texts and books that no one had seen for hundreds of years. This material will transform the mind of Europe, and lead to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and the modern technological world in which we live today

- **Contradictions and Confusions**

Like the Romans, Europeans wanted to produce poems, books and sophisticated culture because they thought, like the Romans did, that high culture, great books and poems were what great and mighty nations have.

Great nations do great deeds (like conquering lands and people) and record those great deeds and conquests in great books and poems.

The reason why "*les gestes* [the glorious deeds] of the Roman people" were unanimously celebrated and preferred to the deeds of the rest of humanity,

Joachim du Bellay explains in the 1520s, was because they had “a multitude of writers.” That is the reason, he says, why “in spite of the passage of time, the fierceness of battle, the vastness of Italy, and foreign incursions, the majority of their deeds (*gestes*) have been in their entirety preserved until our time.” Joachim du Bellay

So the emergence of what we call today “literature” in Renaissance Europe had a strong political motivation and purpose.

What we call today literature emerged because Europeans were becoming politically and militarily powerful. They were conquering lands and taking over trade routes, and as the passage of du Bellay cited indicates, poetry and literature were necessary accessories of political power.

The logic was this:

Great empires needed great literature, just like the Romans and the Greeks had.

In that sense, the study of classical learning, literature and criticism all emerged with the purpose of giving the emerging European states written and “civilized” languages comparable to those of Rome and Greece.

Europeans saw poems and plays and books and stories like they were national monuments. They judged the greatness of a nation by the monuments it builds, (the Coliseum in Rome) and saw books, poems, plays and literature as monuments of the greatness of nations.

“It was, above all, Rome which provided the ideologues of the colonial systems of Spain, Britain and France with the language and political models

they required, for the *Imperium romanum* has always had a unique place in the political imagination of western Europe. Not only was it believed to have been the largest and most powerful political community on earth, it has also been endowed by a succession of writers with a distinct, sometimes divinely inspired purpose."

(Source: Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France 1500-1800*, Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 11-2.

"Imitation of the Classics"

So to imitate Rome and Greece and develop "civilized" languages and cultures to go with their newly acquired military and political power, Europeans found a ready-made model to follow: the Romans.

From the Renaissance all the way to the 20th century, European writers called for the "imitation of the classics." This is how the concepts: "imitation of the classics," "imitation of the ancients," "*imitatio"* (Latin), "mimesis" (Greek) or simply "imitation" became, from the Renaissance to the 20th centuries, the most prestigious and classical concepts in European cultures. No other concept has had a strong formative and foundational influence in modern European cultures like these concepts of imitation.

Imitation doesn't lead to Originality

In Rome, imitation led to frustration and produced a plagiaristic culture. Europeans simply ignored these complications. The desire to produce poetic monuments to go with their political and military power was more important.

As long as imitation produced "textual monuments" in the form of books, poems and plays, European writers were happy with it.

Imitation doesn't lead to Originality

"it is a sign of greater elegance and skill for us," says du Bellay, "in imitation of the bees, to produce in our own words thoughts borrowed from others." Du Bellay advised his contemporaries **not to be "ashamed**" to write in their native language in imitation of the ancients.

It is "no vicious thing, but praiseworthy," he says, "to borrow from a foreign tongue sentences and words to appropriate them to our own." Du Bellay wished that his own language "were so rich in domestic models that it were not necessary to have recourse to foreign ones," but that was not the case.

Europeans adopted the Roman desire to produce a literary culture in imitation of the Greeks without realizing that this imitation method had failed in Rome and that it produced mainly an imitative and plagiaristic culture that remained inferior to the original Greek culture it tried to mimic and duplicate.

In addition, Europeans thought that they were imitating the classical cultures of Greece ad Rome. In reality they imitated mostly the Romans. Very few Greek texts were available in Europe before the 19th century, and even those were read, studied and imitated through Roman perspectives. European classicism, for example, always claimed to be based on the ideas of Aristotle, but research shows that they knew very little of Aristotle's work. In eighteenth-century England, for example:

Aristotelism Without Aristotle

"A first hand knowledge of Aristotle, even in translation, seem to have been exceptional: Walpole mentions him five times in his letters – usually coupled with Bossu and the 'Rules'; and Cowper, at the age of fifty-three, had 'never

in his life perused a page of Aristotle.' The *Poetics* were mush reverenced, but little read."

John W. Draper, "Aristotelian 'Mimesis' in Eighteenth Century England," *PMLA,* 36 (1921), pp. 373-4.

European writers knew Greek works "only… through the praise of (Roman) Latin authors."

Richard Marback, *Plato's Dream of Sophistry* (University of South Carolina, 1999), p. 46.

Renaissance scholars recognized that Roman art and literature were derived from the Greeks, but they could not discern, as Glynne Wickham notes, how plagiaristic the Romans were. Hence, the grotesque European rankings of Horace as a higher dramatic theorist than Aristotle, and of Seneca as a more accomplished dramatist than Sophocles and Euripides.

Glynne Wickham, "Neo-Classical Drama and The Reformation in England," in *Classical Drama and Its Influence*, ed. M. J. Anderson (Methuen, 1965), p.158.

Important to note:

Literature is not simply stories or beautiful words, and literary criticism is not simply a discussion of the content or style of those stories or beautiful words.

There are more important, fascinating and REAL stories behind the fictitious stories and the beautiful words of literature.

Important to note (continued):

Studying literature involves:

1. understanding the historical forces – political, economic, cultural, military – that made literature as an institution, as a tradition and as a discourse possible and

2. understanding the new historical realities – political, economic, cultural, military – that literature as an institution helps shape and create.

We have to understand the historical forces that produce literature and the historical forces and transformations that literature then goes to produce. This is how we can study literature from a critical, analytical and scientific perspective. Do NOT just consume uncritically the stories and the dramas that you read or watch. You are critics, analysts and experts and you should adopt critical and analytical perspectives to this material.

Lecture 3

Criticism in Ancient Greece:
Plato on Poetry

Greece and Western Literature

- There is no genre of literature that we have today – tragedy, comedy, the different forms of poetry, the short story and even the novel – that the Greeks didn't develop.
- Yes, Western literature is based on Greek literature, but as the previous lecture showed and as we will see in this lecture, the reality is more complex than that.
- Greek thought influenced, in one way or another, every single literary form that developed in Europe and the West, but the differences between the two cultures remain significant.

This lecture and the next will look at the two influential Greek thinkers who influenced the development of Western literature and criticism more than any other thinker in history: Plato and Aristotle

Plato's Critique of Poetry

- Extremely influential and extremely misunderstood.
- He wrote dialogues and in every single one, he addressed poetry. He was obsessed with poetry throughout his life. But to the present, Western literature and criticism cannot agree why Plato was so obsessed with poetry? Some critics love him, some hate him, but they all respect him.

- Plato's most important contributions to criticism appear in his famous dialogue the *Republic*. Two main ideas appear in this dialogue that have had a lasting influence. The following lecture will present those ideas and then provide some analysis.

❖Our interest is in Book III and Book X of the *Republic*. Two ideas emerge in these two books that have had a lasting influence:

Book III of the Republic

- ❖ Plato makes the very important distinction between ***Mimesis* and *Diagesis*,** two concepts that remain very important to analyse literature even today. They are often translated as **imitation and narration** or **showing and telling:**

- ❖ If I tell you the story of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the third person: He sailed to Alexandria with 30 000 soldiers and then he marched on Cairo, etc." That would be **a narration (diagesis).** I am **telling** you the story.

- ❖ But if I tell you the story in the first person, as if I am Napoleon: "I sailed to Alexandria with 30 000 soldiers, and then I marched on Cairo, etc." That would be an **imitation (mimesis).** I am **showing** you the story.

- ❖ Drama with characters is usually a mimesis; stories in the third person are usually a diegesis.

"But when the poet speaks in the person of another, may we not say that he assimilates his style to that of the person who, as he informs you, is going to speak?
Certainly
And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation (mimesis) of the person whose character he assumes?
Of course
Then in that case the narrative of the poet may be said to proceed by way of imitation?
Very true
Plato, *Republic* 393

Mimesis-Diegesis (imitation-narration)

Plato was the first to explain that narration or story telling (in Arabic al-sard) can proceed by narration or by imitation:
"And narration may be either simple narration, or imitation, or a union of the two" (*Republic*, 392).

This distinction has been very popular in Western literary criticism and it remains today very important for the analysis of literature. We will see in future lectures how useful it is to twentieth century schools of criticism like Formalism and Structuralism.

Book X of the Republic

- Plato introduced another idea that has produced strong reactions in Western literature and criticism and has been very difficult to understand.

- This is Plato's famous decision in Book X of the *Republic* to ban poets and poetry from the city.

Because European and Western cultures have always valued poetry, literature and art, Plato's decision has always been difficult to explain. Western cultures have always claimed that their practice of literature and art are based on Greek antiquity, but here is the most important Greek philosopher rejecting art and poetry and banning them from his ideal city

Plato Bans the Poet

Christopher Janaway sums up Western Reactions to Plato's Ban of Poetry:
"They protest too much: Plato is assailed with 'gross illogicality and unfairness', 'passionate, hopelessly bad arguments', 'trivial or sophistic arguments which he cannot himself regard as conclusive', and a position which is 'quite unacceptable' (how dare he!) – but then again it is said that he is only 'enjoying himself by over-stating his case', that a 'comparison with other dialogues makes it quite clear that [these sections of the *Republic*] do not contain his considered opinion', and that we should 'construct a nobler and more generous theory of Aesthetic Arts' on his behalf. Perhaps there is a hidden 'commendation

of good art' even within Book 10 itself, or is Plato 'struggling after a theory of aesthetics which does not find full expression before Hegel'? "

Christopher Janaway, Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), p.154, n. 46.

Some have even written imaginary dialogues with Plato to explain to him the gravity of his decision and teach him how good the Western concept of art is:

"We may be tempted to imagine teaching Plato this concept of ours, and patiently leading him out of error: 'You see, these things that you are attacking are Art. If something is Art it invariably has the following value…and does not really need any further justification.' ('Thank you for clearing that up', he might reply -…)"

Ibid.

Oral Society

- Only in the 20th century that some scholars finally showed that the poetry that Plato talks about and bans is different from the poetry and art that Europe and the West have.

- Paul Kristller drew attention to the fact that the Greeks did not have anything similar to the Western ideas of art and literature. The Western ideas of art and literature did not exist in ancient Greece and Rome:

"The Greek term for Art and its Latin equivalent (ars) do not specifically denote the "fine arts" in the modern sense, but were applied to all kinds of human activities which we would call crafts or sciences."

Paul Kristller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vols. XII-XIII, (1951 and 1952), p. 498.

- A decade later Eric Havelock confirmed the same point:

"Neither "art" nor "artist", *as we use the words*, is translatable into archaic or high-classical Greek."
Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, (p. 33, n. 37.)

- The Western institution of "Fine Arts" or "*les Beaux Arts"* or Aesthetics", as a system that includes on the basis of common characteristics those human activities [painting, architecture, sculpture, music and poetry] and separates them from the crafts and the sciences, are all products of the mid eighteenth century:

Arts is an 18th Century Invention

"The basic notion that the five "major arts" [painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry] constitute an area all by themselves, clearly separated by common characteristics from the crafts and the sciences and other human activities, has been taken for granted by most writers on aesthetics from Kant to the present day. It is freely employed even by those critics of art and literature who profess not to believe in "aesthetics"; and it is accepted as a matter of course by the general public of amateurs who assign to "Art" with a capital A that ever narrowing area of modern life which is not occupied by science, religion, or practical pursuit."

Paul Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," (p. 498.)

So what kind of poetry did the Greeks have? Why did Plato ban it?
Notice, first, that Plato does not use the words "literature" or "art." He uses the word "poetry." The discipline that we call today Literature is an 18th century European invention. In the ancient world, they had poetry, tragedy and comedy, but they were all known as "poetry." They poet could be a tragedian like Sophocles or Euripides, a comedian like Aristophanes, or an epic poet like Homer, but the Greeks never called any of these poets "artists" and they never called their poems and plays, "literature."

- The poet that Plato describes in the *Republic*, as Eric Havelock shows, is a poet, a performer and an educator. The poetry that Plato talks about was main source of knowledge in the society.

- ❖ It is only in an oral society that poetry becomes the most principal source of knowledge and education.

- ❖ The reason: in a society that does not have a system of writing, poetry becomes useful to record and preserve knowledge.

- ❖ Without a system of writing, how does a society preserve its knowledge, its customs and its traditions? How does this society transmit that knowledge, custom and tradition to the younger generation?

The answer is: Poetry!
Because poetry uses rhyme, meter and harmony and those make language easy to remember (like proverbs are easy to remember)
Oral societies, societies that do not have a system of writing, use poetry like modern societies use schools, libraries, newspapers and television. Poetry is the education institution. Poetry is the storehouse of knowledge, customs and traditions. Poetry is the medium of communication.

Oral Vs. Written Cultures

This poetry is vastly different that the Western institution of literature and art

- Literature is an interaction between a reader and a book
- Oral poetry is a communal performance.
- Literature is entertainment and pleasure
- Oral poetry teaches science, medicine, war and peace and social values
- The writer or artist of literature is a gifted individual
- The poet in an oral society is a leader, an educator, a warrior, a priest

These distinctions are important to understand why Plato saw the poet as a big danger to his society.

Poetry Cripples the Mind

- Plato accuses the poetic experience of his time of conditioning the citizens to imitate and repeat, uncritically, the values of a tradition without grasping it.

- The citizens, Plato says, are trained to imitate passively the already poor imitations provided by the discourse of poetry.

- The poet is only good at song-making. His knowledge of the things he sings about like courage, honour, war, peace, government, education, etc., is superficial. He only knows enough about them to make his song.

- The poet produces only a poor copy of the things he sings about, and those who listen to him and believe him acquire a poor education.

Poetry excites the senses and neutralizes the brain and the thinking faculties. It produces docile and passive imitators

- The first two Books of the *Republic* describe an unhealthy Greek society where "all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable than justice" (*Republic*, 360). Virtue and justice are considered painful and unrewarding. Vice and injustice, however, are not only easy and practical but also rewarding.

- Plato blames the traditional education given to the youth. It does not meet the standards of justice and virtue. Then he blames the parents and teachers as accomplices. If parents and tutors tell their children to be just, it is "for the sake of character and reputation, in the hope of obtaining for him who is *reputed* just some of those offices, marriages and the like" (*Republic*, 363).

- People are encourage to 'seem' just rather than 'be' just. And the authorities to whom people appeal for these views are, of course, the poets. Homer, Masaeus and Orpheus are all cited for illustration.

See *Republic* (363 a-d; 364c-365a; 365e-366b).

- It would be fine, he says, if people just laughed at these tales and stories, but the problem is that they take them seriously as a source of education and law.

- How are people's minds going to be affected, he asks, by the poetic discourse to which they are exposed night and day, in private and in public, in weddings and funerals, in war and in peace?

- What is the impact especially on those who are young, "quick-witted, and, like bees on the wing, light on every flower?"

- How are they going to deal with this dubious educational material poured into their minds? They are "prone to draw conclusions," he says (*Republic*, 365).

The Colors of Poetry: Rhythm, Harmony and Measures

Plato analyses two aspects of poetry to prove his point: style and content.
Style: Plato observes that the charm of poetry and its power reside in its rhythm, harmony, and measures. These are what he calls the 'colours' of poetry. Without them, he says, poetry loses most of its charm and appeal. The poet, he says, is merely good at the aesthetic adjustment of his verses and rhythms and is actually ignorant about the content of his songs or tales. He is a good craftsman in terms of spinning the appropriate rhythms and melodies to achieve the desired effect on the listener, but as far as the actual matters he sings about, like war or peace or justice or good or evil, he knows no more about them than his ignorant audience. The poet's craft, Plato says, demands only a superficial knowledge of things; just enough to be able to give an imitation of them:

"The poet with his words and phrases may be said to lay on the colours of the several arts, himself understanding their nature only enough to imitate them; and other people, who are as ignorant as he is, and judge only from his words, imagine that if he speaks of cobbling, or of military tactics, or of anything else, in meter and harmony and rhythm, he

speaks very well - such is the sweet influence which melody and rhythm by nature have. And I think that you might have observed again and again what a poor appearance the tales of poets make when stripped of the colours which music puts upon them, and recited in simple prose."

Republic, (601a); See also *Gorgias*, (502).

- Form in oral poetry is not only verbal it is also physical. The oral poet relies equally on gestures, movements and mimicry. These, too, can have a powerful impact on an audience. Like the poet's words, they divert attention from what is actually being said and only aim to impress the spectator by the skills of the delivery:

"[A]nd he will be ready to imitate anything, not as a joke, but in right good earnest, and before a large company. As I was just now saying, he will attempt to represent the roll of thunder, the noise of wind and hail, or the creaking of wheels, and pulleys, and the various sounds of the flutes; pipes, trumpets, and all sorts of instruments: he will bark like a dog, bleat like a sheep, or crow like a cock; his entire art will consist in imitation of voice and gesture, and there will be very little narration."

Republic, (397a). Subsequent references will be given in the text.

- Exposing the youth to poetry from childhood to adult age, Plato says, is simply indoctrination and propaganda. The youth will be educated to rely on emotions rather than reason.

Poetry cripples the mind. It weakens the critical faculty and breeds conformity.

"Did you never observe," he asks, "how imitation, beginning in early youth and continuing far into life, at length grows into habits and becomes a second nature, affecting body, voice and mind?"

- The mixture of rhymes, rhythms and colourful images can have a strong and powerful impact on the listener, because rhythm and harmony," he says, "find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten (*Republic*, 401).

- Excitement of physical pleasures and internal passions, according to Plato, produce a neutralisation of the faculty of sense and judgement.

- Plato's merit is that he distanced himself enough from these experiences to understand that the passivity effect produced was calculated.

- The passivity of the spectator/listener is a desired effect produced by a calculation of the components of the poetic medium.

- To be sure it is not only the naïve or the ignorant that succumb to the power of poetry. The strength of this tradition and its strong grip on minds is emphasised by Plato when he says "the best of us" are vulnerable to a good passage of Homer or the tragedians:

"Hear and judge: The best of us, as I conceive, when we listen to a passage of Homer, or one of the tragedians, in which he represents some pitiful hero who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or weeping, and smiting his breast – the best of us, you know, delight in giving way to sympathy, and are in raptures at the excellence of the poet who stirs our feelings most.

Yes, of course I know"

(*Republic*, 605).

Seeming Vs. Being

- Poetry creates a culture of superficiality. People want only to "seem" just rather than "be" just.

- This culture of appearances can be most devastating in politics and law, for it is there that material rewards and economic exploitation are great.

- Fake appearances can be of great use to politicians. They could develop, on its basis, superficial ideologies with the sole aim of control and profit.

The poets and the rhetoricians are recognized as spin doctors who would ensure that people consent to being deceived or exploited. If that is not enough then there is always the option of force and coercion:

"Nevertheless, the argument indicates this, if we would be happy, to be the path along which we should proceed. With a view to concealment we will establish secret brotherhoods and political clubs. And there are professors of rhetoric who teach the art of persuading courts and assemblies; and so, partly by persuasion and partly by force, I shall make unlawful gains and not be punished." (*Republic*, 365)

- The superficial culture that poetry produces is not, therefore, equally harmful to everybody. There are those who suffer it and there are those who use and benefit from it.

- The benefits are an incentive for many to devote themselves to the game of breeding and developing appearances and lies. Only a cover is needed: "a picture and shadow of virtue to be the vestibule and exterior of my house."

Conclusion

- It seems obvious that, for Plato, it was a deplorable fact that such an experience, or communion, constituted the official form of cultural organization on which the destiny of a whole people for generations depended. It was obvious to him that the Greeks' reliance on such sensational emotionalism as a source of law, education and morality was a very unhealthy state of affairs, and a recipe for disaster.

- Take a step away from it, he suggested to his people, and you will realize how poor and fake an experience it is. You will realize, he says, that it is a blind imitation of modes and patterns of being with no recourse to even the most basic sense of evaluation and judgment.

Lecture 4

Criticism in Ancient Greece
Aristotle on Tragedy

Plato Vs. Aristotle

Unlike Plato, Aristotle has always proved easier to incorporate in Western literary and philosophical systems. His analysis of Tragedy in the Poetics are still today the foundation of artistic, dramatic and literary practice.

Western scholars who dislike Plato's discussion of poetry or disagree with it are usually full of praise for Aristotle

Western scholars prefer Plato to Aristotle

"When Aristotle comes to challenge his great master and speaks up for art, his attitude to the work of imitation is altogether more respectful." John Jones (1962), pp. 23-4.

"One must keep in mind Plato's devaluation of mimesis in order to appreciate the impact of the repairs Aristotle undertook." Wolfgang Iser (1991), p. 281.

"Plato is known to have had shifting opinions on art depending on whether he thought art was useful for or detrimental to his ideal state. Aristotle's was also an aesthetics of effect, but a more enlightened and dehumanised one." Theodor Adorno (1986), p. 289.

The Czar and the Bible of Literary Criticism

Aristotle has, for centuries, been considered in Western cultures as the unchallenged authority on poetry and literature; the 'czar of literary criticism,' to borrow the expression of Gerald Else.

The *Poetics* has for centuries functioned as the most authoritative book of literary criticism – the Bible of literary criticism

The following is an illustration of the main concepts of the *Poetics*.

Definition of Tragedy

"Tragedy, then, is **an imitation of an action** that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of **action, not of narrative**; with incidents **arousing pity and fear**, wherewith to accomplish its ***katharsis*** of such emotions. . . . Every Tragedy, therefore, must have **six parts**, which parts determine its quality—namely**, Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Melody**."

Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butcher.

Tragedy is the "imitation of an action (*mimesis*) according to the law of probability or necessity."

Aristotle says that tragedy is an imitation of action, not a narration. Tragedy **"shows"** you an action rather than **"tells"** you about it.

Tragedy arouses **pity and fear**, because the audience can envision themselves within the cause-and-effect chain of the action. **The audience identifies with the characters, feels their pain and their grief and rejoices at their happiness.**

Plot: The First Principle

Aristotle defines plot as **"the arrangement of the incidents."** He is not talking about the story itself but **the way the incidents are presented to the audience**, the **structure** of the play.

Plot is the order and the arrangement of these incidents in a cause-effect sequence of events.

According to Aristotle, tragedies where the outcome depends on a tightly constructed cause-and-effect chain of actions are superior to those that depend primarily on the character and personality of the hero/protagonist.

Qualities of Good plots:

The plot must be **"a whole,"** with a **beginning, middle, and end**.

- The beginning, called by modern critics the **incentive moment**, must start the cause-and-effect chain.

- The middle, or **climax**, must be caused by earlier incidents and itself causes the incidents that follow it.

- The end, or **resolution**, must be caused by the preceding events but not lead to other incidents. **The end should therefore solve or resolve the problem created during the incentive moment.**

- Aristotle calls the cause-and-effect chain leading from the incentive moment to the climax **the "tying up"** (*desis*). In modern terminology, it's called the **complication**.

- He calls the cause-and-effect chain from the climax to the resolution the **"unravelling"** (*lusis*). In modern terminology, it's called the **dénouement.**

The plot: "complete" and should have "unity of action."

By this Aristotle means that the plot must be **structurally self-contained**, with the **incidents bound together by internal necessity, each action leading inevitably to the next with no outside intervention**. According to Aristotle, the worst kinds of plots are "'episodic,' in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence"; the only thing that ties together the events in such a plot is the fact that they happen to the same person. Playwrights should not use coincidence. Similarly, the poet should exclude the irrational.

The plot must be "of a certain magnitude," both quantitatively (length, complexity) and qualitatively ("seriousness" and universal significance).

Aristotle argues that plots **should not be too brief**; the more incidents and themes that the playwright can bring together in an organic unity, the greater the artistic value and richness of the play. Also, the more

universal and significant the meaning of the play, the more the playwright can catch and hold the emotions of the audience, the better the play will be.

II. Character:

Character should support the plot, i.e., personal motivations of the characters should be intricately connected parts of the cause-and-effect chain of actions that produce pity and fear in the audience.

Characters in tragedy should have the following qualities:

- "good or fine" - the hero should be an aristocrat
- "true to life" - he/she should be realistic and believable.
- "consistency" - Once a character's personality and motivations are established, these should continue throughout the play.
- "necessary or probable" - must be logically constructed according to "the law of probability or necessity" that govern the actions of the play.
- "true to life and yet more beautiful," - idealized, ennobled.

Thought and Diction

III. Thought:

Aristotle says little about thought, and most of what he has to say is associated with how speeches should reveal character. However, we may assume that this category would also include what we call the **themes** of a play.

IV. Diction is "the expression of the meaning in words" which are proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and end of the tragedy:

Here Aristotle discusses the stylistic elements of tragedy; he is particularly interested in metaphors: "the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor; . . . it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances."

Song and Spectacle

V. Song, or melody is the musical element of the chorus:

Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be "mere interludes," but should contribute to the unity of the plot.

VI. Spectacle (least connected with literature); "the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet."

Aristotle argues that superior poets rely on the inner structure of the **play rather than spectacle to arouse pity and fea**r; those who rely heavily on spectacle "create a sense, not of the terrible, but only of the monstrous."

Katharsis

The end of the tragedy is a *katharsis* (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear:

Katharsis is an Aristotelian term that has generated considerable debate. The word means "purging."

Tragedy **arouses the emotions of pity and fear in order to purge away their excess,** to reduce these passions to a healthy, balanced proportion.

Aristotle also talks of the "pleasure" that is proper to tragedy, apparently meaning the aesthetic pleasure one gets from contemplating the pity and fear that are aroused through an intricately constructed work of art.

Lecture 5

Latin Criticism

Horace, Quintilian, Seneca

Living Culture Vs. Museum Culture

In Ancient Greece:

❖ Homer's poetry was not a book that readers read; it was an oral culture that people sang in the street and in the market place, in weddings and funerals, in war and in peace.

❖ The great Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were not plays that people read in books. They were performances and shows that people attended at the tragic festival every year.

❖ Greek culture was a "living culture" that sprang from people's everyday life. All the Greeks – old and young, aristocrats and commoners, literate and illiterate – participated in producing and in consuming this culture.

In Ancient Rome,

❖ Greek culture became books that had no connection to everyday life and to average people.

❖ Greek books were written in a language (Greek) that most of the Romans didn't speak and belonged to an era in the past that Romans had no knowledge of. Only a small, educated minority had the ability to interact with these books. It was a dead culture, past, remote, and with no connections to the daily existence of the majority of the population.

❖ In Rome, Greek culture was not a living culture anymore. It was a "museum" culture. Some aristocrats used it to show off, but it did not inspire the present.

❖ Roman literature and criticism emerged as an attempt to imitate that Greek culture that was now preserved in books.

❖ The Romans did not engage the culture of Greece to make it inform and inspire their resent; they reproduced the books.

Florence Dupont makes a useful distinction between "Living Culture" (in Greece) and "Monument culture" (in Rome). See her *The Invention of Literature: From Greek Intoxication to the Latin Book*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

I. Horace: *Ars Poetica*

❖ Very influential in shaping European literary and artistic tastes.

❖ Horace, though, was not a philosopher-critic like Plato or Aristotle. He was a poet writing advice in the form of poems with the hope of improving the artistic effort of his contemporaries.

In *Ars Poetica*:

❖ He tells writers of plays that a comic subject should not be written in a tragic tone, and vice versa.

❖ He advises them not to present anything excessively violent or monstrous on stage, and that the *deus ex machina* should not be used unless absolutely necessary (192-5).

❖ He tells writers that a play should not be shorter or longer than five acts (190), and that the chorus "should not sing between the acts anything which has no relevance to or cohesion with the plot" (195).

❖ He advises, further, that poetry should teach and please and that the poem should be conceived as a form of static beauty similar to a painting: *ut pictora poesis*. (133-5).

Each one of these principles would become central in shaping European literary taste.

Ars Poetica, in *Classical Literary Criticism*. Reference to line numbers

"Sensibility"

❖ At the centre of Horace's ideas is the notion of "sensibility."
A poet, according to Horace, who has "neither the ability nor the knowledge to keep the duly assigned functions and tones" of poetry should not be "hailed as a poet."

This principle, announced in line 86 of the *Ars Poetica*, is assumed everywhere in Horace's writing.
Whenever Horace talks about the laws of composition and style, his model of excellence that he wants Roman poets to imitate are the Greeks.

The notion of "sensibility" that he asks writers to have is a tool that allows him to separate what he calls "sophisticated" tastes (which he associates with Greek books) from the "vulgar," which Horace always associates with the rustic and popular:

"I hate the profane crowd and keep it at a distance," he says in his *Odes*.
Horace, *Odes* (3.1.1) in *The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. David West, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 76.

In the S*atires*, he refers to "the college of flute-players, quacks, beggars, mimic actresses, parasites, and all their kinds."
Satires, (1. 2) quoted in Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks Mimes, and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre*, (Cooper Square Publishers: New York, 1963), p. 80.

Horace's hatred of the popular culture of his day is apparent in his "Letter to Augustus" where he writes:
"Greece, now captive, took captive its wild conqueror, and introduced the arts to rural Latium. The unprepossessing Saturnian rhythm [the common verse of early Roman poetry] went out, and elegance drove off venom.
All the same, traces of the country long remained, and they are there today. It was late in the day that the Roman applied his intelligence to Greek literature…he began to enquire what use there might be in Sophocles, and Thespis and Aeschylus."

Horace, "A Letter to Augustus," in *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 94.

This passage how Horace saw the contact between the Greek heritage and his Roman world.

- ❖ It was a relationship of force and conquest that brought the Romans to Greece. As soon as Greece was captive, however, it held its conqueror captive, charming him with her nicely preserved culture (books).
- ❖ Horace shows prejudice to the culture of everyday people, but he does not know that the culture of Greece that he sees in books now was itself a popular culture.
- ❖ Horace equates the preserved Greek culture (books) with "elegance" and he equates the popular culture of his own time with "venom."

❖ Horace's hatred of the popular culture of his day was widespread among Latin authors.

❖ Poetry for Horace and his contemporaries meant written monuments that would land the lucky poet's name on a library shelf next to the great Greek names. It would grant the poet fame, a nationalistic sense of glory and a presence in the pedagogical curriculum.

"I will not die entirely," writes Horace, "some principal part of me yet evading the great Goddess of Burials." That great part of him was his books.

Horace, *The Odes* (3. 30), ed. J. d. McClatchy, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 243.

❖ Horace's poetic practice was not rooted in everyday life, as Greek poetry was. He read and reread the *Iliad* in search of, as he put it, what was bad,

what was good, what was useful, and what was not. (Horace, *Epistles*: 1. 2. 1).

❖ In the scorn he felt towards the popular culture of his day, the symptoms were already clear of the rift between "official" and "popular" culture that would divide future European societies.

❖ The "duly assigned functions and tones" of poetry that Horace spent his life trying to make poets adhere to, were a mould for an artificial poetry with intolerant overtone.

❖ Horace's ideas on poetry are based on an artificial distinction between a "civilized" text-based culture and a "vulgar" oral one.

Imitating the Greeks

❖ In all his writing, Horace urges Roman writers to imitate the Greeks and follow in their footsteps. "Study Greek models night and day," was his legendary advice in the *Ars Poetica* (270).

❖ This idea, though, has an underlying contradiction. Horace wants Roman authors to imitate the Greeks night and day and follow in their footsteps, but he does not want them to be mere imitators.

❖ His solution, though, is only a set of metaphors with no practical steps:

"The common stock [the Greek heritage] will become your private property if you don't linger on the broad and vulgar round, and anxiously render word for word, a loyal interpreter, or again, in the process of imitation, find yourself in a tight corner from which shame, or the rule of the craft, won't let you move." *Ars Poetica* (130-5).

Horace's own poetry shows the same contradictions

- ❖ In the "Epistle to Maecenas" he complains about the slavish imitators who ape the morals and manners of their betters:

How oft, ye servile crew

Of mimics, when your bustling pranks I've seen,

Have ye provoked my smiles – how often my spleen!

(Horace, "Epistle To Maecenas, Answering his Unfair Critics," in *The Complete Works of Horace*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), pp. 360-1.)

❖ In the process of following and imitating the Greeks, Horace differentiates himself from those who "mimic" the ancients and slavishly attempt to reproduce them. Obviously, he does not have much esteem for this kind of imitation and saw his own practice to be different:

"I was the first to plant free footstep on a virgin soil; I walked not where others trod. Who trusts himself will lead and rule the swarm. I was the first to show to Latium the iambics of Paros, following the rhythm and spirit of Archilochus, not the themes or the words that hounded Lycambes. Him, never before sung by other lips, I, the lyricist of Latium, have made known. It is my joy that I bring things untold before, and am read by the eyes and held in the hands of the civilized."

(Horace, "Epistle to Maecenas" (21-34).)

- In imitating the Greeks, Horace claims originality, but the bold claim he makes of walking on virgin soil strongly contradicts the implied detail that the soil was not virgin, since Greek predecessors had already walked it.
- In addition, as Thomas Greene notes, the precise nature of what Horace claims to have brought back from his "walk" is not clear.

(Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p.70.

- However Horace conceives of his imitation of the Greeks, he does a poor job at describing it or articulating its dialectics. Imitation seems to have been only a loose and imprecise metaphor in his vocabulary.

Horace and Stylistic Imitation

- ❖In *Ars Poetica*, Horace also advises the aspirant poet to make his tale believable:
- "If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself, then your misfortunes will hurt me" *Ars Poetica* (100-110).
- "My advice to the skilled imitator will be to keep his eye on the model of life and manners, and draw his speech living from there" *Ars Poetica* (317-19).
- "Whatever you invent for pleasure, let it be near to truth." This is the famous:
- "*ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris*." *Ars Poetica* (338-340).
- This use of imitation denotes a simple reality effect idea. Horace simply asks the writer to make the tale believable, according to fairly common standards. His use of the term and the idea of imitation are casual and conventional. If you depict a coward, Horace advises, make the depiction close to a real person who is a coward.

- But Horace only had a stylistic feature in mind. As Craig La Drière notes, Horace could not even think of poetry, all poetry, as an imitation, the way the idea is expressed in Book X of the *Republic*, or in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Craig La Drière, "Horace and the Theory of Imitation," *American Journal of Philology*, vol. Lx (1939): 288-300.

- Horace's ideas about imitating the Greeks and about poetry imitating real life models were both imprecise, but they will become VERY influential in shaping European art and literature
- the principles of taste and "sensibility" (*decorum*) he elaborates to distinguish what he thought was "civilized" from "uncivilized" poetry will be instrumental in shaping the European distinction between official high culture and popular low one.
- Horace's ideas also helped form the conception of literature and poetry as national monuments and trophies.
- Poetry in Horace's text was subordinated to oratory and the perfection of self-expression. Homer and Sophocles are reduced to classroom examples of correct speaking for rhetoricians to practice with.
- The idea of following the Greeks, as Thomas Greene notes, only magnified the temporal and cultural distance with them.

- **II. Quintilian** - *Institutio Oratoria*.
- From 68 to 88 C.E, he was the leading teacher of rhetoric in Rome. He wrote the *Institutio* as a help in the training of orators.

- Sometimes Quintilian justifies the imitation of the Greeks:

- "And every technique in life is founded on our natural desire to do ourselves what we approve in others. Hence children follow the shapes of letters to attain facility in writing; musicians look for a model to the voice of their instructors, painters to the works of their predecessors, countrymen to methods of growing that have been proved successful by experience. In fact, we can see that the rudiments of any kind of skill are shaped in accordance with an example set for it (10. 2. 2)."

- *(Institutio Oratoria*, in *Ancient Literary Criticism),* references are to line numbers.

- But imitation is also dangerous:

"Yet, this very principle, which makes every accomplishment so much easier for us than it was for men who had nothing to follow, is dangerous unless taken up cautiously and with judgement" (10. 2. 3).

"It is the sign of a lazy mentality to be content with what has been discovered by others" (10. 2. 4).

"it is also shameful to be content merely to reach the level of your model" (10. 2. 7).

Quintilian advocates two contradictory positions:

- First that progress could be achieved only by those who refuse to follow, hence the undesirability of imitating the Greeks.

- At the same time, Quintilian continues to advocate imitation, and goes on to elaborate a list of precepts to guide writers to produce "accurate" imitations.

- The imitator should consider carefully whom to imitate and he should not limit himself to one model only.

- He should not violate the rules of genres and species of writing, and should be attentive to his models' use of decorum, disposition and language.

III. Seneca

Seneca singles out the process of transformation that takes place when bees produce honey or when food, after it is eaten, turns into blood and tissue. He, then, explores the process of mellification and its chemistry. Did it happen naturally? Does the bee play an active role in it? Is it a process of fermentation? He does not select any one theory to explain the production of honey. Instead, he stresses a process of transformation:

"We also, I say, ought to copy these bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading, for such things are better preserved if they are kept separate; then by applying the supervising care with which our nature has endowed us, - in other words, our natural gifts, - we should so blend those several flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came."

Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* (84. 5-6).

"This is what we see nature doing in our own bodies without any labour on our part; the food we have eaten, as long as it retains its original quality and floats in our stomachs as an undiluted mass, is a burden; but it passes into tissue and blood only when it has been changed from its original form. So it is with the food which nourishes our higher nature, - we should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or

it will be no part of us. We must digest it, otherwise it will merely enter the memory and not the reasoning power."

Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* (84. 6-7).

- Latin authors never discuss poetry or literature as an imitation (mimesis); they only discuss them as an imitation of the Greeks.
- Latin authors are not familiar with Plato's and Aristotle's analysis of poetry. The *Poetics* or Republic III and X do not seem to have been available to the Romans:

"Unfortunately, Aristotle's *Poetics* exerted no observable influence in the classical period. It appears likely that the treatise was unavailable to subsequent critics."

Preminger, Hardison and Kerrane, "Introduction," in *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism*, p. 7.

- Latin authors used poetry and literature for two things only:

  - To improve eloquence

  - To sing the national glories of Rome and show off its culture.

- This conception of literature will remain prevalent in Europe until the mid 20th century, as future lectures will show.

Lecture 6

Humanist Criticism

Italy, France, Holland

Language as a Historical Phenomenon

- Renaissance humanists realised that the Latin they spoke and inherited from the Middle Ages was different from classical Latin. In this realisation, language was practically established as a historical phenomenon. This is obvious when comparing, for example, Dante's conception of language to that of Italian humanists of the fifteenth century, like Lorenzo Valla.

For Dante, language was divinely instituted, and the connection of words and things and the rules of grammar were not arbitrary:

We assert that a certain form of speech was created by God together with the first soul. And I say, 'a form,' both in respect of the names of things and of the grammatical construction of these names, and of the utterances of this grammatical construction.

- **By the 1440s**, Italian humanists established the fact that meaning in language is created by humans and shaped by history, not given by God and nature. Lorenzo Valla could not be more specific:

Indeed, even if utterances are produced naturally, their meanings come from the institutions of men. Still, even these utterances men contrive by will as they impose names on perceived things… Unless perhaps we prefer to give credit for this to God who divided the languages of men at the Tower of Babel. However, Adam too adapted words to things, and afterwards everywhere men devised other words. Wherefore noun, verb and the other parts of speech per se are so many sounds but have multiple meanings through the institutions of men.

❖ **Source:** Sarah Stever Gravelle, "The Latin-Vernacular Question and Humanist Theory of Language and Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), p. 376.

Neo-Latin Imitation

❖ The realisation of the difference between medieval and classical Latin created a short era of intense neo-Latin imitation. For ancient thought to be revived, for the lessons of Rome to be properly grasped, humanists advocated the revival of ancient Latin. It was felt among some humanists that Latin had to become, again, the natural and familiar mode of organising experience for that experience to equal that of the ancients.

❖ To that end, the imitation of Cicero in prose and Virgil in poetry was advocated. This textual practice of imitation reached its peak, as will be shown, in the controversy over whether Cicero should be the only model for imitation, or whether multiple models should be selected.

The Rise of the Vernaculars

❖ The new conceptions of language led in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century to the undermining of Latin as the privileged language of learning. The central tactic in the attack on the monopoly of Latin was the production of grammar books for the vernacular. These demonstrated that vernaculars could be reduced to the same kind of rules as Latin.

❖ A sense of pride in the vernacular: "Let no one scorn this Tuscan language as plain and meagre," said Poliziano, "if its riches and ornaments are justly appraised, this language will be judged not poor, not rough, but copious and highly polished."

Quoted in Sarah Stever Gravelle, "The Latin-Vernacular Question," p. 381.

Cultural Decolonization

- The monopoly of classical reality as the sole subject of written knowledge came to be highlighted, and the exclusion of contemporary reality as a subject of knowledge began to be felt, acknowledged, and resisted.

- "What sort of nation are we, to speak perpetually with the mouth of another?" said Jacques Peletier (in R. Waswo)

- Joachim du Bellay says that the Romans' labelling of the French as barbarians "had neither right nor privilege to legitimate thus their nation and to bastardise others." (in Defense)

- A form of "cultural decolonisation." It was an attack, he says on what was conceived to be a foreign domination, and its implicit concept of culture that assumed it to be the property of the small minority of Latin speakers.

To Speak With One's Mouth

"To have learned to speak with one's own mouth means to value that speech as both an object of knowledge and the embodiment of a culture worth having. It is to declare that the materials and processes of daily life are as fully 'cultural' as the ruined monuments and dead languages of the ancient world. It is to overthrow the internalised domination of a foreign community, to decolonise the mind."
Richard Waswo, "The Rise of the Vernaculars," p. 416.

Vernacular Imitation of Latin

- The campaign to defend and promote the vernacular dislodged Latin's monopoly on all forms of written or printed enquiry by the early seventeenth century.

- But they developed the new European Language in imitation of Latin, by appropriating the vocabulary, grammar rules and stylistic features of Latin into the vernaculars.

- “Everyone understands,” said Landino in 1481, “how the Latin tongue became abundant by deriving many words from the Greek.” The Italian tongue would become richer, he deduced, “if everyday we transfer into it more new words taken from the Romans and make them commonplace among our own.”

- **L**ike Cicero, Horace, Quintilian and Seneca, European writers also insisted that imitation should lead to originality, at least in principle. The European imitation debate (at least in terms of its dialectics) was almost a replica of the Latin debate.

- Petrarch was the champion of Latin imitation. He advised his contemporaries to heed Seneca’s advice and “imitate the bees which through an astonishing process produce wax and honey from the flowers they leave behind.” There is nothing shameful about imitating the ancients and borrowing from them, said Petrarch. On the contrary, he added, “it is a sign of greater elegance and skill for us, in imitation of the bees, to produce in our own words thoughts borrowed from others.” Like Seneca and Latin authors, Petrarch insisted that imitation should not reproduce its model:

Imitation Vs. Originality

- **Petrarch:** “To repeat, let us write neither in the style of one or another writer, but in a style uniquely ours although gathered from a variety of sources. (Rerum familiarium libri I-XIII)

- **Pietro Bembo** (1512) said that first “we should imitate the one who is best of all.” Then he added “we should imitate in such a way that we strive to overtake him.” Once the model is overtaken, “all our efforts should be devoted to surpassing him.”

- **Landino** stressed that the imitative product should not be “the same as the ones we imitate, but to be similar to them in such a way that the similarity is scarcely recognised except by the learned.”

Italian Humanism

- **Hieronimo Muzio started his *Arte Poetica* (1551) with the command:** "direct your eyes, with mind intent, upon the famous examples of the ancient times." From them, he says, "one learns to say anything." He advised writers to read and even "memorise entire books" of "good" authors, and noted that a slight variation of expression and meaning "is necessary to make one a poet." On a slight variation from Seneca's transformative metaphor, Muzio wanted the models to be assimilated by the imitator so that "writing shall exhale their previously absorbed odour, like a garment preserved among roses." (in Harold Ogden White, 1965)

- **Giraldi Cinthio**: said in his Discorsi (1554) that after patient study of "good" authors, the writer would find that "imitation [would] change into nature", that his work would resemble the model not as a copy but "as father is to son." The writer, added Cinthio, would not be happy by merely equalling the model; he should "try to surpass him…as Virgil did in his imitation of Homer." (in White)

- **Antonio Minturno**: Also using Seneca's metaphor, said in his Arte Poetica (1563) that the writer should make his borrowed flowers "appear to have grown in his own garden, not to have been transplanted from elsewhere." The writer, he said, must transform his material "as the bees convert the juice of the flowers into honey." (in White)

French Humanism

- If the terms of the imitation discussions in Italy were almost a carbon copy of Roman discussions, the terms of the French debate, with minor variations, were also almost a carbon copy of the Italian debate.

- Joachim du Bellay: echoed Vida's celebration of theft and plunder from the classics and called on his contemporaries to "despoil" Rome and "pillage" Greece "without conscience."

Using Quintilian's passage (without acknowledgement), du Bellay argued:

There is no doubt that the greatest part of invention lies in imitation: and just as it was most praiseworthy for the ancients to invent well, so is it most useful [for the moderns] to imitate well, even for those whose tongue is still not well copious and rich.

- du Bellay's *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française* (1549) also echoes Pietro Bembo's *Prose della vulgar lingua* (1525).

- Like Bembo, du Bellay also wanted to invent a language and a poetic tradition in his vernacular to vie with Latin as a language of culture and civilisation.

- Like Petrarch, he enjoined the reader not to be "ashamed" to write in his native tongue in imitation of the ancients. The Romans themselves, he impressed on his contemporaries, enriched their language by the imitation of the Greek masterpieces they inherited.

And using Seneca's transformative metaphor (again without acknowledgement), du Bellay described the process through which the Romans enriched their language as consisting in:

Imitating the best Greek authors, transforming into them, devouring them; and after well digesting them, converting them into blood and nourishment.

- Since there was no shame in imitation, and since the Romans themselves enriched their tongue through imitation, du Bellay called on his French compatriots to practise it. It is "no vicious thing, but praiseworthy, to borrow from a foreign tongue sentences and words to appropriate them to our own." du Bellay wished that his tongue "were so rich in domestic models that it were not necessary to have recourse to foreign ones," but that was not the case. He believed that French poetry "is capable of a higher and better form" which "must be sought in the Greek and Roman" poets.

- Like Roman and Italian authors, du Bellay also stressed that imitation should produce some sort of originality. Only the ‘‘rarest and most exquisite virtues’’ are to be imitated, and he impressed on aspirant imitators to ‘‘penetrate the most hidden and interior part of the [model] author.’’

Dutch Humanism

- Naturally, Europeans could not just imitate the Romans freely. After all, the latter were pagans, and Renaissance Europe was fervently Christian. European authors frequently stressed that imitation should not undermine the Christian character of their world.
- This issue was settled early on by Erasmus’s dramatic intervention into the Ciceronian controversy through his dialogue Ciceronianus (1528).

The controversy raged in the early sixteenth century among Italian humanists between those who advocated the exclusive imitation of Cicero, and others who advocated the imitation of multiple models.

Erasmus and Ciceronians

- Erasmus’s intervention established once and for all Christian interests and sensibilities as the ultimate limit of imitation. The “weapon,” to use G. W. Pigman’s word, that Erasmus used to establish what amounts to a red line in the practice of imitation, was the Horatian concept of decorum.
- **Erasmus: started with two propositions in the *Ciceronianus*:**

the one who speaks most like Cicero speaks best, and good speaking depends on decorum. From here, Erasmus argued that since decorum is important, one should not speak as Cicero spoke in the past, but as he

would speak now, were he alive. This means “in a Christian manner about Christian matters.”

To stress the point, Erasmus openly branded the Ciceronians as a pagan sect:

“I hear that a new sect, as it were, of Ciceronians has risen among the Italians. I think, that if Cicero were now living and speaking about our religion, he would not say, ‘May almighty God do this,’ but ‘May best and greatest Jupiter do this’; nor would he say, ‘May the grace of Jesus Christ assist you,’ but ‘May the son of best and greatest Jupiter make what you do succeed’; nor would he say, ‘Peter, help the Roman church,’ but ‘Romulus, make the Roman senate and people prosper.’ Since the principal virtue of the speaker is to speak with decorum, what praise do they deserve who, when they speak about the mysteries of our religion, use words as if they were writing in the times of Virgil and Ovid?”

Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum des Errasmi Roterdami*, eds. P. S. Allen , H. M. Allen, H. W. Garrod (Oxford: 1906-58), VII, 16, quoted in Pigman, “Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past,” p. 160.

- Obviously, Erasmus saw some dangers in the practice of imitation. With the rediscovery of pagan written documents and their unprecedented diffusion through printing, the strong admiration developing among Europeans for classical virtues could not but ring alarm bells for those who, like Erasmus, saw themselves as guardians of Christian virtue.
- While Erasmus’s primary concern in writing the *Ciceronianus* was to expose renascent paganism disguising itself as Ciceronian classicism, he did not rely, as Pigman notes, “on religious appeal.” Erasmus, according to Pigman, historicized decorum and developed a “historical argument” and “historical reasoning.”

❖ Conclusion

- ❖ du Bellay ideas on imitation, as well as their imitative poetry merely rehearse the arguments of Italian humanists. And both the Italians and the French merely repeat the major precepts of the Roman imitatio discussion.
- ❖ Aristotle's mimesis, as illustrated earlier, was simply made synonymous with *imitatio*, and the *Poetics* was assimilated to a Horatian and essentially Roman conception of creative writing.
- ❖ The humanists were not philosophers. They were a class of professional teachers, chancellors and secretaries, who were connected to European courts through a patronage system. They composed documents, letters and orations, and they included princes, politicians, businessmen, artists, jurists, theologians, and physicians.
- ❖ European humanists recuperated Roman Latin theories of imitation and Roman pedagogies of composition and style. They were clearly not familiar with Greek discussions and analyses of poetry, especially Plato's and Aristotle.

Lecture 7

Russian Formalism

The Russian Formalist Movement: Definition

- A school of literary scholarship that originated and flourished in Russia in the second decade of the 20th century, flourished in the 1920's and was suppressed in the 30s.

- It was championed by unorthodox philologists and literary historians, e.g., Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, and Yuri Tynyanov.

- Its centers were the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1915 and the Petrograd Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Opoyaz) formed in 1916.

- Their project was stated in *Poetics: Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language* (1919), and in *Modern Russian Poetry* (1921) by Roman Jakobson.

A Product of the Russian Revolution

- 1917 – The Bolshevik Revolution
- Prior to 1917, Russia romanticized literature and viewed literature from a religious perspective.
- After 1917, literature began to be observed and analyzed. The formalist perspective encouraged the study of literature from an objective and scientific lens.
- The "formalist" label was given to the Opoyaz group by its opponents rather than chosen by its adherents.
- The latter favored such self-definitions as the "morphological" approach or "specifiers."

Most Important Formalist Critics

- Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Vladimir Propp, Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Boris Tomashevsky, Grigory Gukovsky.
- These names revolutionized literary criticism between 1914 and the 1930s by establishing the specificity and autonomy of poetic language and literature.
- Russian formalism exerted a major influence on thinkers like Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, and on structuralism as a whole.

Formalist Project

Two Objectives:

- The emphasis on the literary work and its component parts
- The autonomy of literary scholarship

Formalism wanted to solve the methodological confusion which prevailed in traditional literary studies, and establish literary scholarship as a distinct and autonomous field of study.

Formalist Principles

Formalists are not interested in:

- The psychology and biography of the author.
- The religious, moral, or political value of literature.
- The symbolism in literature.
- Formalism strives to force literary or artwork to stand on its own
- people (i.e., author, reader) are not important
- the Formalists rejected traditional definitions of literature. They had a deep-seated distrust of psychology.
- They rejected the theories that locate literary meaning in the poet rather than the poem – the theories that invoke a "faculty of mind" conducive to poetic creation.
- They had little use for all the talk about "intuition," "imagination," "genius," and the like.

The Subject of Literature

To the Formalists, it was necessary to narrow down the definition of literature:

❖ Roman Jakobson (Prague, 1921):

"The subject of literary scholarship is not literature in its totality but **literariness** (literaturnost'), i.e., that which makes of a given work a work of literature."

❖ Eichenbaum (Leningrad, 1927):

"The literary scholar ought to be concerned solely with the inquiry into the distinguishing features of the literary materials."

Poetic vs. Ordinary Language

❖ Russian Formalists argued that Literature was a specialized mode of language and proposed a fundamental opposition between the literary (or poetic) use of language and the ordinary (practical) use of language.

❖ Ordinary language aims at communicating a message by reference to the world outside the message

❖ Literature was a specialized mode of language. It does not aim at communicating a message and its reference is not to the world but to itself.

Literariness

❖ Literariness, according to Jan Mukarovsky, consists in "the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance," that is the foregrounding of "the act of expression, the act of speech itself." To foreground is to bring into high prominence.

❖ By backgrounding the referential aspect of language, poetry makes the words themselves palpable as phonic sounds.

❖ By foreground its linguistic medium, the primary aim of literature, as Victor Shklovsky famously put it, **is to estrange** or **defamiliarize** or **make strange**

Defamiliarization – Making Strange

- Literature “makes strange” ordinary perception and ordinary language and invites the reader to explore new forms of perceptions and sensations, and new ways of relating to language.

- Shklovsky's key terms, "making strange," "dis-automatization," received wide currency in the writings of the Russian Formalists.

- Jakobson claimed that in poetry "the communicative function is reduced to a minimum.”

- Shklovsky spoke of poetry as a "dance of articulatory organs.”

Form vs. Content

- Formalism also rejected the traditional dichotomy of form vs. content which, as Wellek and Warren have put it, "cuts a work of art into two halves: a crude content and a superimposed, purely external form.”

- To the Formalist, verse is not merely a matter of external embellishment such as meter, rhyme, alliteration, superimposed upon ordinary speech. It is an integrated type of discourse, qualitatively different from prose, with a hierarchy of elements and internal laws of its own

Plot vs. Story

- plot/story is a Formalist concept that distinguishes between:
- ✓ The events the work relates (the story) from
- ✓ the sequence in which those events are presented in the work (the plot).

- Both concepts help describe the significance of the form of a literary work in order to define its "literariness." For the Russian Formalists as a whole, form is what makes something art to begin with, so in order to understand a work of art as a work of art (rather than as an ornamented communicative act) one must focus on its form.

V. Propp: The Morphology of the Folktale

- One of the most influential Formalist contributions to the theory of fiction was the study in comparative folklore, especially Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*

- Propp studied fairy-tale stories and established character types and events associated with them. He called the events **Functions** and their **numbers were limited to 31.**

He developed a theory of character and established **7 broad character types,** which he thought could be applied to other narratives

Propp (cont): The 31 Functions

1. Absentation: One of the members of a family absents himself from home (or is dead).
2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero.
3. Violation: The interdiction is violated.
4. Reconnaissance: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.
5. Delivery: The villain receives information about his victim.
6. Trickery: The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings.
7. Complicity: The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.
8. Villainy or Lack: The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family ("villainy) or one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something ("lack").
9. Mediation: Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or a command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.
10: Counteraction: The seeker agrees or decides upon counteraction.
11. Departure: The hero leaves home
12. First Function of the Donor: The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or etc., which a helper.
13. Hero's Reaction: The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.
14. Receipts of Magical Agent: The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.

15. Guidance: The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of
an object of search.
16. Struggle: The hero and the villain join in direct combat.
17. Branding: The hero is branded.
18. Victory: The villain is defeated.
19. Liquidation: The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.
20. Return: The hero returns.
21. Pursuit: The hero is pursued.
22. Rescue: The rescue of the hero from pursuit.
23: Unrecognized Arrival: The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.
24. Unfounded Claims: A false hero presents unfounded claims.
25. Difficult Task: A difficult task is proposed to the hero.
26. Solution: The task is resolved.
27. Recognition: The hero is recognized.
28. Exposure: The false hero or villain is exposed.
29. Transfiguration: The hero is given a new appearance.
30. Punishment: The villain is punished.
31. Wedding: The hero is married and ascends the throne.

V. Propp: Character Types

- He also concluded that all the characters could be resolved into 8 broad character types in the 100 tales he analyzed:

1. The villain — struggles against the hero.
2. The dispatcher — character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.
3. The (magical) helper — helps the hero in their quest.
4. The princess or prize — the hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her because of an unfair evil, usually because of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, thereby beating the villain.

V. Propp: Character Types (cont)

1. Her father — gives the task to the hero, identifies the false hero, marries the hero, often sought for during the narrative. Propp noted that functionally, the princess and the father cannot be clearly distinguished.
2. The donor — prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.
3. The hero or victim/seeker hero — reacts to the donor, weds the princess.
4. False hero — takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess

Legacy of Russian Formalism

Formalist School is credited even by its adversaries such as Russian critic Yefimov:

"The contribution of our literary scholarship lies in the fact that it has focused sharply on the basic problems of literary criticism and literary study, first of all on the specificity of its object, that it modified our conception of the literary work and broke it down into its component parts, that it opened up new areas of inquiry, vastly enriched our knowledge of literary technology, raised the standards of our literary research and of our theorizing about literature effected, in a sense, a Europeanization of our literary scholarship…. Poetics became an object of scientific analysis, a concrete problem of literary scholarship"
Quoted in Erlich, "Russian Formalism: In Perspective" 225.

- Russian formalism gave rise to the Prague school of structuralism in the mid-1920s and provided a model for the literary wing of French structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s.

- The literary-theoretical paradigms that Russian Formalism inaugurated are still with us and has a vital presence in the theoretical discourse of our day.

- All contemporary schools of criticism owe a debt to Russian Formalism

Sources

- Victor Erlich, “Russian Formalism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 34, No. 4 (1973)
- Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, University of Texas, 1990.
- *Jerry Everard’s Introduction to Vladimir Propp…*

<http://lostbiro.com/blog/?page_id=522>

Lecture 8
Structuralism

Structuralism

- Structuralism in literature appeared in France in the 1960s
- It continues the work of Russian Formalism in the sense that it does not seek to interpret literature; it seeks rather to investigate its structures.
- The most common names associated with structuralism are Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Gennete, and A.j. Greimas.
- The following lecture looks at one of the most influential contributions of structuralism to the study of literature: Gerard Gennete's *Discours du récit* (Paris, 1972), translated into English as *Narrative Discourse* (1980).
- No other book has been so systematic and so thorough in analyzing the structures of literary discourse and narratology.

Narrative Discourse

- Gennette analyzes three main aspects of the narrative discourse:
  - ✓ Time: Order, Duration, Frequency
  - ✓ Mood: Distance (Mimesis vs. Diegesis), Perspective (the question who sees?)
  - ✓ Voice: Levels of narration (the question who speaks?)

Narrative Order

- There are two forms of time in narrative:
  - ✓ The time of the story: The time in which the story happens
  - ✓ The time of the narrative: The time in which the story is told/narrated

❖ "Narrative Order" is the relation between the sequencing of events in the story and their arrangement in the narrative.

❖ A narrator may choose to present the events in the order they occurred, that is, chronologically, or he can recount them out of order.

Example:

detective stories often begin with a murder that has to be solved. The events preceding the crime, along with the investigation that leads to the killer, are presented afterwards.

The order in which the events occurred does not match the order in which they are presented in the narrative.

This mixing of temporal order produces a more gripping and complex plot (suspense).

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Time Zero

❖ The time of the story is, by definition, always chronological:

Events as they happen: A – B – C – D – E – F (a chronological order)

The time of the narrative is not necessarily chronological:

Events as narrated: E – D – A – C – B – F (non-chronological)

- **Time Zeros**: is the point in time in which the narrator is telling his/her story. This is the narrator's present, the moment in which a narrator is sitting and telling his/her story to an audience or to a reader, etc. Time Zero is the tome of the narration

Anachronies

- Gennette calls all irregularities in the time of narration: Anachrobies.

- Anachronies happen whenever a narrative stops the chronological order in order to bring events or information from the past (of the time zero) or from the future (of the time zero).

- Analepsis: The narrator recounts *after the fact* an event that took place earlier than the moment in which the narrative is stopped.

- Example (fictitious): I woke up in a good mood this morning. In my mind were memories of my childhood, when I was running in the fields with my friends after school.

- 2. Prolepsis: The narrator anticipates events that will occur after the point in time in which the story has stops.

- Example (fictitious): How will my travel to Europe affect me? My relationship with my family and friends will never be the same again. This is what will make me later difficult to live with.

Reach and Extent

"An anachrony can reach into the past or the future, either more or less far from the "present" moment (that is, from the moment in the story when the narrative was interrupted to make room for the anachrony): this temporal distance we will name the anachrony's reach.

The anachrony itself can also cover a duration of story that is more or less long: we will call this its extent" (Gennette, *Narrative Discourse*, 1980, p. 48).

The Function of Anachronies

Anachronies can have several functions in a narrative:

- **Analepses** often take on an explanatory role, developing a character's psychology by relating events from his past

- **prolepses** can arouse the reader's curiosity by partially revealing facts that will surface later.

- These breaks in chronology may also be used to disrupt the classical novel's linear narrative.

Narrative Mood: Mimesis vs. Diegesis

- Traditional criticism studied, under the category of mood, the question whether literature uses *mimesis* (showing) or *diegesis* (telling).

- Since the function of narrative is not to give an order, express a wish, state a condition, etc., but simply to tell a story and therefore to “report” facts (real or fictive), the indicative is its only mood.

- In that sense, Genette says, all narrative is necessarily ***diegesis*** (telling). It can only achieve an illusion of ***mimesis*** (showing) by making the story real, alive and vivid.

- No narrative can show or imitate the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner that can try to be detailed, precise, alive, and in that way give more or less the illusion of mimesis (showing). Narration (oral or written) is a fact of language and language signifies without imitating.

- Mimesis, for Gennete is only a form of diegesis, showing is only a form of telling.

❖ It is more accurate to study the relationship of the narrative to the information it presents under the headings of: Distance and Perspective

Narrative Distance

❖ The only imitation (mimesis) possible in literature is the imitation of words, where the exact words uttered can be repeated/reproduced/imitated. Otherwise, ALL narratives are narratives of events and here every narrative chooses to take a certain amount of **distance** from the information is narrates.

❖ **Narrative of Events**: Always a *diegesis*, that is, a transcription of the non-verbal into the verbal.

✓ *Mimesis*: maximum of information and a minimum of the informer.

✓ *Diegesis*: a minimum of information and a maximum presence of the informer.

Narrative of Words: The only form of mimesis that is possible (Three types):

✓ *Narrated speech:* is the most distant and reduced ("I informed my mother of my decision to marry Albertine" [exact uttered speech].

✓ *Transposed speech*: in indirect style ("I told my mother that I absolutely had to marry Albertine" [mixture of uttered and narrated speech].

✓ *Reproduced speech*: The most mimetic form is where the narrator pretends that the character is speaking and not the narrator: "I said to my mother: it is absolutely necessary that I marry Albertine."

Narrative Perspective

❖ **Perspective** is the second mode of regulating information.

❖ Traditional criticism, says Gennete, confuses two different issues (narrative voice and narrative perspective) under the question of "Point of View":

❖ Gennete argues that a distinction should be made between narrative voice (the question “Who speaks?”) and narrative perspective (the question “Who sees?”).

The one who perceives the events is not necessarily the one who tells the story of those events, and vice versa

Focalization: Who Sees?

Genette distinguishes three kinds of focalization:

1. *Zero focalization*: The narrator knows more than the characters. He may know the facts about all of the protagonists, as well as their thoughts and gestures. This is the traditional "omniscient narrator".
2. *Internal focalization*: The narrator knows as much as the focal character. This character filters the information provided to the reader, and the narrator does not and cannot access or report the thoughts of other characters. Focalization means, primarily, a limitation, a limit on the capacity of the narrator to “see” and “report.” If the narrator wants to be seen as reliable, then he/she has to recognize and respect that he cannot be everywhere and know everything.

3. *External focalization*: The narrator knows less than the characters. He acts a bit like a camera lens, following the protagonists' actions and gestures from the outside; he is unable to guess their thoughts. Again, there is restriction.

Levels of narration: Who Speaks?

❖ Genette systematizes the varieties of narrators according to purely formal criteria:

Their structural position with respect to the story/events and the different narrative/enunciative levels of the work.

The two criteria he uses result in the fourfould characterization of narrators into extradiegetic / intradiegetic on one hand, and homodiegetic / heterodiegetic on the other.

Note: Do not confuse [in fiction] the narrating instance with the instance of writing, the [fictional] narrator [sender] with the [real] author, or the [fictional] recipient [receiver, addressee of the [fictive] narrative with the [real] reader of the work.

- From the point of view of time, there are four types of narrating:
- 1-SUBSEQUENT: The classical (most frequent) position of the past-tense narrative.

- 2- PRIOR: Predictive narrative, generally in the future tense (dreams, prophecies) [this type of narrating is done with less frequency than any other]

- 3- SIMULTANEOUS: Narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action (this is the simplest form of narrating since the simultaneousness of the story and the narrating eliminates any sort of interference or temporal game).

- 4-INTERPOLATED: Between the moments of the action (this is the most complex) [e.g., epistolary novels]

Homodiegetic Narrator: a story in which the narrator is present in the story he narrates

Heterodiegetic Narrator: a story in which the narrator is absent from the story he narrates

Extradiegetic Narrative: The narrator is superior, in the sense of being at least one level higher than the story world, and hence has a good or virtually complete knowledge of the story he narrates.

Intradiegetic Narrative: the narrator is immersed within the same level as that of the story world, and has limited or incomplete knowledge of the story he narrates.

Sources

Gerard Gennette, *The Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Foreword by Jonathan Culler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 1983.

Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge), 1975.

Lecture 9

Author Critiques:
1. Roland Barthes: "The Death of the Author"

Structuralism

- Structuralism usually designates a group of French thinkers who were influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language

- They were active in the 1950s and 60s and applied concepts of structural linguistics to the study of social and cultural phenomenon, including literature.

- Structuralism developed first in Anthropology with Claude Levi-Strauss, then in literary and cultural studies with Roman Jackobson, Roland Barthes, Gerard Gennette, then in Psychoanalysis with Jacques Lacan, Intellectual History with Michel Foucault and Marxist Theory with Louis Althusser. These thinkers never formed a school but it was under the label "Structuralism" that their work circulated in the 1960s and 70s (Jonathan Culler, *Introduction to Literary Theory*)

- **In Literary Studies:** Structuralism is interested in the conventions and the structures of the literary work.

- It does not seek to produce new interpretations of literary works but to understand and explain how these works can have the meanings and effects that they do.

- It is not easy to distinguish Structuralism from Semiotics, the general science of signs, which traces its lineage to Saussure and Charles Sanders Pierce. Semiotics, though, is the general study of signs in behaviour and

communication that avoids philosophical speculation and cultural critiques that marked Structuralism.

Roland Barthes 1915-1980

This presentation will illustrate the work of one of the most prominent figures in French Structuralism, Roland Barthes, on a topic that has attracted a lot of attention: the function of the author in literature.
We will focus mostly on his famous article: "The Death of the Author," published in his book *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): pp. 142-48.

The Author: A Modern Invention

- Barthes reminds the reader in this essay that the idea of the "author" is a modern invention.

- The author, he says, is a modern figure, a product of our modern society. It emerged with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, when society discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person.'

- Literature is tyrannically centred on the author, his life, person, tastes and passions.
- The explanation of a text is sought in the person who produced it. In ethnographic societies, the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, a relator.

The Function of the Author

- The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.

- The author, as a result, reigns supreme in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the mind of the critics anxious to unite the works and their authors/persons through biographies, diaries and memoirs.

- Literary criticism, as a result, and literature in general are enslaved to the author. The reader, the critic, the historian all read the text of literature only to try to discover the author, his life, his personality, his biography, psychology etc.

- The work or the text, itself, goes unread, unanalyzed and unappreciated.

The Death of the Author

- Barthes proposes that literature and criticism dispose of the the author – hence the metaphor of "the death of the author."

- Once the Author is removed, he says, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile.

- The professional critics who claims to be the guardian of the text because he is best placed to understand the author's intentions and to explain the text, looses his position. All readings become equal.
- Roland Barthes questioned the traditional idea that the meaning of the literary text and the production of the literary text should be traced solely to a single author.

- Structuralism and Poststructuralism proved that meaning is not fixed by or located in the author's 'intention.'

- Barthes rejected the idea that literature and criticism should rely on "a single self-determining author, in control of his meanings, who fulfils his intentions and only his intentions" (Terry Eagleton).

From 'Work' to 'Text'

- According to Roland Barthes, it is language that speaks and not the author who no longer determines meaning. Consequences: We no longer talk about works but texts.

"It is now known that a text is not a line of words realising a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture." Barthes, "The Death of the Author."

"Did he [the author] wish to express himself? he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely." (Ibid)

From Author to Reader

- Barthes wants literature to move away from the idea of the author in prder to discover the reader, and more importantly, in order to discover writing.

A text is not a message of an author; it is "a multidimensional space where a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, **but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.**

- In other words, it is the reader (not the author) that should be the focus of interpretation. The process of signification that a text carries are realized concretely at the moment of reading.

- The birth of the reader has a cost: the death of the Author.

From Work to Text

- The text is plural, “a tissue of quotations,” a woven fabric with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, that signify FAR MORE than any authorial intentions.

It is this plurality that needs to be stressed and it can only be stressed by eliminating the function of the author and the tyranny of the author from the reading process.

From Author to Scriptor

- The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after.

- The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child.

- In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now, at the moment it is read.

The Modern Scriptor

- The modern scriptor has, as Barthes describes it, the hand cut off from any voice. He is borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.

Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, indefinitely deferred

Lecture 10

Author Critiques:

1. Michel Foucault: “What is an Author?”

Foucault’s Title

- Even with his title, Foucault is being provocative, taking a given and turning it into a problem.

His question ("What is an Author?") might even seem pointless at first, so accustomed have we all become to thinking about authors and authorship.

The idea of the Death of the Author

- Foucault questions the most basic assumptions about authorship. He reminds us that the concept of authorship hasn't always existed.

It "came into being,” he explains, at a particular moment in history, and it may pass out of being at some future moment.

- Foucault also questions our habit of thinking about authors as individuals, heroic figures who somehow transcend or exist outside history (Shakespeare as a genius for all times and all place).
- Why, he wonders, are we so strongly inclined to view authors in that way? Why are we often so resistant to the notion that authors are products of their times?
- According to Foucault, Barthes had urged critics to realize that they could "do without [the author] and study the work itself.” This urging, Foucault implies, is not realistic.

- Foucault suggests that critics like Barthes and Derrida never really get rid of the author, but instead merely reassigns the author's powers and privileges to "writing" or to "language itself."
- Foucault doesn't want his readers to assume that the question of authorship that's already been solved by critics like Barthes and Derrida.

He tries to show that neither Barthes nor Derrida has broken away from the question of the author--much less solved it.

The Author as a Classificatory Function

- Foucault asks us to think about the ways in which an author's name "functions" in our society. After raising questions about the functions of proper names, he goes on to say that the names of authors often serve a "classifactory" function.
- Think about how the average bookstore is organized.

When you go to the bookstore looking for Oliver Twist, most of the time you will search under the section:

Charles Dickens, or you will ask for the novels of Charles Dickens.

It probably wouldn't even occur to you to make your search in any other way. It’s almost unconscious.

❖ The “Author Function”

- Now, Foucault asks, why do you--why do most of us--assume that it's "natural" for bookstores to classify books according to the names of their authors? What would happen to Oliver Twist if scholars were to discover that it hadn't been written by Charles Dickens? Wouldn't most

bookstores, and wouldn't most of us, feel that the novel would have to be reclassified in light of that discovery? Why should we feel that way? After all, the words of the novel wouldn't have changed, would they?

- Foucault here introduces his concept of the "author function." It is not a person and it should not be confused with either the "author" or the "writer." The "author function" is more like a set of beliefs or assumptions governing the production, circulation, classification and consumption of texts.

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- Foucault identifies and describes **four** characteristics of the "author function":

1. The "author function" is linked to the legal system and arises as a result of the need to punish those responsible for transgressive statements.

There is the need here to have names attached to statements made in case there is a need to punish someone for transgressive things that get said.

2. The "author function" does not affect all texts in the same way. For example, it doesn't seem to affect scientific texts as much as it affects literary texts. If a chemistry teacher is talking about the periodic table, you probably wouldn't stop her and say, "Wait a minute--who's the author of this table?" If I'm talking about a poem, however, you might very well stop me and ask me about its author.

3. The "author function" is more complex than it seems to be.

This is one of the most difficult points in the essay. To illustrate, Foucault gives the example of the editorial problem of attribution-- the problem of deciding whether or not a given text should be attributed to a particular author.

This problem may seem rather trivial, since most of the literary texts that we study have already been reliably attributed to an author. Imagine, however, a case in which a scholar discovered a long-forgotten poem whose author was completely unknown.

Imagine, furthermore, that the scholar had a hunch that the author of the poem was William Shakespeare.

What would the scholar have to do, what rules would she have to observe, what standards would she have to meet, in order to convince everyone else that she was right?

4. The term "author" doesn't refer purely and simply to a real individual.

The "author" is much like the "narrator," Foucault suggests, in that he or she can be an "alter ego" for the actual flesh-and-blood "writer."

"Author Function" Applies to Discourse

- Foucault then shows that the "author function" applies not just to individual works, but also to larger discourses.

This, then, is the famous section on "founders of discursivity" – thinkers like Marx or Freud who produce their own texts (books), and "the possibilities or the rules for the formation of other texts."

- He raises the possibility of doing a "historical analysis of discourse," and he notes that the "author function" has operated differently in different places and at different times.

- Remember that he began this essay by questioning our tendency to imagine "authors" as individuals isolated from the rest of society.
- Foucault, in the end, argues that the author is not a source of infinite meaning, but rather part of a system of beliefs that serve to limit and restrict meaning. For example: we often appeal to ideas of "authorial intention" to limit what someone might say about a text, or mark some interpretations and commentaries as illegitimate.
- At the very end, Foucault returns to Barthes and agrees that the "author function" may soon "disappear." He disagrees, though, that instead of the limiting and restrictive "author function," we will have some kind of absolute freedom.

Most likely, one set of restrictions and limits (the author function) will give way to another set since, Foucault insists, there must and will always be some "system of constraint" working upon us.

- **Sources**

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Lecture 11

Greimas: The Actantial Model

Origins of the Actantial Model

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- The actantial model is a tool that can theoretically be used to analyze any real or thematized action, but particularly those depicted in literary texts or images.
- In the actantial model, an action may be broken down into six components, called actants. Actantial analysis consists of assigning each element of the action being described to one of the actantial classes.

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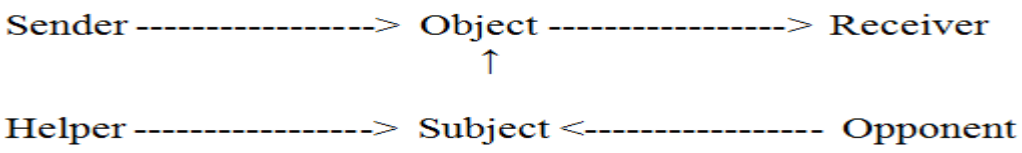

1. **The subject**: the hero of the story, who undertakes the main action.
2. **The object**: what the subject is directed toward
3. **The helper**: helps the subject reach the desired object
4. **The opponent**: hinders the subject in his progression
5. **The sender**: initiates the relation between the subject and the object
6. **The receiver**: the element for which the object is desired.

Actant Vs. Character

The actants must not be confused with characters because

- ✓ An actant can be an abstraction (the city, Eros, God, liberty, peace, the nation, etc), a collective character (the soldiers of an army) or even a group of several characters.
- ✓ A character can simultaneously or successively assume different actantial functions
- ✓ An actant can be absent from the stage or the action and its presence can be limited to its presence in the discourse of other speakers
- ❖ An actant, says Greimas, is an extrapolation of the syntactic structure of a narrative. An actant is identified with what assumes a syntactic function in the narrative.

❖ Six Actants, Three Axes

❖ The six actants are divided into three oppositions, each of which forms an axis of the actantial description:

1. **The axis of desire - Subject – Object**: The subject wants the object. The relationship established between the subject and the object is called a junction. Depending on whether the object is conjoined with the subject (for example, the Prince wants the Princess) or disjoined (for example, a murderer succeeds in getting rid of his victim's body), it is called a conjunction or a disjunction.
2. **The axis of power – Helper – Opponent**: The helper assists in achieving the desired junction between the subject and object; the opponent tries to prevent this from happening (for example, the

sword, the horse, courage, and the wise man help the Prince; the witch, the dragon, the far-off castle, and fear hinder him)

3. **The axis of transmission – Sender – Receiver:** The sender is the element requesting the establishment of the junction between subject and object (for example, the King asks the Prince to rescue the Princess).

The receiver is the element for which the quest is being undertaken. To simplify, let us interpret the receiver (or beneficiary-receiver) as that which benefits from achieving the junction between subject and object (for example, the King, the kingdom, the Princess, the Prince, etc.) The Senders are often also Receivers.

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Lecture 12

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Definition

- Poststructuralism is a broad historical description of intellectual developments in continental philosophy and critical theory
- An outcome of Twentieth-century French philosophy
- The prefix "post' means primarily that it is critical of structuralism
- Structuralism tried to deal with meaning as complex structures that are culturally independent
- Post-structuralism sees culture and history as integral to meaning
- Poststructuralism was a 'rebellion against' structuralism
- It was a critical and comprehensive response to the basic assumptions of structuralism
- Poststructuralism studies the underlying structures inherent in cultural products (such as texts)
- It uses analytical concepts from linguistics, psychology, anthropology and other fields

❖ The Poststructuralist Text

❖ To understand a text, Poststructuralism studies:

✓ The text itself

✓ the systems of knowledge which interacted and came into play to produce the text

❖ Post-structuralism: a study of how knowledge is produced, an analysis of the social, cultural and historical systems that interact with each other to produce a specific cultural product, like a text of literature, for example

❖ Basic Assumptions in Postsctructuralism

❖ The concept of "self" as a singular and coherent entity, for Poststructuralism, is **a fictional construct, an illusion.**

❖ The “individual,” for Poststructuralism, is not a coherent and whole entity, but a mass of conflicting tensions + Knowledge claims (e.g. gender, class, profession, etc.)

❖ To properly study a text, the reader must understand how the work is related to his own personal concept of self and how the various concepts of self that form in the text come about and interact

Self-perception: Poststructuralism requires a critical attitude to one's assumptions, limitations and general knowledge claims (gender, race, class, etc)

Basic Assumptions

- "Authorial intentions" or the meaning that the author intends to "transmit" in a piece if literature, for Poststructuralism, is secondary to the meaning that the reader can generate from the text
- Rejects the idea of a literary text having one purpose, one meaning or one singular existence
- To utilize a variety of perspectives to create a multifaceted (or conflicting) interpretation of a text. Poststructuralism like multiplicity of readings and interpretations, even if they are contradictory
- To analyze how the meanings of a text shift in relation to certain variables (usually the identity of the reader)

❖ Poststructuralist Concepts

(1): Destabilized Meaning

- Poststructuralism displaces the writer/author and make the reader the primary subject of inquiry (instead of author / writer)
- They call such displacement: the "destabilizing" or "decentering" of the author
- Disregarding essentialist reading of the content that look for superficial readings or story lines
- Other sources are examined for meaning (e.g. readers, cultural norms, other literature, etc.)
- Such alternative sources promise no consistency, but might provide valuable clues and shed light on unusual corners of the text.

(2): Deconstruction

- Poststructuralism rejects that there is a consistent structure to texts, specifically the theory of binary opposition that structuralism made famous
- Post-structuralists advocate deconstruction
- Meanings of texts and concepts constantly shift in relation to many variables. The same text means different things from one era to another, from one person to another
- The only way to properly understand these meanings: deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge systems which produce the illusion of singular meaning

Lecture 10

Author Critiques:

1. Michel Foucault: “What is an Author?”

Foucault’s Title

- Even with his title, Foucault is being provocative, taking a given and turning it into a problem.

His question ("What is an Author?") might even seem pointless at first, so accustomed have we all become to thinking about authors and authorship.

❖ The idea of the Death of the Author

- Foucault questions the most basic assumptions about authorship. He reminds us that the concept of authorship hasn't always existed.

It "came into being,” he explains, at a particular moment in history, and it may pass out of being at some future moment.

- Foucault also questions our habit of thinking about authors as individuals, heroic figures who somehow transcend or exist outside history (Shakespeare as a genius for all times and all place).
- Why, he wonders, are we so strongly inclined to view authors in that way? Why are we often so resistant to the notion that authors are products of their times?
- According to Foucault, Barthes had urged critics to realize that they could "do without [the author] and study the work itself.” This urging, Foucault implies, is not realistic.

- Foucault suggests that critics like Barthes and Derrida never really get rid of the author, but instead merely reassigns the author's powers and privileges to "writing" or to "language itself."
- Foucault doesn't want his readers to assume that the question of authorship that's already been solved by critics like Barthes and Derrida.

He tries to show that neither Barthes nor Derrida has broken away from the question of the author--much less solved it.

The Author as a Classificatory Function

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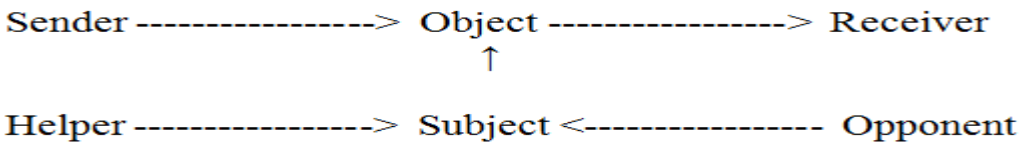

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Lecture 13

Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction

Post-structuralism is French

- ❖ Post-structuralism is a European-based theoretical movement that departs from structuralist methods of analysis. The most important names are:
  - ✓ Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis)
  - ✓ Michel Foucault (history)
  - ✓ Jacques Derrida (philosophy)

Deconstruction is American

- ❖ Deconstruction is a U.S.-based method of literary and cultural analysis influenced by the work of Jacques
  - ✓ Derrida
  - ✓ J. Hillis Miller
  - ✓ Geoffrey Hartman
  - ✓ Paul De Man
  - ✓ Barbara Johnson

Derrida's Central Works

- ❖ Three Early Classics:
  - ✓ Of Grammatology (1967)
  - ✓ Speech and Phenomena (1967)
  - ✓ Writing and Difference (1967)

- ❖ Further Interests: Politics, Literature, Ethics, etc.
  - ✓ Acts of Literature (1992)
  - ✓ Spectres of Marx (1993)
  - ✓ Of Hospitality (1997)

❖ Articles:

- ✓ • "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human
- ✓ Sciences" (1966) [also in Writing and Difference]
- ✓ • "Signature, Event, Context" (1977) [Derrida vs. Austin]

Derrida on Language: What Language Is Not

❖ Derrida radically challenges commonsense assumptions about language. For him,

- ✓ language is not a vehicle for the communication of pre-existing thoughts
- ✓ "language is not an instrument or tool in man's hands […]. Language rather thinks man and his 'world'" (J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host")
- ✓ language is not a transparent window onto the world

What Language Is

❖ For Derrida, language is unreliable

❖ There is no pre-discursive reality. Every reality is shaped and accessed by a discourse. "there is nothing outside of the text" (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)

❖ Texts always refer to other texts (cf. Fredric Jameson's The Prison-House of Language)

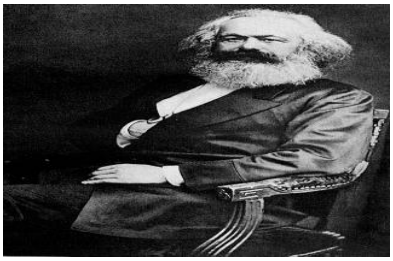
❖ Language constructs/shapes the world

Note: Derrida has a very broad notion of 'text' that includes all types of sign systems)

Lecture 14

Marxist Literary Criticism

Karl Marx



- Karl Marx born 1818 in Rhineland.
- Known as “The Father of Communism.”
- “Communist Correspondence League” – 1847
- “Communist Manifesto” published in 1848.
- The “League” was disbanded in 1852.
- Marx died in 1883.

Base-Superstructure

- This is one of the most important ideas of karl Marx
- The idea that history is made of two main forces:
- The Base: The material conditions of life, economic relations, labor, capital, etc
- The Superstructure: This is what today is called ideology or consciousness and includes, ideas, religion, politics, history, education, etc

- Marx said that it is people's material conditions that determines their consciousness. In other words, it is people's economic conditions that determines the ideas and ideologies that they hold.
- Note: Ibn Khaldoun says the same thing in the Muqaddimah

Marxism & Literary Criticism

- Marxist criticism analyzes literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it while being aware of its own historical conditions.
- The goal of Marxist criticism is to "explain the literary works more fully, paying attention to its forms, styles, and meanings- and looking at them as products of a particular history.
- The best literature should reflect the historical dialectics of its time.
- To understand literature means understanding the total social process of which it is part
- To understand ideology, and literature as ideology (a set of ideas), one must analyze the relations between different classes in society.

Important Marxist Ideas on Literature

- Literary products (novels, plays, etc) cannot be understood outside of the economic conditions, class relations and ideologies of their time.
- Truth is not eternal but is institutionally created (e.g.: "private property" is not a natural category but is the product of a certain historical development and a certain ideology at a certain time in history.

- Art and Literature are commodities (consumer products) just like other commodity forms.

Art and Literature are both Reflections of ideological struggle and can themselves be central to the task of ideology critique

The Main Schools of Marxism

- Classical Marxism: The work of Marx and Engels
- Early Western Marxism
- Late Marxism

1. Classical Marxism

- Classical Marxist criticism flourished in the period from the time of Marx and Engels to the Second World War.
- Insists on the following basic tenets: materialism, economic determinism, class struggle, surplus value, reification, proletarian revolution and communism as the main forces of historical development. (Follow the money)
- Marx and Engels were political philosophers rather than literary critics. The few comments they made on literature enabled people after them to build a Marxist theory of literature.
- Marx and Engels were more concerned with the contents rather than the form of the literature, because to them literary study was more politically oriented and content was much more politically important. Literary form, however, did have a place if it served their political purposes. Marx and Engels, for instance, liked the realism in C. Dickens, H. Balzac, and W.M.

Thackeray, and Lenin praised L. Tolstoy for the "political and social truths" in his novels.

❖ 2. Early Western Marxism

- ❖ **Georg Lukács** was perhaps the first Western Marxist.
- ❖ He denounced as mechanistic the "vulgar" Marxist version of criticism whereby the features of a cultural text were strictly determined by or interpreted in terms of the economic and social conditions of its production and by the class status of its author.

However, he insisted, more than anybody else, on the traditional Marxist reflectionist theory (Superstructure as a reflection of the base), even when this theory was under severe attack from the formalists in the fifties.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin: Monologism vs. dialogism

- ❖ In "Discourse in the Novel" written in the 1930s, Bakhtin, like Lukács, tried to define the novel as a literary from in terms of Marxism.
- ❖ The discourse of the novel, he says, is dialogical, which means that it is not tyrannical and one-directional. It allows dialogue.
- ❖ The discourse of poetry is monological, tyrannical and one-directional
- ❖ In *Rabelais and His World*, he explains that laughter in the Medieval Carnival represented "the voice of the people" as an oppositional discourse against the monological, serious ecclesiastical, church establishment.

Frankfurt School of Marxism

- Founded In 1923 at the “Institute of Social Research” in the University of Frankfurt, Germany
- Members and adherents have included:Max Hirkheimer, Thoedor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althussser, Raymond Williams and others.

A distinctive feature of the Frankfurt School are independence of thought, interdisciplinarity and openness for opposing views

3. Late Marxism

Raymond Williams says:

- There were at least three forms of Marxism: the writings of Karl Marx, the systems developed by later Marxists out of these writings, and Marxisms popular at given historical moments.

Fredric Jameson says:

- There were two Marxisms, one being the Marxian System developed by Karl Marx himself, and the other being its later development of various kind

“It is a mistake to equate concreteness with things. An individual object is the unique phenomenon it is because it is caught up in a mesh of relations with other objects.

It is this web of relations and interactions, if you like, which is 'concrete', while the object considered in isolation is purely abstract.

In his *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx sees the abstract not as a lofty, esoteric notion, but as a kind of rough sketch of a thing.

The notion of money, for example, is abstract because it is no more than a bare, preliminary outline of the actual reality.

It is only when we reinsert the idea of money into its complex social context, examining its relations to commodities, exchange, production and the like, that we can construct a 'concrete' concept of it, one which is adequate to its manifold substance.

The Anglo-Saxon empiricist tradition, by contrast, makes the mistake of supposing that the concrete is simple and the abstract is complex…

In a similar way, a poem for Yury Lotman is concrete precisely because it is the product of many interacting systems.

Like Imagist poetry, you can suppress a number of these systems (grammar, syntax, metre and so on) to leave the imagery standing proudly alone; but this is actually an abstraction of the imagery from its context, not the concretion it appears to be.

In modern poetics, the word 'concrete' has done far more harm than good.”

— Terry Eagleton, How to Read a Poem