# Open Yale Courses

Introduction to Theory of Literature with Professor Paul H. Fry

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| About the Course This is a survey of the main trends in twentieth-century literary theory. Lectures will provide background for the readings and explicate them where appropriate, while attempting to develop a coherent overall context that incorporates philosophical and social perspectives on the recurrent questions: what is literature, how is it produced, how can it be understood, and what is its purpose? [view class sessions >>](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.959\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions.html) Course Structure: This Yale College course, taught on campus twice per week for 50 minutes, was recorded for Open Yale Courses in Spring 2009. |
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| About Professor Paul H. Fry Paul H. Fry is the William Lampson Professor of English at Yale and specializes in British Romanticism, literary theory, and literature and the visual arts. He was educated at the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard and has been teaching at Yale since 1971. His publications include The Poet's Calling in the English Ode, for which he was awarded the Melville Cane Award; The Reach of Criticism: Method and Perception in Literary Theory; William Empson: Prophet Against Sacrifice; A Defense of Poetry: Essays on the Occasion of Writing; and Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are. |

**Introduction to Theory of Literature**

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*Click session titles below to access audio, video, and course materials.*

|  |
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| [1. Introduction](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture01.html) |
| [2. Introduction (cont.)](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture02.html) |
| [3. Ways In and Out of the Hermeneutic Circle](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture03.html) |
| [4. Configurative Reading](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture04.html) |
| [5. The Idea of the Autonomous Artwork](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture05.html) |
| [6. The New Criticism and Other Western Formalisms](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture06.html) |
| [7. Russian Formalism](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture07.html) |
| [8. Semiotics and Structuralism](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture08.html) |
| [9. Linguistics and Literature](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture09.html) |
| [10. Deconstruction I](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture10.html) |
| [11. Deconstruction II](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture11.html) |
| [12. Freud and Fiction](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture12.html) |
| [13. Jacques Lacan in Theory](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture13.html) |
| [14. Influence](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture14.html) |
| [15. The Postmodern Psyche](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture15.html) |
| [16. The Social Permeability of Reader and Text](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture16.html) |
| [17. The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture17.html) |
| [18. The Political Unconscious](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture18.html) |
| [19. The New Historicism](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture19.html) |
| [20. The *Classical* Feminist Tradition](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture20.html) |
| [21. African-American Criticism](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture21.html) |
| [22. Post-Colonial Criticism](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture22.html) |
| [23. Queer Theory and Gender Performativity](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture23.html) |
| [24. The Institutional Construction of Literary Study](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture24.html) |
| [25. The End of Theory?; Neo-Pragmatism](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture25.html) |
| [26. Reflections; Who Doesn't Hate Theory Now?](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.812\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\sessions\lecture26.html) |

**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 1 Transcript**

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| January 13, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** I thought I'd begin today--this [gestures to outline on chalkboard] is, by the way, the regular practice. This is as close as I get to bulleted Power Point. It's all there. I ought to have got through those topics by the end of the lecture. If I don't, not to worry. I'll pick up wherever the dotted line emerges in the subsequent lecture.

In any case, I thought I'd begin today by making a few remarks about the title of our course because it has some big words in it: "theory" and "literature," but also "introduction." I think it's worth saying a word or two about the word "introduction" as well.

Now the word *theory* has a very complicated etymological history that I won't trouble you with. The trouble with the etymology of *theory* and the way in which the word has been used traditionally is that sometimes it actually means *practice*, and then at other historical periods it means something very different from practice, something typically from which practice is derived. Well, that's the sense of theory that I like to work with, and I would pause over it by saying that after all, there is a difference and practice and we shouldn't too quickly, at least, confuse the terms. There's a difference between theory and methodology. Yes, it's probably fair enough to say that methodology is applied theory, but there's a great danger in supposing that every aspect of theory has an immediate application. Theory is very often a purely speculative undertaking. It's an hypothesis about something, the exact nature of which one needn't necessarily have in view. It's a supposition that whatever the object of theory might be, theory itself must--owing to whatever intellectual constraints one can imagine--be of such and such a form.

At this level of abstraction, plainly there isn't all that much incentive to apply thinking of that kind, but on the other hand undoubtedly theory does exist for the most part to be applied. Very frequently, courses of this kind have a text--*Lycidas, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* a short story*--*and then once in a while the disquisition of the lecture will pause, the text will be produced, and whatever theory has recently been talked about will be applied to the text; so that you'll get a postcolonial reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner--*something, by the way, which is absolutely fascinating and important to do--and so on through the course.

Now I suppose it's my reluctance to get into the intricacies of questions having to do with applied theory that makes me prefer to keep it simple. *Our* text is a story for toddlers called *Tony the Tow Truck.* I've decided not to pass it out today because, after all, I want to get it into the right hands! You can't read it unless you take the course!--and so I'm going to wait a little bit. [holds up the text] We won't come back to it at least for the moment, but you see that it's mercifully short, and as time passes we will do some rather interesting tricks with it. We will revert, as others revert to *Lycidas*,to *Tony the Tow Truck* for the purpose of introducing questions of applied theory.

Now this choice may suggest a certain condescension both toward theory and toward literary text, which is not at all intended. It's much more a question of reminding you that if you can do it with this, you can do it with anything; but also of reminding you that, after all, reading--reading just anything--is a complex and potentially almost unlimited activity. That's one of the good things that theory teaches us and that I hope to be able to get across in the course of our varied approaches to *Tony the Tow Truck.*

Now theory resembles philosophy perhaps in this: that it asks fundamental questions and also at times builds systems. That is to say, theory has certain ambitions to a totalization of what can be thought that resembles or rivals philosophy. But theory differs from philosophy--and this is something that I'm going to be coming back to persistingly in the second half of this lecture and many times hereafter: theory differs from most philosophy in that it involves a certain--this is by no means self-evident, and "Why should this be?" is one of the questions we're going to be asking--it involves a certain skepticism. There seems to be a doubt, a variety of doubts, about the foundations of what we can think and the basis of our opinions, that pervades theory, and is seen somehow or another to characterize its history. Not all theory that we read in this course is skeptical. Some of the most powerful and profound thought that's been devoted to the subject of the theory of literature is positive in its intentions and in its views, but by and large you will happily or unhappily come to terms with the fact that much of what you're going to be reading this semester is undergirded, or perhaps I should say undermined, by this persisting skepticism. It's crucial, as I say, and I'm going to be coming back to it, but it's just a point I want to make in passing about the nature of theory now.

Turning to the word *literature*, this is not theory of relativity, theory of music, or theory of government. This is a course in theory of literature, and theory of literature shares in common with other kinds of theory the need for definition. That is to say, maybe the most central and, for me, possibly the most fascinating question theory asks is--well, what is literature? How do we know it when we see it? How can we define it? Much of what we'll be reading takes up the question "What is literature?" and provides us with fascinating and always--for the moment, I think--enticing definitions. There are definitions based on form, circularity, symmetry, economy of form, lack of economy of form, and repetition. There are definitions based on psychological complexity, psychological balance, psychological harmony, sometimes psychological imbalance and disharmony, and there are also definitions which insist that somehow there is an epistemological difference between literature and other kinds of utterance. Whereas most utterances purport to be saying something true about the actual state of things in the world, literary utterance is under no such obligation, the argument goes, and ought properly to be understood as fiction--making it up as opposed to referring.

All right. Now all of these definitions have had currency. We'll be going over them again and finding them, I hope, more fascinating as we learn more about them; but at the same time, even as I rattle off this list of possibilities, probably you felt in yourself an upsurge of skepticism. You say, "My goodness. I can easily find exceptions to all of those rules. It's ridiculous to think that literature could be defined in any one of those ways or even in a combination of all of them. Literature is many things, a many-splendored thing," you say to yourself, "and it simply cannot be confined or trapped within a definition of that kind." Well and good, properly ecumenical of you, but at the same time it gives rise to a sense that possibly after all, literature just isn't anything *at all*: in other words, that literature may not be susceptible of definition, of any one definition, but it is rather--and this is the so-called neo-pragmatist argument--but it is rather whatever you think it is or more precisely whatever your interpretive community says that it is. This isn't really a big problem. It's kind of unsettling because we like to know what things are, but at the same time it's not really a big problem because as long as we know about the fact that a certain notion of literature exists in certain communities, we can begin to do very interesting work precisely with that idea. We can say there's a great deal to learn about what people think literature is and we can develop very interesting kinds of thinking about the variety of ways in which these ideas are expressed. And so it's not, perhaps, crippling if this is the conclusion we reach, but at the same time it's not the only possible conclusion. The possibility of definition persists. Definition is important to us, and we're certainly not going to give it short shrift in this course. We're going to make every effort to define literature as carefully as we can.

Now in addition to defining literature, literary theory also asks questions obviously not unrelated but which open up the field somewhat. What causes literature and what are the effects of literature? In a way, there's a subset of questions that arises from those, and as to causes these are, of course, what we'll be taking up next time: the question "What is an author?" That is to say, if something causes literature, there must be some sort of authority behind it and therefore we find ourselves asking, "What is an author?" By the same token, if literature has effects, it must have effects on someone, and this gives rise to the equally interesting and vexing question, "What is a reader?" Literary theory is very much involved with questions of that kind, and organizing those questions is basically what rationalizes the structure of our syllabus. You'll notice that we move in the syllabus--after a couple of introductory talks that I'll mention in a minute--we move from the idea that literature is in some sense caused by language to the idea that literature is in some sense caused by the human psyche, to the idea that literature is in some sense caused by social, economic, and historical forces. There are corollaries for those ideas in terms of the kinds of effects that literature has and what we might imagine ourselves to conclude from them.

Finally, literary theory asks one other important question--it asks many, but this is the way at least I'm organizing it for today--it asks one other important question, the one with which we will actually begin: not so much "What is a reader?" but "How does reading get done?" That is to say, how do we form the conclusion that we are interpreting something adequately, that we have a basis for the kind of reading that we're doing? What is the reading experience like? How do we meet the text face-to-face? How do we put ourselves in touch with the text which may after all in a variety of ways be remote from us?

These are the questions that are asked by what's called hermeneutics, a difficult word that we will be taking up next week. It has to do with the god Hermes who conveyed language to man, who was in a certain sense, among many other functions, the god of communication, and hermeneutics is, after all, obviously about communication. So hermeneutics will be our first topic, and it attempts to answer the last question that I've mentioned which is raised by theory of literature.

All right. Now let me pause quickly over the word *introduction*. I first started teaching this course in the late 1970s and 80s when literary theory was a thing absolutely of the moment. As I told the teaching fellows, I had a colleague in those days who looked at me enviously and said he wished he had the black leather concession at the door. Theory was both hot and cool, and it was something about which, following from that, one had not just opinions but very, very strong opinions. In other words, the teaching fellows I had in those days--who knows? They may rise up against me in the same way this semester--but the teaching fellows I had in those days said, "You can't teach an introduction. You can't teach a survey. You can't say, 'If it's Tuesday, it must be Foucault. If it's Thursday, it must be Lacan.' You can't approach theory that way. Theory is important and it's important to know what you believe," in other words, what the basis of all other possible theory is."I am a feminist. I'm a Lacanian. I am a student of Paul de Man. I believe that these are the foundational moments of theorizing and that if you're going to teach anything like a survey, you've got to derive the rest of it from whatever the moment I happen to subscribe to might be."

That's the way it felt to teach theory in those days. It was awkward teaching an introduction and probably for that reason [laughs] while I was teaching Lit 300, which was then called Lit Y, Paul de Man was teaching Lit Z. He was teaching a lecture course nearby, not at the same time, which was interpretation as practiced by the School of de Man. That was Lit Z, and it did indeed imply every other form of theory, and it was extremely rigorous and interesting, but it wasn't a survey. It took for granted, in other words, that everything else would derive from the fundamental idea; but it didn't for a minute think that a whole series of fundamental ideas could share space, could be a kind of smorgasbord that you could mix and match in a kind of happy-go-lucky, eclectic way, which perhaps we will be seeming to do from time to time in our introductory course.

Well, does one feel any nostalgia now for the coolness and heat of this moment? Yes and no. It was fascinating to be--as Wordsworth says, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive"--to be around in those days, but at the same time I think it's rather advantageous for us too to be still "in theory." That is to say we still have views. We still have to recognize that what we think derives from this or that understanding of theory and these or those theoretical principles. We have to understand the way in which what we do and say, what we write in our papers and articles, is grounded in theoretical premises which, if we don't come to terms with them, we will simply naively reproduce without being fully aware of how we're using them and how, indeed, they are using us. So it is as crucial as ever to understand theory.

In addition, we have the vantage point of, I suppose, what we can now call history. Some of what we'll be studying is no longer practiced as that which is the absolutely necessary central path to methodology. Some of what we're studying has had its moment of flourishing, has remained influential as a paradigm that shapes other paradigms, but is not itself, perhaps, today the sole paradigm--which gives us the opportunity of historical perspective, so that from time to time during the course of the course, I'll be trying to say something about why certain theoretical issues and ideas pushed themselves into prominence at certain historical moments, and that too then can become part of our enterprise. So an introduction is not only valuable for those of us who simply wish to acquire knowledge. It's also valuable, I think, in lending an additional perspective to the topic of theory and to an understanding about how theory is, on the one hand and perhaps in a certain sense, now an historical topic and is, on the other hand, something that we're very much engaged in and still committed to: so all that then by way of rationale for teaching an introduction to theory.

All right. Now the question, "How does literary theory relate to the history of criticism?" That is a course that I like to teach, too; usually I teach Plato to T.S. Eliot or Plato to I.A. Richards or some other important figure in the early twentieth century. It's a course which is absolutely fascinating in all sorts of ways, and it has one very important thing in common with literary theory: that is to say, literary criticism is, too, perpetually concerned with the definition of literature. Many of the issues that I raised in talking about defining literature are as relevant for literary criticism as they are for literary theory, and yet we all instinctively know that these are two very different enterprises. Literary theory loses something that literary criticism just takes for granted. Literary theory is not concerned with issues of evaluation, and it's not really concerned with concomitant issues of appreciation. Literary theory just takes those for granted as part of the sense experience, as one might say, of any reader and prefers, rather, to dwell on questions of description, analysis and speculation, as I've said.

So that's what's lost in theory, but what's new in theory? Here I come to the topic which will occupy most of my attention for the remainder of the lecture. What's new in theory is the element of skepticism that literary criticism by and large--which is usually affirming a canon of some sort--doesn't reflect. Literary theory, as I say, is skeptical about the foundations of its subject matter and also, in many cases, about the foundations of what it itself is doing. So the question is: how on earth did this come about? It's an historical question, as I say, and I want to devote the rest of the lecture to it. Why should doubt about the veridical or truth-affirming possibilities of interpretation be so widespread in the twentieth century?

Now here is a big glop of intellectual history. I think the sort of skepticism I mean arises from what one might call and what often is called modernity--not to be confused with Modernism, an early twentieth-century phenomenon, but the history of modern thought as it usually derives from the generation of Descartes, Shakespeare, and Cervantes. Notice something about all of those figures: Shakespeare is preoccupied with figures who may or may not be crazy. Cervantes is preoccupied with a figure who is crazy--we're pretty sure of that, but he certainly isn't. He takes it for granted that he is the most rational and systematic of all thinkers and raises questions about--since we all take ourselves to be rational too--raises questions about just how we know ourselves not to be paranoid delusives like Don Quixote. So that can be unsettling when we think of this as happening at a certain contemporaneous moment in the history of thought.

Now Descartes, you remember, in his *Meditations* begins by asking a series of questions about how we can know anything, and one of the skeptical questions he asks is, "Well, might I not be crazy?" In other words, Descartes is still thinking along these same lines. He says, "Well, maybe I've been seized by an evil genius of some kind or maybe I'm just crazy." Now why--and here is the question--why do we get this nervousness about the relationship between what I know and how I know it arising at this moment? Well, I think it's characterized at least in part by what Descartes goes on to say in his *Meditations*. Descartes settles the matter--perhaps somewhat sweeping the question of whether he is crazy under the rug because I'm still not sure he answers that question--but he settles the matter famously by saying, "I think. Therefore, I am," and furthermore, as a concomitant, "I think, therefore, all the things that I'm thinking about can be understood to exist as well."

Now the Cartesian Revolution establishes something that is absolutely crucial for what we call the Enlightenment of the next hundred, hundred and fifty years--in other words, the idea that there is a distance between the mind and the things that it thinks about, but that this distance is a good thing. In other words, if you look too closely at a picture or if you stand too far away from it you don't see it clearly--it's out of focus--but if you achieve just the right distance from it, it comes into focus. The idea of scientific objectivity, the idea that motivates the creation of the great *Encyclopedia* by the figures of the French Enlightenment--this idea all arises out of the idea that there is a certain appropriate objective distance between the perceiver and the perceived. Gradually, however, the idea that this distance is not too great begins to erode so that in 1796 Kant, who isn't exactly enlisted on the side of the skeptics by most of his serious students, nevertheless does say something equally famous as that which Descartes said and a good deal more disturbing: "We cannot know the thing in itself." Now as I said, Kant erected such an incredibly magnificent scaffolding around the thing in itself--that is to say, the variety of ways in which although we can't know it, we can sort of triangulate it and come to terms with it obliquely--that it seems churlish to enlist him on the side of the skeptics, but at the same time there's a sense of a danger in the distance between subject and object that begins to emerge in thinking of this kind.

Now by 1807, Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind* is saying that in recent history and in recent developments of consciousness something unfortunate has set in. We have "unhappy consciousness," unhappy consciousness which is the result of estrangement, or *Verfremdung*, and which drives us too far away from the thing that we're looking at. We are no longer certain at all of what we're looking at, and consciousness, therefore, feels alienated. All right. So you can already begin to see a development in intellectual history that perhaps opens the way to a certain skepticism. But the crucial thing hasn't yet happened, because after all, in all of these accounts, even that of Hegel, there is no doubt about the authority of consciousness to think what it thinks. It may not clearly think about things, about objects, but it has a kind of legitimate basis that generates the sort of thinking that it does. But then--and here is where I want you to look at the passages that I've handed out. Here's where three great figures--there are others but these are considered the seminal figures--begin to raise questions which complicate the whole issue of consciousness. Their argument is that it's not just that consciousness doesn't clearly understand what it's looking at and is therefore alienated from it. It's also that consciousness is alienated from its own underpinnings, that it doesn't have any clear sense of where it's coming from any more than what it's looking at: in other words, that consciousness is not only estranged from the world but that it is in and of itself inauthentic.

So just quickly look at these passages. Marx, in the famous argument about commodity fetishism in *Kapital*,is comparing the way in which we take the product of human labor and turn it into a commodity by saying that it has objective value, by saying that we know what its value is in and of itself. He compares that with religion. The argument is: well, God is a product of human labor. In other words, it's not a completely supercilious argument, sort of "God is brought into being the same way objects that we make use of are brought into being." God is a product of human labor, but then we turn around and we say God exists independently and has value objectively. Marx's argument is that the two forms of belief, belief in the objective value of the commodity and belief in God, are the same. Now whether or not any of this is true, believe me, is neither here nor there. The point that Marx is making is that consciousness, that is to say the way in which we believe things, is determined by factors outside its control--that is to say in the case of Marx's arguments, social, historical and economic factors that determine what we think and which in general we call "ideology"; that is to say, ideology is driven by factors beyond the ken of the person who thinks ideologically.

So you see the problem for consciousness now is not just a single problem. It's twofold: its inauthentic relationship with the things it looks at and also its inauthentic relationship with its own underpinnings. The argument is exactly the same for Nietzsche, only he shifts the ground of attack. For Nietzsche, the underpinnings of consciousness which make the operations of consciousness inauthentic are the nature of language itself. That is to say that when we think we're telling the truth we're actually using worn-out figures of speech. "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms--in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified," etc., etc., etc., "and are now no longer of account as coins but are debased."

Now that word "now" [laughs] is very important. It suggests that Nietzsche does somehow believe that there's a privileged moment in the history of language when perhaps language is a truth serum, when it is capable of telling the truth, but language has *now* simply become a question of worn-out figures, all of which dictates what we believe to be true. I speak in a figurative way about the relationship between the earth and the sky, and I believe that there's a sky god. I move from speech to belief because I simply don't believe that I'm using figures of speech. All of this is implied in Nietzsche's argument. In other words, language, the nature of language, and the way language is received by us, in turn determines what we can do with it, which is to say it determines what we think, so that for Nietzsche the distortion of truth--that is to say the distortion of the power to observe in consciousness--has as its underlying cause language, the state of language, the status of language.

Freud finally argues for exactly the same relationship between consciousness--that is to say, what I think I am thinking from minute to minute--and the unconscious, which perpetually in one way or another unsettles what I'm thinking and saying from minute to minute. You know that in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud reminded us that the Freudian slip isn't something that happens just sometimes--and nobody knows this better than an ad libbing lecturer--;it's something that happens all the time. The Freudian slip is something that one lives with simply as a phenomenon of the slippage of consciousness under the influence of the unconscious.

Now in the passage I gave you, Freud says a very interesting thing, which is that after all, we have absolutely no objective evidence that the unconscious exists. If I could see the unconscious, it'd be conscious. Right. The unconscious, Freud is saying, is something that we have to infer from the way consciousness operates. We've got to infer something. We've got to figure out somehow how it is that consciousness is never completely uninhibited, never completely does and says what it wants to say. So the spin on consciousness for Freud is the unconscious.

Now someone who didn't fully believe Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, a very important modern philosopher in the hermeneutic tradition named Paul Ricoeur, famously said in the fourth passage on your sheet that these great precursors of modern thought--and particularly, I would immediately add, of modern literary theory--together dominate a "school of suspicion." There is in other words in Ricoeur's view a hermeneutics of suspicion, and "skepticism" or "suspicion" is a word that can also be appropriated perhaps more rigorously for philosophy as negativity. That is to say, whatever seems manifest or obvious or patent in what we are looking at is undermined for this kind of mind by a negation which is counterintuitive: that is to say, which would seem not just to qualify what we understand ourselves to be looking at but to undermine it altogether. And these tendencies in the way in which Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have been received have been tremendously influential. When we read Foucault's "What is an Author?"next time we'll return to this question of how Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have been received and what we should make of that in view of Foucault's idea that--well, not that there's no such thing as an author but that it's rather dangerous to believe that there are authors. So if it's dangerous to believe that there are authors, what about Marx, Nietzsche and Freud? Foucault confronts this question in "What is an Author?"and gives us some interesting results of his thinking. For us, the aftermath even precisely of the passages I have just quoted, but certainly of the *oeuvre* of the three authors I have quoted from, can to a large degree be understood as accounting for our topic--the phenomenon of literary theory as we study it. In other words, literary theory, because of the influence of these figures, is to a considerable degree a hermeneutics of suspicion recognized as such both by its proponents and famously--I think this is perhaps what is historically remote for you--by its enemies.

During the same period when I was first teaching this course, a veritable six-foot shelf of diatribes against literary theory was being written in the public sphere. You can take or leave literary theory, fine, but the idea that there would be such an incredible outcry against it was one of the most fascinating results of it. That is to say for many, many, many people literary theory had something to do with the end of civilization as we know it. That's one of the things that seems rather strange to us today from an historical perspective: that the undermining of foundational knowledge which seemed to be part and parcel of so much that went on in literary theory was seen as the central crucial threat to rationality emanating from the academy and was attacked in those terms in, as I say, at least six feet of lively polemics. All of that is the legacy of literary theory, and as I say, it arises in part from the element of skepticism that I thought it best to emphasize today.

Now I think that one thing Ricoeur leaves out, and something that we can anticipate as becoming more and more important for literary theory and other kinds of theory in the twenty-first century, is Darwin. That is to say, it strikes me that Darwin could very easily be considered a fourth hermeneut of suspicion. Of course, Darwin was not interested in suspicion but he was certainly the founder of ways of thinking about consciousness that are determined, socio-biologically determined: determined in the realm of cognitive science, determined as artificial intelligence, and so on. All of this is Darwinian thinking and, I think, increasingly will be central in importance in the twenty-first century. What will alter the shape of literary theory as it was known and studied in the twentieth century is, I think, an increasing emphasis on cognitive science and socio-biological approaches both to literature and to interpretive processes that will derive from Darwin in the same way that strands of thinking of the twentieth century derive from the three figures that I've mentioned.

But what all this gives rise to--and this brings me finally to the passages which you have on both sides of your sheet and which I don't want to take up today but just to preview--the passages from Henry James' *Ambassadors* from 1903, and from Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* from1904. In other words, I am at pains to remind you that this is a specific historical moment in which, in a variety of ways, in each case the speaker argues that consciousness--that is to say, the feeling of being alive and being someone acting in the world--no longer involves agency: the feeling that somehow to be conscious has become to be a puppet, that there is a limitation on what we can do, imposed by the idea that consciousness is determined in ways that we cannot control and cannot get the better of, so that Strether in *The Ambassadors* and Yepihodov in *The Cherry Orchard* speak for a point of view which is a kind of partially well-informed gloom and doom that could be understood to anticipate texts that are much better informed, that we will be considering but nevertheless are especially important as an aspect of their historical moment. I want to begin the next lecture by taking up those passages. Please do bring them, and I will also be passing around *Tony the Tow Truck* and I'll give you a brief description of what the little children's book actually looks like, and then we will plunge in to the question "What is an author?" So I'll see you on Thursday.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 2 Transcript**

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| January 15, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Last time we introduced the way in which the preoccupation with literary and other forms of theory in the twentieth century is shadowed by a certain skepticism, but as we were talking about that we actually introduced another issue which isn't quite the same as the issue of skepticism--namely, determinism. In other words, we said that in intellectual history, first you get this movement of concern about the distance between the perceiver and the perceived, a concern that gives rise to skepticism about whether we can know things as they really are. But then as a kind of aftermath of that movement in figures like Marx, Nietzsche and Freud--and you'll notice that Foucault reverts to such figures when he turns to the whole question of "founders of discursivity," we'll come back to that--in figures like that, you get the further question of not just how we can know things in themselves as they really are but how we can trust the autonomy of that which knows: in other words, how we can trust the autonomy of consciousness if in fact there's a chance--a good chance, according to these writers--that it is in turn governed by, controlled by, hidden powers or forces. This question of determinism is as important in the discourse of literary theory as the question of skepticism. They're plainly interrelated in a variety of ways, but it's more to the question of determinism I want to return today.

Now last time, following Ricoeur, I mentioned Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as key figures in the sort of secondary development that somehow inaugurates theory, and then I added Darwin. It seems particularly important to think of Darwin when we begin to think about the ways in which in the twentieth century, a variety of thinkers are concerned about human agency--that is to say, what becomes of the idea that we have autonomy, that we can act or at least that we can act with a sense of integrity and not just with a sense that we are being pulled by our strings like a puppet. In the aftermath of Darwin in particular, our understanding of natural selection, our understanding of genetic hard-wiring and other factors, makes us begin to wonder in what sense we can consider ourselves, each of us, to be autonomous subjects. And so, as I say, the question of agency arises.

It's in that context, needless to say, that I'd like to take a look at these two interesting passages on the sheet that has Anton Chekhov on one side and Henry James on the other. Let's begin with the Chekhov. *The Cherry Orchard*,you know, is about the threat owing to socioeconomic conditions, the conditions that do ultimately lead to the Menshevik Revolution of 1905, to a landed estate, and the perturbation and turmoil into which the cast of characters is thrown by this threat. Now one of the more interesting characters, who is not really a protagonist in the play for class reasons, is a house servant named Yepihodov, and Yepihodov is a character who is, among other things, a kind of autodidact. That is to say, he has scrambled into a certain measure of knowledge about things. He is full of a kind of understandable self-pity, and his speeches are in some ways more characteristic of the gloomy intellectual *milieu* that is reflected in Chekhov's text really than almost anyone else's.

I want to quote to you a couple of them. Toward the bottom of the first page, he says, "I'm a cultivated man. I read all kinds of remarkable books and yet I can never make out what direction I should take, what it is that I want, properly speaking." As I read, pay attention to the degree to which he's constantly talking about language and about the way in which he himself is inserted into language. He's perpetually seeking a mode of properly speaking. He is a person who is somewhat knowledgeable about books, feels himself somehow to be caught up in the matrix of book learning--in other words, a person who is very much preoccupied with his conditioning by language, not least when perhaps unwittingly he alludes to *Hamlet*. "Should I live or should I shoot myself?"--properly speaking, "To be or not to be?" In other words, he inserts himself into the dramatic tradition to which as a character he himself belongs and shows himself to be in a debased form derived from one of those famous charismatic moments in which a hero utters a comparable concern.

So in all sorts of ways, in this simple passage we find a character who's caught up in the snare--if I can put it that way--the snare of language. To continue, he says at the top of the next page, "Properly speaking and letting other subjects alone, I must say"--everything in terms of what other discourse does and what he himself can say, and of course, it's mainly about "me"--"regarding myself among other things, that fate treats me mercilessly as a storm treats a small boat." And the end of the passage is, "Have you read Buckle?" Now Buckle is a forgotten name today, but at one time he was just about as famous as Oswald Spengler who wrote *The Decline of the West.* He was a Victorian historian preoccupied with the dissolution of Western civilization. In other words, Buckle was the avatar of the notion in the late nineteenth century that everything was going to hell in a handbasket. One of the texts that Yepihodov has read that in a certain sense determines him is Buckle. "Have you read Buckle? I wish to have a word with you Avdotya Fyodorovna." In other words, I'm arguing that the saturation of these speeches with signs of words, language, speaking, words, books, is just the dilemma of the character. That is to say, he is in a certain sense book- and language-determined, and he's obscurely aware that this is his problem even as it's a source of pride for him.

Turning then to a passage in a very different tone from James's *Ambassadors.* An altogether charming character, the elderly Lambert Strether, who has gone to--most of you know--has gone to Paris to bring home the young Chad Newsome, a relative who is to take over the family business, the manufacture of an unnamed household article in Woollett, Massachusetts, probably toilet paper. In any case, Lambert Strether, as he arrives in Paris, has awakened to the sheer wonder of urbane culture. He recognizes that he's missed something. He's gone to a party given by a sculptor, and at this party he meets a young man named Little Bilham whom he likes, and he takes Little Bilham aside by the lapel, and he makes a long speech to him, saying, "Don't do what I have done. Don't miss out on life. Live all you can. It is a mistake not to. And this is why," he goes on to say, "the affair, I mean the affair of life"--it's as though he's anticipating the affair of Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet, which is revealed at the end of the text--"couldn't, no doubt, have been different for me for it's"--"it" meaning life--"[life is] at the best a tin mold either fluted or embossed with ornamental excrescences or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness, is poured so that one takes the form, as the great cook says"--the great cook, by the way, is Brillat-Savarin--"one takes the form, as the great cook says, and is more or less compactly held by it. One lives, in fine, as one can. Still one has the illusion of freedom."

Here is where Strether says something very clever that I think we can make use of. He says, "Therefore, don't be like me without the memory of that illusion. I was either at the right time too stupid or too intelligent to have it. I don't quite know which." Now if he was too stupid to have it, then of course he would have been liberated into the realm of action. He would have been what Nietzsche in an interesting precursor text calls "historical man." He simply would have plunged ahead into life as though he had freedom, even though he was too stupid to recognize that it was an illusion. On the other hand, if he was too intelligent to, as it were, bury the illusion and live as though he were free, if he was too intelligent to do that, he's a kind of an avatar of the literary theorist--in other words, the sort of person who can't forget long enough that freedom is an illusion in order to get away from the preoccupations that, as I've been saying, characterize a certain kind of thinking in the twentieth century. And it's rather charming at the last that he says--because how can we know anything--"I don't quite know which."

That, too, strikes me as a helpful and also characteristic passage that can introduce us to today's subject, which is the loss of authority: that is to say, in Roland Barthes' terms, "the death of the author," and in Foucault's terms, the question "What is an author?" In other words, in the absence of human agency, the first sacrifice for literary theory is the author, the idea of the author. That's what will concern us in this second, still introductory lecture to this course. We'll get into the proper or at least more systematic business of the course when we turn to hermeneutics next week.

Now let me set the scene. This is Paris. It wouldn't have to be Paris. It could be Berkeley or Columbia or maybe Berlin. It's 1968 or '69, spilling over in to the seventies. Students and most of their professors are on the barricades, that is to say in protest not only against the war in Vietnam but the outpouring of various forms of authoritative resistance to protest that characterized the sixties. There is a ferment of intellectual revolt which takes all sorts of forms in Paris but is first and foremost perhaps organized by what quickly in this country became a bumper sticker: "Question authority." This is the framework in which the then most prominent intellectual in France writes an essay at the very peak of the student uprising, entitled "What is an Author?" and poses an answer which is by no means straightforward and simple. You're probably a little frustrated because maybe you sort of anticipated what he was going to say, and then you read it and you said, "Gee, he really isn't saying that. In fact, I don't quite know what he is saying" and struggled more than you're expected to because you anticipated what I've just been saying about the setting and about the role of Foucault and all the rest of it, and were possibly more confused than you might have expected to be. Yet at the same time, you probably thought "Oh, yeah, well, I did come out pretty much in the place I expected to come out in despite the roundabout way of having gotten there." Because this lecture is introductory, I'm not going to spend a great deal of time explicating the more difficult moments in his argument. I am going to emphasize what you perhaps did anticipate that he would say, so that can take us along rather smoothly.

There is an initial issue. Because we're as skeptical about skepticism as we are about anything else we're likely to raise our eyebrows and say, "Hmm. Doesn't this guy Foucault think he's an author? You know, after all, he's a superstar. He's used to being taken very seriously. Does he want to say that he's just an author function, that his textual field is a kind of set of structural operations within which one can discover an author? Does he really want to say this?" Well, this is the question raised by the skeptic about skepticism or about theory and it's one that we're going to take rather seriously, but we're going to come back to it because there are ways, it seems to me, of keeping this question at arm's length. In other words, Foucault is up to something interesting, and probably we should meet him at least halfway to see, to measure, the degree of interest we may have in it. So yes, there is the question--there is the fact that stands before u--that this very authoritative-sounding person seems to be an author, right? I never met anybody who seemed more like an author than this person, and yet he's raising the question whether there is any such thing, or in any case, the question how difficult it is to decide what it is if there is.

Let me digress with an anecdote which may or may not sort of help us to understand the delicacy of this relationship between a star author, a person undeniably a star author, and the atmosphere of thought in which there is, in a certain sense, no such thing as an author. An old crony and former colleague of mine was taking a course at Johns Hopkins in the 1960s. This was a time when Hopkins led all American universities in the importing of important European scholars, and it was a place of remarkable intellectual ferment. This particular lecture course was being given by Georges Poulet, a so-called phenomenological critic. That's one of the "isms" we aren't covering in this seminar. In any case, Poulet was also a central figure on the scene of the sixties. Poulet would be lecturing along, and the students had somehow formed a habit of from time to time--by the way, you can form this habit, too--of raising their hand, and what they would do is they would utter a name--at least this is what my friend noticed. They would raise their hand and they would say, "Mallarmé." And Poulet would look at them and say, "Mais, oui! Exactement! A mon avis aussi!" And then he would go on and continue to lecture for a while. Then somebody else would raise his hand and say, "Proust." "Ah, précisément! Proust. Proust." And then he'd continue along. So my friend decided he'd give it a try [laughter] and he raised his hand and he said, "Voltaire," and Poulet said "Quoi donc… Je ne vous comprends pas," and then paused and hesitated and continued with his lecture as though my friend had never asked his question. 17:17

Now this is a ritual of introducing names, and in a certain sense, yes, the names of authors, the names of stars; but at the same time, plainly names that stand for something other than their mere name, names that stand for domains or fields of interesting discursivity: that is to say--I mean, Poulet was the kind of critic who believed that the *oeuvre* of an author was a totality that could be understood as a structural whole, and his criticism worked that way. And so yes, the signal that this field of discursivity is on the table is introduced by the name of the author but it remains just a name. It's an author without authority, yet at the same time it's an author who stands for, whose name stands for, an important field of discourse. That's of course what my friend--because he knew perfectly well that when he said "Voltaire," Poulet would [laughs] have nothing to do with it--that's the idea that my friend wanted to experiment with. There are relevant and interesting fields of discourse and there are completely irrelevant fields of discourse, and some of these fields are on the sides of angelic discourse and some of these fields are on the side of the demonic. We simply, kind of spontaneously, make the division.

Discursivity, discourse: that's what I forgot to talk about last time. When I said that sometimes people just ultimately throw up their hands when they try to define literature and say, "Well, literature's just whatever you say it is. Fine. Let's just go ahead," they are then much more likely, rather than using the word "literature," to use the word "discourse" or "textual field," "discursivity." You begin to hear, or perhaps smell, the slight whiff of jargon that pervades theoretical writing. It often does so for a reason. This is the reason one hears so much about discourse. Simply because of doubt about the generic integrity of various forms of discourse. One can speak hesitantly of literary discourse, political discourse, anthropological discourse, but one doesn't want to go so far as to say literature, political science, anthropology. It's a habit that arises from the sense of the permeability of all forms of utterance with respect to each other, and that habit, as I say, is a breakdown of the notion that certain forms of utterance can be understood as a delimited, structured field.

One of the reasons this understanding seems so problematic is the idea that we don't appeal to the authority of an author in making our mind about the nature of a given field of discourse. We find the authority of the author instead somewhere within the textual experience. The author is a signal, is what Foucault calls a "function." By the way, this isn't at all a question of the author not existing. Yes, Barthes talks about the death of the author, but even Barthes doesn't mean that the author is dead like Nietzsche's God. The author is there, sure. It's a question rather of how we know the author to be there, firstly, and secondly, whether or not in attempting to determine the meaning of a text--and this is something we'll be talking about next week--we should appeal to the authority of an author. If the author is a function, that function is something that appears, perhaps problematically appears, within the experience of the text, something we get in terms of the speaker, the narrator, or--in the case of plays--as the inferred orchestrator of the text: something that we infer from the way the text unfolds. So as a function and not as a subjective consciousness to which we appeal to grasp a meaning, the author still does exist.

So we consider a text as a structured entity, or perhaps as an entity which is structured and yet at the same time somehow or another passes out of structure--that's the case with Roland Barthes. Here I want to appeal to a couple of passages. I want to quote from the beginning of Roland Barthes' essay, which I know I only suggested, but I'm simply going to quote the passage so you don't have to have read it, *The Death of the Author.* It's on page 874 for those of you who have your texts, as I hope you do. Barthes, while writing this--he's writing what has perhaps in retrospect seemed to be his most important book, it's called *S/Z.* It's a huge book which is all about this short story by Balzac, "Sarrasine," that he begins this essay by quoting. This is what he says here about "Sarrasine":

In his story "Sarrasine" Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: "*This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings and her delicious sensibility.*" [Barthes says,] "Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing "literary" ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject [and this is a deliberate pun] slips away ["our subject" meaning that we don't quite know what's being talked about sometimes, but also and more importantly the subject, the authorial subject, the actual identity of the given speaking subject--that's what slips away] the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

So that's a shot fired across the bow against the author because it's Barthes' supposition that the author isn't maybe even quite an author function because that function may be hard to identify in a discrete way among myriad other functions.

Foucault, who I think does take for granted that a textual field is more firmly structured than Barthes supposes, says on page 913 that when we speak of the author function, as opposed to the author--and here I begin quoting at the bottom of the left-hand column on page 913--when we speak in this way we no longer raise the questions:

"How can a free subject penetrate the substance of things and give it meaning? How can it activate the rules of a language from within and thus give rise to the designs which are properly own--its own?"

In other words, we no longer say, "How does the author exert autonomous will with respect to the subject matter being expressed?" We no longer appeal, in other words, to the authority of the author as the source of the meaning that we find in the text.

Foucault continues,

Instead, these questions will be raised: "How, under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules?" In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute)… [That is to say, when we speak in this way of an author function,] it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) [a character, for example, or a speaker, as we say when we don't mean that it's the poet talking but the guy speaking in *"My Last Duchess"* or whatever] of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.

"The subject" here always means the subjectivity of the speaker, right, not the subject matter. You'll get used to it because it's a word that does a lot of duty, and you need to develop context in which you recognize that well, yeah, I'm talking about the human subject or well, I'm talking about the subject matter; but I trust that you will quickly kind of adjust to that difficulty.

All right. So with this said, it's probably time to say something in defense of the author. I know that you wish you could stand up here and say something in defense of the author, so I will speak in behalf of all of you who want to defend the author by quoting a wonderful passage from Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*,in which he explains for us why it is that we have always paid homage to the authority of the author. It's not just a question, as obviously Foucault and Barthes are always suggesting, of deferring to authority as though the authority were the police with a baton in its hand, right? It's not a question of deferring to authority in that sense. It's a question, rather, of affirming what we call the human spirit.

This is what Johnson says:

There is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the inquiry, how far man may extend his designs or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance, curiosity is always busy to discover the instruments as well as to survey the workmanship, to know how much is to be ascribed to original powers and how much to casual and adventitious help.

So what Johnson is saying is: well, it's all very well to consider a textual field, the workmanship, but at the same time we want to remind ourselves of our worth. We want to say, "Well, gee, that wasn't produced by a machine. That's not just a set of functions--variables, as one might say in the lab. It's produced by genius. It's something that allows us to rate human ability high." And that, especially in this vale of tears--and Johnson is very conscious of this being a vale of tears--that's what we want to keep doing. We want to rate human potential as high as we can, and it is for that reason in a completely different spirit, in the spirit of homage rather than cringing fear, that we appeal to the authority of an author.

Well, that's an argument for the other side, but these are different times. This is 1969, and the purpose that's alleged for appealing to the author as a paternal source, as an authority, is, according to both Barthes and Foucault, to police the way texts are read. In other words, both of them insist that the appeal to the author--as opposed to the submersion of the author in the functionality of the textual field--is a kind of delimitation or policing of the possibilities of meaning.

Let me just read two texts to that effect, first going back to Roland Barthes on page 877. Barthes says, "Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile." By the way, once again there's a bit of a rift there between Barthes and Foucault. Foucault wouldn't say "quite futile." He would say, "Oh, no. We can decipher it, but the author function is just one aspect of the deciphering process." But Barthes has entered a phase of his career in which you actually think that structures are so complex that they cease to be structures and that this has a great deal to do with the influence of deconstruction. We'll come back to that much later in the course.

In any case, he continues.

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism [and criticism is a lot like policing, right--"criticism" means being a critic, criticizing] very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is "explained"--a victory to the critic.

In other words, the policing of meaning has been accomplished and the critic wins, just as in the uprisings of the late sixties, the cops win. This is, again, the atmosphere in which all of this occurs--just then to reinforce this with the pronouncement of Foucault at the bottom of page 913, right-hand column: "The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning."

Now once again, there is this sort of the skepticism about skepticism. You say, "Why shouldn't I fear the proliferation of meaning? I want to know what something definitely means. I don't want to know that it means a million things. I'm here to learn what things mean in so many words. I don't want to be told that I could sit here for the rest of my life just sort of parsing one sentence. Don't tell me about that. Don't tell me about these complicated sentences from Balzac's short story. I'm here to know what things mean. I don't care if it's policing or not. Whatever it is, let's get it done." That, of course, is approaching the question of how we might delimit meaning in a very different spirit. The reason I acknowledge the legitimacy of responding in this way is that to a certain extent the preoccupation with--what shall we say?--the misuse of the appeal to an author is very much of its historical moment. That is to say, when one can scarcely say the word "author" without thinking "authority," and one can definitely never say the word "authority" without thinking about the police. This is a structure of thought that perhaps pervades the lives of many of us to this day and has always pervaded the lives of many people, but is not quite as hegemonic in our thinking today perhaps as it was in the moment of these essays by Barthes and Foucault.

All right. With all this said, how can the theorist recuperate honor for certain names like, for example, his own? "All right. It's all very well. You're not an author, but I secretly think I'm an author, right?" Let's suppose someone were dastardly enough to harbor such thoughts. How could you develop an argument in which a thought like that might actually seem to work? After all, Foucault--setting himself aside, he doesn't mention himself--Foucault very much admires certain writers. In particular, he admires, like so many of his generation and other generations, Marx and Freud. It's a problem if we reject the police-like authority of authors, of whom we may have a certain suspicion on those grounds, when we certainly don't feel that way about Marx and Freud. What's the difference then? How is Foucault going to mount an argument in which privileged authors--that is to say, figures whom one cites positively and without a sense of being policed--can somehow or another stay in the picture?

Foucault, by the way, doesn't mention Nietzsche, but he might very well because Nietzsche's idea of "genealogy" is perhaps the central influence on Foucault's work. Frankly, I think it's just an accident that he doesn't mention him. It would have been a perfect symmetry because last time we quoted Paul Ricoeur to the effect that these authors, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, were--and this is Ricoeur's word--"masters." Whoa! That's the last thing we want to hear. They're not masters. Foucault couldn't possibly allow for that because plainly the whole texture of their discourse would be undermined by introducing the notion that it's okay to be a master, and yet Ricoeur feels that these figures dominate modern thought as masters.

How does Foucault deal with this? He invents a concept. He says, "They aren't authors. They're founders of discursivity," and then he grants that it's kind of difficult to distinguish between a founder of discursivity and an author who has had an important influence. Right? And then he talks about the gothic novel and he talks about Radcliffe's, Anne Radcliffe's--he's wrong about this, by the way. The founder of discursivity in the gothic novel is not Anne Radcliffe; it's Horace Walpole, but that's okay--he talks about Anne Radcliffe as the person who establishes certain tropes, *topoi*,and premises that govern the writing of gothic fiction for the next hundred years and, indeed, even in to the present, so that she is, Foucault acknowledges, in a certain sense a person who establishes a way of talking, a way of writing, a way of narrating. But at the same time she isn't a person, Foucault claims, who introduces a discourse or sphere of debate within which ideas, without being attributable necessarily, can nevertheless be developed. Well, I don't know. It seems to me that literary influence is not at all unlike sort of speaking or writing in the wake of a founder of discursivity, but we can let that pass.

On the other hand, Foucault is very concerned to distinguish figures like this from scientists like Galileo and Newton. Now it is interesting, by the way, maybe in defense of Foucault, that whereas we speak of people as Marxist or Freudian, we don't speak of people as Radcliffian or Galilean or Newtonian. We use the adjective "Newtonian" but we don't speak of certain writers who are still interested in quantum mechanics as "Newtonian writers." That's interesting in a way, and may somehow or another justify Foucault's understanding of the texts of those author functions known as Marx and Freud--whose names might be raised in Poulet's lecture class with an enthusiastic response--as place holders for those fields of discourse. It may, in some sense, reinforce Foucault's argument that these are special inaugurations of debate, of developing thought, that do not necessarily *kowtow* to the originary figure--certainly debatable, but we don't want to pause over it in the case either of Marx or of Freud. Plainly, there are a great many people who think of them as tyrants, right, but within the traditions that they established, it is very possible to understand them as instigating ways of thinking without necessarily presiding over those ways of thinking authoritatively. That is the special category that Foucault wants to reserve for those privileged figures whom he calls founders of discursivity.

All right. Very quickly then to conclude: one consequence of the death of the author, and the disappearance of the author into author function is, as Foucault curiously says in passing on page 907, that the author has no legal status. And you say, "What? What about copyright? What about intellectual property? That's a horrible thing to say, that the author has no legal status." Notice once again the intellectual context. Copyright arose as a bourgeois idea. That is to say, "I possess my writing. I have an ownership relationship with my writing." The disappearance of the author, like a kind of corollary disappearance of bourgeois thought, entails, in fact, a kind of bracketing of the idea of copyright or intellectual property. And so there's a certain consistency in what Foucault is saying about the author having no legal status.

But maybe at this point it really is time to dig in our heels. "I am a lesbian Latina. I stand before you as an author articulating an identity for the purpose of achieving freedom, not to police you, not to deny your freedom, but to find my own freedom. And I stand before you precisely, and in pride, as an author. I don't want to be called an author function. I don't want to be called an instrument of something larger than myself because frankly that's what I've always been, and I want precisely as an authority through my authorship to remind you that I am not anybody's instrument but that I am autonomous and free."

In other words, the author, the traditional idea of the author--so much under suspicion in the work of Foucault and Barthes in the late sixties--can be turned on its ear. It can be understood as a source of new-found authority, of the freedom of one who has been characteristically not free and can be received by a reading community in those terms. It's very difficult to think how a Foucault might respond to that insistence, and it's a problem that in a way dogs everything, or many of the things we're going to be reading during the course of this semester--even within the sorts of theorizing that are characteristically called cultural studies and concern questions of the politics of identity. Even within those disciplines there is a division of thought between people who affirm the autonomous integrity and individuality of the identity in question and those who say any and all identities are only subject positions discernible and revealed through the matrix of social practices. There is this intrinsic split even within those forms of theory--and not to mention the kinds of theory that don't directly have to do with the politics of identity--between those for whom what's at stake is the discovery of autonomous individuality and those for whom what's at stake is the tendency to hold at arm's length such discoveries over against the idea that the instability of any and all subject positions is what actually contains within it--as Foucault and Barthes thought as they sort of sat looking at the police standing over against them--those for whom this alternative notion of the undermining of any sense of that which is authoritative is in its turn a possible source, finally, of freedom. These sorts of vexing issues, as I say, in all sorts of ways will dog much of what we read during the course of this semester.

All right. So much for the introductory lectures which touch on aspects of the materials that we'll keep returning to. On Tuesday we'll turn to a more specific subject matter: hermeneutics, what hermeneutics is, how we can think about the nature of interpretation. Our primary text will be the excerpt in your book from Hans-Georg Gadamer and a few passages that I'll be handing out from Martin Heidegger and E.D. Hirsch.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 3 Transcript**

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| January 22, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** All right. Let's hope we can free our minds of these matters now and turn to something a little more substantive, which is the question--before we plunge in to Gadamer really: what is hermeneutics? Well, what it is is easily enough explained despite the sort of difficulty and thorniness of the word. It is the art or principles of interpretation.

But hermeneutics has a history; that is to say, it's not something which has always just been there. It's not something that people have always thought about in a systematic way. Strictly speaking, what I have just said isn't true. Many of you probably know that Aristotle has a treatise called *De Interpretatione.* The Middle Ages are rife with treatises on interpretation. I suppose what I'm really saying is that the word "hermeneutics" wasn't available, and the idea that there ought to be a sort of a systematic study of how we interpret things wasn't really current.

Of course, by the same token the notion of hermeneutics arises primarily in religion first, specifically in the Christian tradition, but that isn't to say that there hasn't been, that there wasn't long before the moment at which hermeneutics became important in Christianity, that there wasn't centuries' worth of Talmudic scholarship which is essentially also hermeneutic in nature--that is, to say concerned with the art and basis of interpretation.

What gave rise in the Western world to what is called "hermeneutics" was in fact the Protestant Reformation. And there's a lot of significance in that, I think, and I'll try to explain why. You don't really puzzle your head about questions of interpretation, how we determine the validity of interpretation and so on, until A) meaning becomes terribly important to you, and B) the ascertainment of meaning becomes difficult. You may say to yourself, "Well, isn't it always the case that meaning is important and that meaning is hard to construe?" Well, not necessarily. If you are a person whose sacred scripture is adjudicated by the Pope and the occasional tribunal of church elders, you yourself don't really need to worry very much about what scripture means. You are told what it means. It goes without saying therefore what it means. But in the wake of the Protestant Reformation when the question of one's relationship with the Bible became personal and everyone was understood, if only through the local minister, to be engaged with coming to an understanding of what is after all pretty difficult--who on earth knows what the Parables mean and so on, and the whole of the Bible poses interpretative difficulties--then of course you are going to have to start worrying about how to interpret it. Needless to say, since it's a sacred scripture, the meaning of it is important to you. You do want to know what it means. It can't mean just anything. It's crucial to you to know exactly what it means and why what it means is important.

So as Protestantism took hold, by the same token the arts and sciences of hermeneutics took hold, and people began to write treatises about interpretation--but it was always interpretation of the Bible. In other words, in this tradition religion came first. After that, the next thing that happens is you begin to get the rise of constitutional democracies, and as you get that, you begin to become much more interested, as a citizen or as a person who has suffrage or as a person who in one way or another has the rights of the state or nation--you begin to become concerned about the nature of the laws you live under. That's why hermeneutics gradually moved--I should say, it didn't desert religion, but it expanded--to the study of the law. The arts and sciences that had been developed in thinking about interpreting scripture were then applied to the interpretation of something the meaning of which had become almost as important; that is to say, it mattered what the law was and how it was to be interpreted. You know of course that this is absolutely crucial to the study of the law to this day: what are the grounds for understanding the meaning of the Constitution, for example? There are widespread controversies about it, and many of the courses you would take in law school are meant to try to get to the bottom of these thorny questions. Well and good. Once again you see that hermeneutics enters a field when the meaning of something becomes more important and when that meaning is recognized to be difficult to grasp.

Now as yet we haven't said anything about literature, and the fact is there is no hermeneutic art devoted to literature during the early modern period and for most of the eighteenth century. Think about the writers you've studied from the eighteenth century. It's very interesting that they all just sort of take meaning for granted. If you think about Alexander Pope, for example, or even Samuel Johnson, as they reflect on literature and why it's important and what the nature of literature is, they aren't concerned about interpretation. They're concerned about evaluation, establishing the principles of what's at stake in writing a poem or in writing literature in some other form and raise questions that are largely moral and esthetic. They are not concerned about interpretation because to them, good writing is precisely writing that's clear, writing that doesn't need to be interpreted but has precisely as its virtue its transparency of meaning. In fact, during this whole period playwrights were writing prologues to their plays abusing each other for being obscure--that is to say, abusing each other for requiring interpretation. "I don't understand what your metaphors are all about. You don't know what a metaphor is. All you do is make one verbal mistake after another. Nobody can understand you." This is the nature of the prose and verse prefaces to theatrical pieces in the eighteenth century, and from that you can see that interpretation is not only not studied but is considered to be completely extraneous to what's valuable about literature. If you have to interpret it, it isn't any good.

Then as the eighteenth century wears on, you begin to get the sense-- with the emergence of Romanticism, as is well known and I think often overstated--you begin to get a cult of genius. You get the idea that everything arises from the extraordinary mental acuity or spiritual insight of an author and that what needs to be understood about literature is the genius of its production. Well, well and good, but at the same time, if that's the case, and if there is this extraordinary emphasis on the importance of the expression of genius, you can see what's beginning to happen. The literary creator starts to seem a lot more like the divine creator, that is to say, and in a certain sense could be understood as a placeholder for the divine creator. Remember that secularization in Western culture is increasing during the course of the Enlightenment--that is to say, during the course of the eighteenth century, and there's a certain way in which Romanticism and what's important about Romanticism can be understood as what Northrop Frye has called a "secular scripture." In other words, the meaning of literature becomes more difficult because it's profoundly subjective and no longer engaged with the shared values that had made for the importance of literature; that is to say, our sense of why it's so important to understand it has also grown because for many people, it begins to take over partly at least the role of religion.

So with the rise of secular scripture--that is to say, literature imagined as something both terribly important and also difficult to understand--naturally the arts and sciences of hermeneutics begin to enter that field. In particular, the great theologian of the Romantic period, Friedrich Schleiermacher, devoted his career to principles of hermeneutics that were meant to be applied as much to literature as to the study of scripture, and established a tradition in which it was understood that literature was a central focus of hermeneutics.

So much then for the history of hermeneutics. What followed was the work of Wilhelm Dilthey around the turn of the century, of Heidegger in his *Being and Time* of1927, of Gadamer who in many ways can be understood as a disciple and student of Heidegger; and a tradition which persists today follows from the initial engagements of Schleiermacher during the Romantic period with literature.

All right. So what is the basic problematic for hermeneutics in this tradition? It's what we probably all have heard about and something that I will briefly try to describe, what's called the hermeneutic circle. So what is the hermeneutic circle? It's a relationship between a reader and a text or--as is the case for certain kinds of students of hermeneutics but not Gadamer, I think--of a relationship between a reader and an author: in other words a relationship which is understood to aim at understanding the intention of an author. The author of the fourth quotation on your sheet for today, E. D. Hirsch, belongs in that tradition and understands the hermeneutic circle as a relationship between a reader and an author where the text is a kind of a mediatory document containing the meaning of the author.

But for Gadamer and his tradition, it's a little different. It can be understood as the relationship between a reader and a text, and this can be put in a variety of ways. It's often put in terms of the relationship between the part and the whole. I approach a text and of course the first thing I read is a phrase or a sentence. There's still a lot more of the text and so that first fragment a *part*, but I immediately begin to form an opinion about this part with respect to an imagined or supposed whole. Then, I use this sense I have of what the whole must be like to continue to read successive parts--lines, sentences, whatever they may be. I keep referring those successive parts back to a sense of the whole which changes as a result of knowing more and more and more parts. The circularity of this interpretative engagement has to do with moving back and forth between a certain preconception about the whole that I form from studying a part, moving then to the part, back to the whole, back to the part, back to the whole and so on in a circular pattern.

This can also be understood as a relationship between the present and the past--that is to say, my particular historical horizon and some other historical horizon that I'm trying to come to terms with, so that I refer back and forth to what I know about the world before I engage the text; what the text seems to be saying in relation to that which I know, how it might change my sense of what I know by referring back from what I know continuously to an understanding of the way in which the past text speaks. Finally of course, because hermeneutics isn't just something that takes place across an historical gulf--because it also can take place across a social or cultural gulf, or maybe not even very much of a gulf--when we engage each other in conversation, we are still performing a hermeneutic act. I have to try to understand what you're saying and I have to refer it to what I want to say, and the circuit of communication between us has to stay open as a result of this mutual and developing understanding of what we're talking about. It's the same thing, of course, with conversations across cultures. So understand that hermeneutics isn't necessarily about, as Gadamer would put it, merging historical horizons. It's also about merging social and cultural and interpersonal horizons and it applies to all of those spheres.

All right. Now the hermeneutic circle, then, involves this reference back and forth between the entities that I've been trying to describe. Let's just quickly--and here we begin to move in to the text--listen to Gadamer's version of how the circularity of this thinking works. This is on page 722 toward the bottom of the left-hand column.

The reader [Gadamer's word is 'he'] projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. [In other words, as soon as he sees what the part is like, he projects or imagines what the whole must be that contains this part.] Again the latter [that is to say, the sense of the initial meaning] emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project [that is to say, the sense we have in advance of the meaning of what we are going to read] which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.

In other words, what is there--which is a kind of way of talking that Gadamer inherits from Heidegger--really has to do with what Gadamer means when he talks also about *die Sache*, the subject matter. In other words, the effort of a reader in coming to terms with the meaning of a text is an effort to master the subject matter, what is there, and--I suppose it's fair enough to say as a kind of paraphrase--what the text is really about. That's what Gadamer means when he says "what is there."

Anyway, you can see that in this passage on page 722, Gadamer is describing the circularity of our reading, and he's describing it in a way that may raise certain concerns for us. "What do you mean, a fore-structure or a fore-project or a fore-having? Can't I view this thing, as we might say, objectively?" In other words, aren't I going to be hopelessly prejudiced about what I read if I've got some sort of preliminary conception of what it's all about? Why don't I just set aside my preliminary conceptions so that I can understand precisely what is there? How am I ever going to understand what is there if I approach it with some sort of preliminary idea which I never really get rid of because each revision of what I think is there as a result of further reading nevertheless becomes in itself yet another fore-project or preliminary conception?" In other words, this way of thinking seems to suggest--to tell you the truth it does suggest--that you can't get away from preliminary conceptions about things.

This, of course, is disturbing and it's especially disturbing when you then get Heidegger and Gadamer insisting that even though there are always these preliminary conceptions--which Gadamer sort of boldly calls "prejudices," and we'll come back to that--even though there are always these preliminary conceptions, there nevertheless are, as Heidegger puts it, two ways into the circle. All right? A circle, in other words, is not necessarily a vicious circle. See, that's what you are tempted to conclude if you say, "I can never get away from preconceptions." All right? "I'm just going back and forth meaninglessly because I'm never going to get anyplace." Right? But Gadamer and Heidegger say, "No, that's not true. That's not true. A circle isn't at all necessarily vicious. The way into the circle can also be constructive." That is to say, you really can get someplace, and so you're entitled to say, "Well, okay. It can be constructive, but how can that be?"

Take a look at the second passage on your sheet from Heidegger, not the whole passage but just the first sentence of it where Heidegger says, "In an interpretation, the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of being." "Now wait a minute," you say. "If I'm just dealing in preconceptions here, how can I take anything from the entity itself?" Right? That's just what seems to be at risk if I can never get beyond my preconceptions.

Well, let me give you an example. I was going to do this later in the lecture but I feel like doing it now. In the eighteenth century, a poet named Mark Akenside wrote a long poem called *The Pleasures of the Imagination,* and in this poem there is the line "The great creator raised his plastic arm." Now let's say that we're into polymers. We know what plastic is. We have no concern or hesitation in saying what plastic is, and so we say, "Oh, gee. Well, I guess the great creator has a sort of a prosthetic limb and he raised it. All right. So that's what the sentence must mean." But then of course, if we know something about the horizon within which Akenside was writing his poem, we are aware that in the eighteenth century the word "plastic" meant "sinuous," "powerful," "flexible," and in that case of course, we immediately are able to recognize what Akenside meant, why it makes perfect sense. The great creator raised his sinuous, powerful, flexible arm, and we know where we stand.

Now notice this. In other words, this is an example of good and bad prejudice, right? The good prejudice is our prior awareness that plastic meant something different in the eighteenth century than it means now. And we bring that prejudice to bear on our interpretation of the line, then that is a constructive way into the circle according to Heidegger and Gadamer. The bad prejudice is when we leap to the conclusion, without thinking for a moment that there might be some other historical horizon, that we know what plastic means. The reason we can tell the difference, by the way, is that if we invoke the eighteenth-century meaning of plastic, we immediately see that the line makes perfect sense, that it's perfectly reasonable and not even particularly notable; but if we bring our own meaning to bear--that is to say our own sense of what the word "plastic" means--then of course the meaning of the line must be crazy. I mean, what on earth? Why would he be saying this about the great creator?

Now I think I'll come back to this example next week when we're talking about an essay called "The Intentional Fallacyby W.K. Wimsatt," and I will revisit the possibility that there might be some value in supposing that Akenside meant the great creator raised his prosthetic limb, but I'll leave that until next week. I think for the moment it should be plain to you that this is a good way of understanding what the difference between a useful preconception and a useless preconception brought to bear on an interpretative act might consist in.

All right. Now in giving the example, I've gotten a little bit ahead of myself, so let me reprise a bit. As you can tell from your reading of Gadamer--and of course, the title of the great book from which this excerpt is taken is *Truth and Method* or *Wahrheit und Methode,* with its implicit suggestion that there is a difference between truth and method--the great objection of Gadamer to other people's way of doing hermeneutics is that they believe that there is a methodology of interpretation. The basic methodology Gadamer is attacking in the excerpt you've read is what he calls historicism.

Now that's a tricky word for us because later in the semester we're going to be reading about something called the New Historicism, and the New Historicism actually has nothing to do with what Gadamer is objecting to in this form of historicism; so we will return to the New Historicism in that context. For the moment, what Gadamer means by "historicism" is this: the belief that you can set aside preconception, in other words that you can completely factor out your own subjectivity, your own view of things, your own historically conditioned point of view--I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said "historically conditioned," I mean your own point of view--that you can completely factor that out in order to enter into the mindset of some other time or place: that you can completely enter into the mind of another. This then is the object of historicizing and, as we'll see at the end of the lecture, there's a certain nobility about it to be juxtaposed with the nobility of Gadamerian hermeneutics. In the meantime, Gadamer is objecting to this because he says, you simply can't do this. You cannot factor out these preconceptions. All you can do, he says, is recognize that you do exist in, you do live in, you do think consciously within a certain horizon, recognize that you are coming face-to-face with another horizon, and try to bridge your horizon and the other horizon--in other words, to put it simply, to find common ground, to find some way of merging a present with a past: a here with a there, in such a way that results in what Gadamer calls *Horizontverschmelzung*, "horizon merger." This act of horizon merger has as its result what Gadamer calls "effective history," and by "effective history" he means history which is useful--that is to say, history which really can go to work for us and is not just a matter of accumulating an archive or distancing ourselves from the past.

I'll say again, somewhat in advance perhaps of the time I should say it, that Gadamer thinks that there's something immoral about historicism. Why? Because it condescends toward the past. It supposes that the past is simply a repository of information, and it never supposes for a minute that if we actually merge ourselves with the moment of the past, the past may be able to tell us something we ought to know--that is to say, it may be able actually to teach us something. Gadamer believes that historicism forgets the possibility of being taught something by past-ness or otherness.

Now I think in order to make this viewpoint seem plausible, we probably should study it for a moment a little bit more philosophically. That is to say, you're asking yourself, "Well, sure. You know what? I pride myself on this: I can factor out all forms of subjectivity. I really can be objective. I'm perfectly capable of understanding the past in and for itself without any contribution of my own, without, in short, any preconceptions." So let's look at a couple of passages from your sheet, from Heidegger's *Being and Time,* from his analytic of the hermeneutic circle, and see what Heidegger has to say about this claim. This is the first passage on your sheet. Heidegger says:

When we have to do with anything, the mere seeing of the things which are closest to us bears in itself the structure of interpretation and in so primordial a manner that just to grasp something free, as it were, of the "as" requires a certain adjustment. . .

What is Heidegger saying? He is saying, I stand here and I am just looking. I look back there and I'm just seeing that sign that says 'exit'. I'm not interpreting it. I don't have any preconception about it. I'm just looking. Right? No, Heidegger says, this is a total illusion. How do I know it's a sign? How do I know it says 'exit'? I bring a million preconceptions to bear on what I take to be a simple act of looking. And then Heidegger says, you know what? It's not at all uninteresting to imagine the possibility of just seeing something without seeing it as something. It would be kind of exhilarating, wouldn't it, to be able just to have something before us. Right? But he says, "You know what? That is well nigh impossible. It is in fact a very, very difficult and derivative act of the mind to try to forget that I am looking at a sign that says 'exit' and, in fact, just looking at what is there without knowing what it is. In other words, I don't *not* know first that that's a sign that says "exit." The very first thing I know is that it's a sign that says "exit." There's no prior act of consciousness. It's the very first thing that I know.

It's an interesting thought experiment to try not to know that that's a sign that says "exit." As Heidegger points out in this passage, that's a thought experiment which, if it can be done at all, derives from that prior knowledge. I always know something first *as* something. If I can just have it there before me, that is a very difficult and derivative intellectual act, and it cannot be understood as primordial or primitive. I am always already in possession of an interpretation of whatever object I look at, which isn't at all to say that my interpretation is correct. It's only to say that I can't escape the fact that the very first movement of mind, not the last movement but the first movement of mind, is interpretative. Right? We always see something as something, and that is precisely the act of interpretation. We can never just have it there before us or, as I say, if we can--if we can--it's a very, very difficult act of concentration.

Continue the passage: "This grasping which is free of the 'as' is a privation of the kind of seeing [and you see how attracted Heidegger is to it because he shifts his rhetoric] in which one merely understands." In other words, It would be an extraordinary thing not to understand, Heiddeger is saying. We can't help understanding. We always already understand, which has nothing to do again with whether or not we're right or wrong. We always already just necessarily do understand. It's a kind of imprisonment, understanding, and when Heidegger says, wouldn't it be great not to have to merely understand? right, he's saying, wouldn't it be great just to have it there before us? but he's also insisting that this is an incredibly difficult, if not impossible, moment of thought.

All right. So that's why--and this is perhaps the essential, the central passage, and I don't want to pause over it--but you can look at passage number three on your sheet, which says roughly again what Heidegger is saying in the first passage--that's why we must work always as interpreters with preconceptions, with fore-understandings.

Now what about this word "prejudice"? It is a sort of a problematic word. Gadamer is a bit apologetic about it, and he goes into the appropriate etymologies. The French *préjugé* and the German *Voruteil* all mean "prejudgment" or "prior judgment." They actually can be used in a court of law as a stage toward arriving at a verdict. They needn't be thought of as vulgar prejudices, one of which is in fact the "prejudice against prejudice." As Gadamer says, this is the characteristic idea of the Enlightenment: its prejudice against prejudice, that we can be objective, that we can free ourselves of--

Okay, fine. But prejudice is bad, we know prejudice is bad. We know what prejudice has wrought historically and socially, so how can we try to vindicate it in this way? It's extremely problematic.

What Gadamer does in his essay is actually an act of intellectual conservatism, it has to be admitted. That whole section of the essay in which he talks about classicism--and you may have said to yourself as you were reading it, "Well, gee, isn't this sort of digressive? What's he so interested in classicism for?"-- the whole section of the essay in which he's talking about classicism and which he later calls "tradition" is meant to suggest that we really can't merge horizons effectively unless we have a very broad and extensive common ground with what we're reading. The great thing about classicism for Gadamer, or what he calls "tradition," is that it's something we can share. The classical, Gadamer argues, is that which doesn't just speak to its own historical moment but speaks for all time, speaks to all of us in different ways but does speak to us--that is to say, does proffer its claim to speak true. The classical can do that.

"Okay, great," we say to Gadamer. "Certainly you're entitled to an intellectually conservative canon. Maybe other principles of hermeneutics will place much more stress on innovation or novelty or difference, but you're not sure people can understand unless they share a great deal of common ground." All well and good, but you know what? That's where the bad side of prejudice sneaks in. Slavery was considered perfectly appropriate and natural to a great many of the most exalted figures working within the tradition that Gadamer rightly calls classical--classical antiquity. A great many modern figures never stopped to question slavery. Slavery was an aspect of classical culture which had its defenses. Well, Gadamer doesn't talk about this obviously, but it is an aspect of that prejudice that one might share with tradition if one weren't somewhat more critical than this gesture of sharing might indicate. I just say that in passing to call your attention to it as a risk that's involved in our engagement with a hermeneutic project of the nature of Gadamer's. It's not to say that Gadamer favored slavery or anything of the sort. It is, however, to say that prejudice--while plainly we can understand it simply to mean preconception which is inescapable and can understand that philosophically--nevertheless can still be bad. We have to understand the way in which it's something that, if we're going to accept this point of view, we need to live with.

All right. So it is troublesome, and it's troublesome also, perhaps, in a variety of other ways that I won't go into. I think that what I'd like to do in the time remaining is to call your attention to two passages, one in Gadamer's text which I'm about to read and the other the fourth passage on your sheet by someone called E. D. Hirsch, whom you may actually know as the author of a dictionary of what every school child should know and as a sort of a champion of the intellectual right during the whole period when literary theory flourished, but a person who also is seriously invested in hermeneutics and conducted a lifelong feud with Gadamer about the principles of hermeneutics.

The two passages that I'm about to read juxtapose the viewpoints that I've been trying to evoke in describing Gadamer's position. The dignity and nobility of Gadamer is that it involves being interested in something true--that is to say, in hoping that there is an intimate relationship between meaning, arriving at meaning, and arriving at something that speaks to us as true. Hirsch, on the other hand, is evoking a completely different kind of dignity. What I want you to realize as we juxtapose these two passages is that it is impossible to reconcile them, and it poses for us a choice which, as people interested in interpretation, needs ultimately to be made and suggests perhaps differing forms of commitment.

Now the first passage is in Gadamer's text on page 735, the very bottom of the page, and then I'll be going over to page 736. Gadamer says, and here again he's attacking historicism:

The text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim that it is uttering something true. We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint, i.e., place ourselves in the historical situation and seek to reconstruct the historical horizon. [I've been attempting to summarize this position and so I trust that it's easily intelligible as I read it to you now.] In fact, however, we have given up the claim to find, in the past, any truth valid and intelligible for ourselves.

And, by the way, this would also apply to cultural conversation. If I'm proud of knowing that in another culture if I belch after dinner it's a compliment to the cook, right, and if I'm proud of knowing that without drawing any conclusions from it, that's sort of the equivalent of historicism. It's just a factoid for me. In other words, it's not an effort to come to terms with anything. It's not an effort to engage in dialogue. It's just historicizing otherness in a way that somehow or another satisfies my quest for information. So it's not just a question of the past, as I say and as I've said before. It's a question of cultural conversation as well.

Continuing:

Thus, this acknowledgment of the otherness of the other, which makes him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth.

This is a devastating and, I think, brilliant argument. I think it ought to remind us of what's at stake when we invoke the notion of objectivity. Implicit, according to Gadamer, in the notion of objectivity is an abandonment of the possibility of learning from the object, of learning from otherness. It only becomes a question of knowing the object, of knowing it in and for itself, in its own terms, and not at all necessarily of learning from it, of being spoken to by it.

All right, but now listen to Hirsch. All right? This is really a hard choice to make. [laughs] What Hirsch says, invoking Kant--rightly invoking Kant--is: "Kant held it to be a foundation of moral action that men should be conceived as ends in themselves, not as instruments of other men." In other words, you are an end and not a means to me unless in fact I'm exploiting you and instrumentalizing you. Right? That's Kant's position and that's what Hirsch is leaping to defend. This idea that I don't really care, or that I don't really think I can come to terms with the actual meaning of an entity as that entity, is instrumentalizing the entity. In other words, it's approaching it *for me*. This turns the whole idea of being open to the possibility that the other is speaking true--it turns it on its ear and says, Oh, no, no. You're just appropriating the other for yourself. Right? You're instrumentalizing the other. You're not taking it seriously as itself. That's Hirsch's response.

He continues:

This imperative is transferable to the words of men because speech is an extension and expression of men in the social domain and also because when we fail to conjoin a man's intention to his words, we lose the soul of speech, which is to convey meaning and to understand what is intended to be conveyed.

Notice that although the nobility of this alongside the nobility of Gadamer is obvious and painful [laughs] and really does seem to bring us to a crossroads where we really want to be Yogi Berra, right, and go in both directions--even though this is the case, notice one thing. Hirsch is not saying anything about truth. Right? He's talking about meaning--that's good--and he's making the notion of arriving at a correct meaning as honorific as he possibly can, but it is significant that he's not talking about truth. It's Gadamer who is talking about truth. For Hirsch the important thing is the meaning. For Gadamer the important thing is that the meaning be true, right, and that's where the distinction essentially lies. Gadamer is willing to sacrifice because of his belief in the inescapability of preconception. He's willing to sacrifice historical or cultural exactitude of meaning. He's willing to acknowledge that there's always something of me in my interpretation, but it's a good something because after all I am mindful of the horizon of otherness. I am not just saying "plastic" means "polymer," right, but nevertheless there's something of me in the interpretation.

Hirsch is saying, "There's nothing of me in the interpretation. Therefore, I am able to arrive accurately and objectively at the meaning of the other, and I honor the other by arriving with such accuracy at the meaning," but notice that truth isn't backing it up. It doesn't seem to be a question for Hirsch of whether the other speaks true. This is unfair to Hirsch, by the way, because truth actually is backing it up. All you need to do is read him and you will recognize that it does matter to Hirsch whether the other speaks true, but it's not implicit in the philosophical position he's taking up here. It's something that the philosophical position sacrifices.

Okay. So that's the basic distinction and, as I say, as far as I can see it's irreconcilable so it leaves us with a choice that really does have to be made, and it's a choice which looms over a course in literary theory and coming to understand the tradition of literary theory. Some will take one side, others will take another, and we'll find ourselves siding or not siding with them, at least in part for reasons that arise out of the distinction between these two positions that I've been making today.

We may or may not have the lecture on Iser, but on Tuesday we'll be getting into the varieties of formalism and first we'll take up the American New Criticism. All right. Thanks.

[end of transcript]

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 4 Transcript**

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| January 30, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So before we go on to talk a little bit about the American historicist hermeneutical scholar E. D. Hirsch, and then Wolfgang Iser--for whom you have your reading assignment--I want to go back to Gadamer a little bit and say something more about his taste, that is to say, the kind of literary and intellectual canon that his approach to hermeneutics establishes. You remember Gadamer is very much concerned with the norm of classicism, which later in his essay he is inclined to call "tradition" instead, and the reason that's so important to him is that he actually has a very conservative view of what the reader can accomplish in understanding another horizon. Gadamer, in other words, doesn't think that the reader can perform any great miracles in intuitively feeling his or her way into the mind of another time and place, so that the value of classicism and of tradition for Gadamer is that there is evident common ground in certain texts. Sometimes we refer to them as "great books"--in other words, the sort of text that speaks, or we feel as though it's speaking, to all places and times. Of course, it's contested whether or not there is really any merit in talking about texts that way. But Gadamer's view is very strongly that this conservatism about the canon, which is intimately related to his conservative doubt about the actual capability of a reader to span enormous gaps--and I use that word advisedly because it is the word that Iser uses to talk about the distance between the reader and the text, and the way in which that distance should be negotiated--so in any case this conservatism, it seems to me, however, can be questioned.

I thought that we'd begin then by turning to page 731, the left-hand column, the footnote. You're beginning to realize, I'm sure, that I like footnotes. Gibbon of course was said to have lived his life in his footnotes. Perhaps I live my life in the footnotes of other people. In any case, in this footnote Gadamer says something--I think it's very rare that we can actually just sort of outright disagree with Gadamer, but he says something in this footnote that I believe we can actually disagree with. Toward the bottom of the footnote, 731, left-hand column, he says, "… [J]ust as in conversation, we understand irony to the extent to which we are in agreement on the subject with the other person." We understand irony only, he means, to the extent to which we are in agreement with the other person. If you are expressing an opinion, in other words, which differs radically from my own, I can't understand, according to Gadamer, whether or not you're being ironic.

This seems to me to be just patently false. Think about politics. Think about political talk shows. Think about political campaigns. When our political opponent is being ironic about our views we understand the irony perfectly well. We're used to it, we have accommodated ourselves to it, and of course it's the same in reverse. Our opponent understands our ironies, and there is, it seems to me, a perfect kind of symbiosis, ironically enough, between political opponents precisely maybe in the measure to which their ironies are mutually intelligible. It probably teaches each of them a good deal to be able to accommodate, to encounter, to get used to the ironies of the other, and I think this applies to conversation in general. It's very easy to pick up most forms of irony. We don't have an enormous difficulty grasping them, and it doesn't seem to me that our capability of grasping irony is founded on a necessary, underlying agreement.

That's what he's saying. Now if this is the case, it seems to me that one has found a loophole in Gadamer's conservatism about what the reader can do. His premise is that in order to understand, there has to be a basis of agreement; but if what we've just said about understanding each other's ironies, even where there is pretty wholesale disagreement, is true, that ought to apply also to our capacity to read work with which we distinctly disagree, with which we feel we can never come to terms in terms of affirming its value, but which we nevertheless can understand. If understanding is not predicated on agreement, the possibility of opening up the canon, as we say, insisting that it doesn't have to be an absolutely continuous traditional canon, is available to us once again and Gadamer's conservatism on this issue can be questioned.

Now it's not that Gadamer is insisting on absolute continuity. On the contrary. You'll probably remember that he says early in the essay that in order to recognize that we are in the presence of something that isn't merely within our own historical horizon, we need to be "pulled up short." In other words, to go back to that example once more, we need to recognize that there's something weird about that word "plastic," and in being pulled up short we recognize the need also for the fundamental act of reading in Gadamer which is the merger of horizons: in other words, that we are dealing knowingly with a horizon not altogether our own that has to be negotiated, that has to be merged with our own for understanding to be possible.

In fact, Gadamer even insists that if we don't have this phenomenon of being pulled up short, our reading is basically just solipsistic. We just take it for granted that what we're reading is completely within our own horizon and we don't make any effort at all to understand that which is fundamentally or at least in some ways different. Gadamer acknowledges this, even insists on it as I say, but he doesn't lay stress on it because the gap that is implied in the need to be pulled up short is not a big one. That is to say, it's one that we can easily traverse. Take the example of "plastic" again: "Oh, gee, that's a strange word," we say, so we go to the OED [Oxford English Dictionary], we see it meant something different then, our problem is solved, and we continue. No big deal, right? But there may be ways of being pulled up short, occasions for being pulled up short, that Gadamer thinks exceed the imaginative grasp of a reader. As you'll see when we return to Iser after I've said a few things about Hirsch, this, as you'll see, is the fundamental difference between Gadamer and Iser. Where for Gadamer, the gap between reader and text, between my horizon and the horizon of the text, is perforce a small one, for Iser it needs to be a much larger one in order for what he calls the "act of the reader," the reading act, really to swing into high gear, and we'll see that this has implications for the obvious difference between their two canons.

All right, but now I want to say something about the passage from which I quoted over against the passage from Gadamer at the end of the Gadamer lecture. You remember Gadamer said we have to be open to the otherness of the past in order that for us it may "speak true," but if we simply bracket out our own feelings, that can't possibly happen so that we have to recognize that in this mutuality of the reading experience we really are in a conversation. We're open to being told something true by someone else.

Hirsch on the other hand says, "Oh, well, no. The important thing is to know the exact meaning of that other person because that's the only way to honor the otherness of the person. Kant says people ought to be an end and not a means for us; we ought to understand them on their terms." Gadamer's claim, however, was that if we do that, we are in fact suspending the way in which it might be that they speak true. We are honoring instead the integrity of what they're saying without thinking about whether or not it might be true.

So I introduced Hirsch in that context, and now I want to go back to him a little bit and I want to work with two passages which I have sent you all in e-mail-form and which I have neglected to put on the board, but they're so short I don't think that will be necessary. The first of the two passages I want to talk about is Hirsch's argument that "meaning is an affair of consciousness and not of words"--meaning is an affair of consciousness and not of words. In other words, the text is what makes the ascertainment of meaning possible and available to us, but meaning is not *in* the text. Meaning is in the intention of the author, and that is what we need to arrive at as we work through the text. Meaning is an affair of consciousness and not of words.

Now think about this. What it means is that in understanding a text, we are attempting to grasp it in paraphrase. We are, in other words, attempting to grasp it in a sentence that might read something like, "What the author means to say is--" Right? So that it's not what the text means--which might be anything, according to Hirsch, if you just appeal to the text; it's what the author means to say.

Okay. So what's implied here? On the one hand, you could say this is just absolute total nonsense. We use a text to find meaning in something that we don't have available to us. Why don't we just find meaning in the text, which is available to us? That would make more sense. It's up to us to construe the text. We can't possibly know what the author meant except on the basis of our determination of the meaning of the text, so why not just focus our attention to meaning on the text? Hirsch was a student of Wimsatt. Hirsch was engaged in lifelong disagreement with Gadamer but he was a student of Wimsatt, the author of "The Intentional Fallacy." Obviously, Hirsch was a rebellious student [laughs] and insisted that, far from wanting to take Wimsatt's position, appealing to intention was the most important thing you can do, the only thing you can do which establishes--according to the title of his first important book on hermeneutics*--"*validity in interpretation."

All right. It's very difficult intuitively to assent to Hirsch's position, and I'll just tell you by the way that I don't, I can't, but I will say in passing in defense of Hirsch that if we reflect on the matter, we realize that in common sense terms, appealing to an author's intention is precisely what we do for practical reasons. Let me give you an example. You're all students. You are sitting in classrooms that in many cases oblige you to take exams. Your instructor tells you when you write your exam, "Don't just parrot the words of the authors you're studying. I want to know that you understand those authors." Think about it. You prove to your teacher that you understand the authors by being able to put their meaning *in other words*--in other words, to say the author is intending to say something, not just that the text says something and this is what it says, with your exam then being one long screed of quotation. Ironically, the instructor doesn't really want just quotation on an exam. He wants explanation, and the form of explanation is paraphrase. You can't have paraphrase unless you can identify a meaning which is interpersonal, a meaning which can be shared among a group that understands it and can be expressed in other words. That's the key. If you can put it in other words, those other words take the form of an appeal to intention.

All right. That's an important argument in Hirsch's favor. We realize that practically speaking, the necessity of appealing to paraphrase in order to guarantee mutual understanding certainly does seem to be something like agreeing or admitting that meaning is an affair of consciousness, not of words--my consciousness, the author's consciousness, the consciousness that we can all share. That's where we find meaning, and meaning takes the form of that kind of paraphrase that everyone can agree on.

So much then to the advantage or benefit of Hirsch. There are lots of things to be said against it, on the other hand, which I don't want to pause over now because I think a course of lectures on literary theory will inevitably show the ways in which paraphrase is inadequate to the task of rigorous interpretation. Cleanth Brooks, a New Critic, writes a famous essay called "The Heresy of Paraphrase," insisting that proper literary interpretation is a wooden, mechanical, inflexible exercise if it reduces the incredible complexity of a textual surface to paraphrase. So it's a complex issue, and I should leave it having said this much, at least for the moment.

Now one other thing that Hirsch says, the other thing that I quoted, is in effect--I'll paraphrase now--[laughs]that what Gadamer omits to realize is that there is a difference between the *meaning* of a text and the *significance* of a text. That is Hirsch's other key position, and we can understand it by saying something like this: the meaning of a text is what the author intended it to mean--that is to say, what we can establish with a reliable paraphrase. The significance of the text, which Hirsch does not deny interest to, is the meaning *for us*--that is to say, what we take to be important about this meaning: the way in which, for example, we can translate it into our own terms historically, we can adapt it to a cause or an intellectual position--the ways, in other words, in which we can take the meaning of a text and make it significant for us. The difference between meaning and significance then is something that Hirsch takes very seriously and he insists--and here is, of course, where it becomes controversial--he insists that it's possible to tell the difference between meaning and significance if, good historicists that you are, you can pin down accurately and incontestably the author's meaning, appealing to all the philological tricks that you have, throwing out irrelevancies and insisting that you finally have the meaning right--of course, how many times has that happened? which is obviously one point of disagreement with Hirsch. Then, once you've done that, once you have secured the integrity and accuracy of the meaning, Hirsch says, "Okay, fine. Now you can do anything you like with the text. You can adapt it for any sort of possible purpose, but the crucial thing is to keep the distinction between meaning and significance clear."

Obviously, Gadamer refuses to argue that we can distinguish in that way reliably. We don't know--because it's a question of merging horizons, my horizon and the horizon of the text--we don't know with any guarantee where meaning leaves off and significance begins, so that the splitting apart of the two terms is something that simply can't be accomplished by the way in which we enter the hermeneutic circle. That's Gadamer's position, and it is the position of anyone who opposes that of Hirsch, although what he means by the distinction is clear enough. "Yes, yes," you say, "I see exactly what he means." Nevertheless, to secure the distinction in actual practice, to say, "Okay. This is the meaning and now this is how I'm going to make it significant"--well, it seems unlikely indeed that this is something anyone could ever accomplish.

All right. Finally, to turn to Wolfgang Iser: Iser is concerned with what he calls the act of the reader--*Akt des Lesers* is the title of one of his books--and in so doing he establishes himself as a person very much in the tradition of phenomenology deriving from Husserl and more directly, in Iser's case, from an analyst of the way in which the reader moves from sentence to sentence in negotiating a text, a Polish intellectual named Roman Ingarden who is quoted frequently in the essay that you have. Those are the primary influences on Iser, but he himself has been tremendously influential in turn. Iser's interest in the reader's experience is part of a school of thought that he helped to found that grew up around the University of Konstanz in the sixties and seventies, and which resulted in a series of seminars on what was called "reception history" or alternatively "the aesthetics of reception." Iser's colleague was Hans Robert Jauss, whom we will be reading later in the course. The influence of the so-called Konstanz School spread to the United States and had many ramifications here, particularly and crucially in the early work of another critic we'll be turning to later in the semester, Stanley Fish.

So reception history has been a kind of partly theoretical, partly scholarly field, one that's really still flourishing and has been ever since the early work in the great Konstanz seminars of Iser, Jauss and others. Iser, later in his career--he died just a couple of years ago--taught annually at the University of California, Irvine, and by that time he was very much engaged in a new aspect of his project, which he called the anthropology of fiction--that is to say, "Why do we have fiction? Why do we tell stories to each other?" All of Iser's work is grounded in the notion of literature as fiction. He's almost exclusively a scholar of the novel--and by the way, one of the first obvious differences you can notice between Iser and Gadamer is that whereas Gadamer is an intellectual historian whose canonical texts are works of philosophy, works of social thought as well as great works of literature, for Iser it's a completely different canon. He is exclusively concerned with fiction and how we read fiction, how we come to understand fiction, and how we determine the meaning of a work of fiction. As I say, in the last phase of his career when he started thinking about the anthropology of fiction, he raised the even more fundamental question--I think a very important one, though not necessarily to be aimed exclusively at fiction--the anthropological question of why we have fiction at all, why it has been a persisting trans-historical phenomenon of human culture that we tell stories to each other, that we make things up when after all we could be spending all of our time, well, just talking about things that actually are around us. In other words, how is it that we feel the need to make things up?

All right. Now as you read Iser you'll see immediately that in tone, in his sense of what's important, and in his understanding of the way in which we negotiate the world of texts he much more closely resembles Gadamer than Hirsch. We can say this in two different ways. We can say that Iser's position is a reconstruction of what Gadamer has, essentially, to say about the merger of horizons. For example, on page 1002, the bottom of the left-hand column over to the right-hand column, he says, "The convergence of text and reader"--Gadamer's way of putting that would be the merger of the reader's horizon, my horizon, with the horizon within which the text appears--"brings the literary work into existence." This is implied in Gadamer as well. It's not your horizon; it's not my horizon; it's that effective history which takes place when our horizons merge. That is the locus of meaning for Gadamer.

By the same token, what Iser is saying is that the space of meaning is "virtual"--this is the word he uses. It's neither in the text nor in the reader but the result of the negotiation back and forth between the text and the reader, he says, that sort of brings the literary work into existence in a virtual space. "… [A]nd this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader." So you see this is Gadamerian. This is the result, this is the fruit, of the hermeneutic engagement between horizons that results in meaning. It's put in a different way by Iser, but it is in a large degree the same idea. He also plainly shares with Gadamer the assumption, the supposition, that the construal of meaning cannot be altogether objective. In other words, Iser is no more an historicist than Gadamer is but insists rather on the mutual exchange of prejudice between the two horizons in question. So he argues on page 1005, the right-hand column:

One text [this halfway down the column] is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potentia, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way.

This of course brings us to the issue of "gaps" and the role that they play in the act of reading as Iser understands it. It's an interesting term. I don't actually know whether Iser, to be Hirschian, *means* [laughs] what I'm about to say about gaps, but plainly a "gap" is an abyss, it's a distance between two points; but what's really interesting is that we think of spark plugs--we think of gapping a spark plug. I don't know if you know how a spark plug works, but for the electrical current to fly into operation in a spark plug, the two points of contact have to be gapped. They have to be forced apart to a certain degree. Too much, there's no spark. Too little, you short out. Right? There's no spark. So you have to gap a spark plug, and it seems to me that the "ah-ha" effect of reading, the movement back and forth across the gap between the reader and the text, can be understood in terms of a spark, right, as though the relationship between the reader and the text were the relationship between the two points of a spark plug. Whether Gadamer means that when he speaks of gap or whether he simply means an abyss or a distance to be crossed [laughs] I couldn't say. Much like the opportunities in the word "plastic," I think it's useful to suggest that this sense of gapping a spark plug may have some relevance to our understanding of what goes on in this reading process.

Now how then does he differ from Gadamer? One way that is I think not terribly important but I think is interesting in view of what we've just been saying about Hirsch and another way that's absolutely crucial that we've implied already and to which we need to return. The way that's perhaps not terribly important at least for present purposes--although this is a distinction that's going to be coming up again and again later in the semester--is the way in which he actually seems to distinguish--this is page 1006 in the upper left-hand column--between "reading" and "interpretation." This is at the very top of the left-hand column. He says: "… [T]he text refers back directly to our own preconceptions--"--Gadamer would call those "prejudices"--"which are revealed by the act of interpretation that is a basic element of the reading process." So there's a wedge there between the concept of reading and the concept of interpretation. I would suggest that it's not unlike the wedge that Hirsch drives between the concept of meaning and the concept of significance. In other words, meaning is construal. Significance is the application of that construal to something. I think that the distinction Iser is making between reading and interpretation can be understood in much the same way.

Iser doesn't make much of the distinction. In other words, it's not an important part of his argument, which is why I say that the difference with Gadamer--who never makes the distinction between reading and interpretation--in this matter is slight, but the other difference is very important, and that is--to return to this point--that Iser stresses innovation as the principle of value governing the choice and the interpretive strategies of reading. Innovation is what Iser's canon is looking for. That's what makes it so different from Gadamer's conservative continuous traditional canon. Iser's understanding of gapping the spark plug is a much more bold affirmative of the imaginative powers of the reader, a much more bold process than the hesitant conservative process suggested by Gadamer.

Now in order to illustrate the way in which what Iser calls virtual work gets done in this regard, let me just run through a few passages quickly. If Gadamer says, in a way, that he doesn't really stress in the long run that in order to know that there is actually a difference between the reader's horizon and the horizon of the text you need to be "pulled up short," something needs to surprise you--well, Iser throws his whole emphasis on this element of surprise. If it doesn't surprise, it isn't worth it; it doesn't have value. And we'll talk in more detail about the ways in which it doesn't have value in a minute. If the element of surprise is to become absolutely central and paramount in the reading process, the gap has to get bigger. [laughs] It has to be a bigger distance, a broader abyss, and that's what Iser is working with in the passages I'm about to quote. As I say, I'm going to quote three, more or less rapid-fire. The first is on page 1003, the upper left-hand column: "In this process of creativity"--that is to say, the way in which a text induces the feeling of surprise in the reader-- "the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far…"

Now I admit in this particular passage you get a hint of Gadamer's element of conservatism. The text may go too far. In other words, it may make demands on us that are too great. For example, we're reading *Finnegan's Wake.* We haven't got a clue. The text has gone too far. We can't get from sentence to sentence, and even within the sentence we have no idea what the words mean, so we're lost at sea unless, of course, we really rise to meet the challenge; but typically or characteristically in Iser's terms the text has gone too far: "… [S]o we may say"--he elaborates here'--"that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play." In other words, if there are no surprises, it's just a yawn. Why bother to read at all? If the surprises are too great, then they induce overstrain and we throw away the book in frustration and despair. So the distance of the gap needs to be between the outer limits of boredom and overstrain according to Iser.

Continuing to page 1004, the upper right-hand column: "… [E]xpectations"--this word is what Iser thinks governs the sort of dialectic that the reading process is playing with. Reading consists, according to Iser, in the violation of expectations. For the violation to work the expectations have to be there.So that's the dialectic; that's what's negotiated. There has to be a sense, moving from sentence to sentence, that something is likely to happen next. If that underlying sense isn't there, then whatever happens is simply met with frustration, but if we have the expectation that something's going to happen next, and then something different happens, or if the suspense of wondering what will happen next is in play so that anything can happen--but the experience of suspense has been gone through, then in those cases that's all to the good; that's a good part of the reading process. "… [E]xpectations," says Iser, "are scarcely ever fulfilled in a truly literary text." You see, that's where the evaluative principle that completely revolutionizes Gadamer's canon comes in. In other words, innovation, the principle of change, the principle of violated expectation, is what imposes or establishes value in the literary text--not continuity, not a sense that across the abyss truth is being spoken to us, but rather the sense that across the abyss we are being constructively surprised. Right? That's what has changed between these two positions.

"We implicitly demand of expository texts," he goes on to say--and he may be alluding to Gadamer here because after all Gadamer is talking primarily about expository texst, works of philosophy, works of social thought, which of course aren't trying to surprise [laughs] or trick us. They're trying to lay out an argument which is consistent and continuous and keep surprise to a minimum. It's difficult, philosophy and social thought, but it's not difficult because of the element of surprise. It's the vocabulary, it's the complexity of the thought, and so on that makes it difficult. Iser acknowledges this. He says, "… [W]e implicitly demand of expository texts… [that there be no surprise] as we refer to the objects they are meant to present-- [but it's] a defect in a literary text." That's the difference for Iser between nonfiction and fiction. With nonfiction, we don't want to be surprised. It poses other kinds of difficulty, let's say; but in the case of fiction, in order to be engaged, in order to enter the hermeneutic circle properly, we need the element of surprise, as I say, as a way of distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction.

Let's turn to page 1010, the lower right-hand column. The word "defamiliarization" we will encounter soon when we take up the Russian Formalists. "Defamiliarization" means precisely pulling you up short or taking you by surprise, making you feel that what you thought was going to be the case or what you thought was the state of affairs is not the state of affairs. The poet Wallace Stevens puts it beautifully when he says that poetry should make the visible a little hard to see; in other words it should be a defamiliarizing of that which has become too familiar. That's an aspect of the reading process, and so Iser says: "This defamiliarization of what the reader thought he recognized is bound to create a tension that will intensify his expectations as well as his distrust of those expectations." In other words, the tension itself of simultaneously having expectations and feeling that they should be violated, that probably they will be violated, being on the alert for how they're going to be violated--this is a kind of tension, a constructive tension which constitutes for Iser the psychological excitement of reading.

All right. Having said all of this, obviously what Iser means to say is that the reader should work hard, that the virtual work done by the reader to constitute, to bring into existence, a virtual meaning should be hard work, and there's not much work to do if two things are the case: first of all, if the text just seems real. In other words, if there's no spin on reality, if there's no sense of this being a fictive world, if it just seems to be about the everyday, about life as we live it, the life that we find ourselves in--then according to Iser, at least, there's no violation of expectations. The gap isn't big enough.

This is, of course, disputable. There is a kind of a vogue recurrently in the history of fiction for a kind of miraculous sense that this is just exactly the way things are. People enjoy that in ways that Iser may not be fully acknowledging in this argument, but there's no question that it doesn't involve the violation of expectations. There's not much gap at all. It's another kind of pleasure that Iser is perhaps not taking into account that we take in that which seems to be simply incontestably real as we read it, and Iser leaves that out of account. On the other hand, he says that there is no use either, no value either, in that form of engagement with a text in which an illusion is perpetually sustained. In other words, an illusion is created; a never-never land is created. We know it's an illusion, but we get to live in it so comfortably with so little alteration of the nature of the illusion or of the way in which we negotiate the illusory world, that it becomes kind of womb-like and cozy.

Here of course, Iser is referring to what he calls "culinary fiction," the sub-genres of literature like, well, nurse novels, bodice-rippers, certain kinds of detective fiction--although a lot of detective fiction is much better than that description would imply: in other words, novels in which undoubtedly it's an illusory world. Things just don't happen the way they happen in nurse novels and bodice-rippers--in which somehow or another the pauper marries the prince. This doesn't happen, but at the same time it's a world of illusion in which the reader lives all too comfortably. Right? So these are forms of the experience of reading fiction of which Iser disapproves because there's no work being done. The virtual work of the reader does not involve surprise, does not involve the violation of expectations.

The relationship between text and reader must be a collaboration, Iser argues. The poly-semantic nature of the text--that is to say, the fact that the text sort of throws up all sorts of possibilities of meaning if it's a good text-- [laughs] and the illusion making of the reader are opposed factors. In other words, there is something in the reader that wants to settle comfortably into the world of the nurse novel, the bodice-ripper, the formulaic detective novel--that wants just to sort of exist comfortably in those worlds; but a good text is perpetually bringing the reader up short and preventing that comfort zone from establishing itself, so that the tension between the tendency on our part to sustain an illusion and the way in which the text keeps undermining the illusion is again that aspect of the psychological excitement of reading that Iser wants to concentrate on.

Now a word about *Tony the Tow Truck* in this regard. I brought the text with me. You can look at it now or at your leisure. I wanted to call attention to a few places in the text in which it is a question of expectation and of the way in which this expectation can be violated. Now it's only fair to say that if we're going to read *Tony* seriously in this way we have to put ourselves in the shoes of a toddler; that is to say, as readers or auditors we have to think of ourselves and of the psychological excitement of experiencing the text as that of a toddler. It's not so very difficult to do. For example:

I am Tony the Tow Truck. I live in a little yellow garage. I help cars that are stuck. I tow them to my garage. I like my job. One day I am stuck. Who will help Tony the tow truck?

All right. Now this is a wonderful example of the tension between having expectations, the expectation that someone will help Tony, and being in a state of suspense, not knowing who it will be. Now from the adult point of view, this is culinary because we know that we're in the world of folklore and that in folklore everything happens three times. We know that two vehicles are going to come along and not help Tony and that the third vehicle will, because everything, as I say, happens in threes in folklore. Notice *Tony the Tow Truck* [emphasizes consonants] --next week when we read the Russian formalists, we will learn the research finding of one of the early formalists to the effect that "repetition in verse is analogous to tautology in folklore." We have exactly that [laughs] going on in *Tony the Tow Truck,* "t- t- t," and then the three events, Neato the Car, Speedy the Car, and Bumpy the Car coming along in sequence, with Bumpy finally resolving the problem.

So in any case we have an expectation. We have the dialectic of suspense on the one hand, how will this be resolved, and inevitability on the other, "Oh, it's a folk tale, it'll be resolved, don't worry about it." We have this suspense, as I say, between expectation, the possibility of violation, and simply not knowing.

Okay. Now we continue:

"I cannot help you," says Neato the Car. "I don't want to get dirty"… "I cannot help you," says Speedy the Car. "I am too busy"… I am very sad. Then a little car pulls up.

I think it's wonderful because it "pulls up" just like Gadamer being "pulled up short," and there is, it seems to me, there's another crisis of expectation in this line in that especially as a toddler I need to negotiate that expression idiomatically. I'm three years old. Maybe I don't know what "pulls up" means. It's probably not very good writing for a toddler precisely for that reason, but at the same time it lends itself to us because we recognize that there's a reading problem or a piece of virtual work that needs to be overcome before you can get on with it. You have to find out what "pulls up" means in the same way that the adult reader of *Pleasures of the Imagination* has to find out what "plastic" means. As I say, it's a wonderful irony that this particular difficulty in reading is precisely what Gadamer calls being pulled up short.

All right. So you solve the problem and then, lo and behold, it turns out that:

It is my friend Bumpy. Bumpy gives me a push. He pushes and pushes and-- I'm on my way. "Thank you, Bumpy," I call back. "You're welcome," says Bumpy.

Now I think we get another expectation. This is the kind of story that has a moral. It's a feel-good story. Something good has happened. A sense of reciprocity is established between the tow truck and the person who helps the tow truck out of being stuck--a fine sense of reciprocity, so the expectation is that there will be a moral. The tension or suspense is: what will the moral be? There are a variety of ways, in other words, in which this story, just like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, could end. It's by no means clear that *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* will end with "Love all things, great and small things." It could have ended any number [laughs] of other ways, and just so this story could end a number of ways. It happens to end "Now that's what I call a friend." Well, fine. The moral is that reciprocity is friendship and so good, all to the good, but as I say there's a moment of suspense in the expectation at the point in the text when we expect a moral but we don't know what the moral is going to be. Once again, there is that moment of suspense that the reader is able to get through with a kind of pleasurable excitement and then overcome as the moral is actually revealed. So even *Tony the Tow Truck*,in other words, is not absolutely culinary and can be treated in ways that I hope shed some light on the reading process.

All right. The time is up, so let me conclude by saying that *if* there is this remarkable distinction between Gadamer and Iser, between canons, where the methodology of Gadamer seems to impose on us a traditional canon and the methodology of Iser seems to impose on us an innovative canon, isn't there some relief in historicism after all--because the whole point of historicism, as Gadamer himself puts it, is that it lets the canon be? We're not interested in establishing a principle of value that shapes a canon. We're interested in hearing everybody on his or her own terms and letting those texts be. In other words, doesn't historicism open the canon and indeed make the process of reading, the experience of reading, archival and omnivorous rather than canonical? If every text just is what it is and we can't bring, methodologically speaking, any kind of preconception to bear on what's a good text or what's a bad text, haven't we solved the problem of the limitation imposed on the reader by any kind of canon formation?

Well, that's the case only, I say in conclusion, if we can distinguish between meaning and significance. In other words, only if we really are sure that the historicist act of reading is effective and works, if I know the meaning of a text. Well, fine. Then later on, if I wish, I can establish a canon by saying certain texts have certain significance and those are the texts that I care about and want to read, but I can only do that if I can distinguish between meaning and significance. But if meaning and significance bleed into each other, what I'm going to be doing is establishing a canon, as it were, unconsciously or semiconsciously. I'm going to say, "Ah, this is just what the text means," but at the same time, I'll be finding ways, without realizing it, of affirming certain kinds of meaning and discrediting certain other kinds of meaning--all the while saying, "Oh, it's just meaning. I'm not doing that." But if in fact my reading practice can be shown not clearly to distinguish between meaning and significance, well, then that's what would happen. So it's still up in the air and it's still perhaps inescapable that we read, as it were, canonically, but by thinking of various approaches to hermeneutics in these terms, I think what's shown is that there is a relationship between methodology and canon formation, that certain things follow from our assumptions about how to read. Evaluation would seem rather at a distance removed from simple considerations of how to read, but in fact I think we've shown that evaluation is in one way or another implicit in certain methodological premises as they establish themselves in the work of these various writers.

Okay. Thank you very much.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 5 Transcript**

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| January 27, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Okay. Moving then as quickly as possible into our subject matter for today, we begin a series of lectures on various aspects of twentieth-century formalism--a big word. At the end of our run through the varieties of twentieth-century formalism, I hope it doesn't seem quite as big and that its many meanings--yet a finite number of meanings--have been made clear to you. That is to say, what we're taking up this week, is as much really the history of criticism as literary theory. You remember in the first lecture I said there's a difference between the history of criticism and theory of literature, one difference being that the history of criticism has a great deal to do with literary evaluation: that is to say, why do we care about literature and how can we find means of saying that it's good or not good? This is an aspect of thought concerning literature that tends to fall out of literary theory but not out of the materials that we are reading this week. You can see that when Wimsatt and Beardsley talk about the "success" of the poem, they understand the whole critical enterprise, including its theoretical underpinnings--the question of what is a poem, the question of how should we best read it--to be still geared toward literary evaluation.

That makes the subject matter that we'll be discussing this week, as I say, as much a part of the history of criticism as it is of literary theory. *We're* going to be reading it with a theoretical spin. That is to say, we're going to focus on the question of what a poem is and the question, "What criteria should we invoke in order to read it for the best and correctly?" But there are other ways of approaching this material.

In any case, then, Wimsatt. Beardsley by the way was actually a philosopher who taught at Temple University, a good friend of his. In the book in which the essay "The Intentional Fallacy"appeared, a book called *The Verbal Icon,* Wimsatt collaborated with Monroe Beardsley on three essays, and this is one of them. So we try to remember to say "Wimsatt and Beardsley" even though it is Wimsatt who taught at Yale. That in itself needn't be significant except that the New Critics, the school of critics to which he belonged, have always been identified with Yale and indeed consolidated here a kind of teaching method and attitude toward literature which constituted the first wave--the first of two waves--of involvement in literary theory which amounts to the Yale English and comparative literature departments' claims to fame. Many of those figures who belong to the New Critics did much of their important work before they arrived at Yale. Others never were at Yale, and yet at the same time it's a movement closely associated with this institution.

When I arrived at Yale, Wimsatt was still teaching, Cleanth Brooks was still teaching, and so I feel a kind of personal continuity with these figures and understand, as we all will more fully later on, the way in which the style, and emphasis on the style, of close reading that evolved within the New Criticism meaningfully and importantly left its mark on much subsequent criticism and theory that hasn't in fact always acknowledged the New Criticism perhaps to the extent that it might have. Much of this should be reserved for next time when I talk about Cleanth Brooks and return to the whole subject of the New Criticism and the way in which it's viewed historically--so much of it can be reserved for next time.

But what I do want to say now is this. If it weren't for the New Critics, none of you probably would have been able to sit patiently through any of your middle or high school English classes. When Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren published a book called *Understanding Poetry,* first published in 1939 and then subsequently reissued again and again and again as it swept the country, suddenly schoolteachers had a way of keeping kids in the classroom for fifty minutes. Close reading, the idea that you could take a text and do things with it--that the interpretation of a text wasn't just a matter of saying, "Oh, yes, it's about this and isn't it beautiful?"--reciting the text, emoting over it, enthusing about it, and then looking around for something else to say--it was no longer a question of doing that. It was a question of constructing an elaborate formal edifice to which everybody could contribute. Students got excited about it. They saw certain patterns or certain ways of elaborating patterns that the teachers were talking about and, lo and behold, the fifty minutes was over and everybody had had a pretty good time. This had never happened in an English class before. [laughs] [laughter]

Seriously, you're English majors because of the New Criticism--I admit, especially if you went to private school. This way of teaching did not perhaps quite so much for a variety of reasons permeate public school literature teaching, but it was simply, as a result of *Understanding Poetry*, the way to go. It took time. If you had *more* than fifty minutes, you could actually make ample use of it. T.S. Eliot, who was in many ways associated with the New Criticism, one of its intellectual forebears, nevertheless took a somewhat dim view of it and called it "lemon squeezer criticism." What this meant is it takes time. You've got to squeeze absolutely everything out of it, and so it was ideal from the standpoint of teaching and was, it seems to me, also wonderfully galvanizing intellectually because it really did make people think: "look how intricate what I thought was simple turns out to be." The New Criticism, incontestably and without rival, created an atmosphere in which it was okay to notice that things were a little more difficult than they'd been supposed to be. This in itself was extraordinarily useful and constructive, not just for subsequent literary theory, I think, but for the way in which English teaching actually can help people think better. All of this the New Criticism had a great deal to do with--and when I talk next time about the way in which it's been vilified for the last [laughs] forty or fifty years, naturally I will have this in the back of my mind.

So in any case, where did this preoccupation with form--because we're beginning to think about the way in which theory can preoccupy itself with form--where does it come from? Well, needless to say, I'm about to say it goes back to the beginning. When Plato writes his *Republic* and devotes Book Ten, as I'm sure most of you know, to an argument in effect banishing the poets from the ideal republic, part of the argument is that poets are terrible imitators. They imitate reality as badly as they possibly can. They are three times removed from the ideal forms of objects in reality. They're a hopeless mess. They get everything wrong. They think that a stick refracted in the water is therefore a crooked stick. They are subject to every conceivable kind of illusion, not to be trusted, and Socrates calls them liars.

Okay. Now when Aristotle writes his *Poetics* he does so--and this is true and rewards scrutiny if one thinks carefully about the *Poetics--*he does so very consciously in refutation of Plato's arguments in the *Republic,* and perhaps the keystone of this refutation is simply this: Plato says poets imitate badly. Aristotle says this is a category mistake because poets don't imitate *reality*. Poets don't imitate, says Aristotle, things as they are. They imitate things as they should be. In other words, the business of poets is to organize, to bring form to bear, on the messiness of reality and, in so doing, to construct not an alternate reality in the sense that it has nothing to do with the real world--that is to say, it doesn't mention anything in the real world, or it somehow or other invents human beings made out of chocolate or something like that--instead, it idealizes the elements existing in the real world such that its object is something other than reality as such. This is really the origin of formalism. Aristotle is considered the ancestor of the varying sorts of thought about form, and it's this move, this move that he makes in the *Poetics,* that engenders this possibility.

Now turning to your sheet, in the early, early modern period the poet and courtier, Sir Philip Sidney, wrote an elegant, really wonderfully written defense of poetry, in one edition called *The Apology for Poesie*. In this edition he, while actually a fervent admirer of Plato, nevertheless develops this idea of Aristotle with remarkable rhetorical ingenuity and I think very impressively lays out the case that Aristotle first makes, here in the first passage on your sheet. Sidney's talking about the various kinds of discourse: divinity, hymnody, science, philosophy, history--in other words, all the ways in which you can contribute to human betterment and human welfare. He says in the case of all but one of them, each discourse is a "serving science." That is to say, it is subservient to the natural world; its importance is that it refers to that world. The first sentence of your passage: "There is no art but one delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object." This by the way-- although what they serve is not exactly a work of nature--is why even that which is incontestably better than secular poetry, in other words hymnody, and also divine knowledge or theology--even these fields, which are the supreme fields, are also serving sciences. They are subservient to an idea that they have to express, which is the idea of God, right, and God is real. There's no sense that we're making God up in this kind of discourse. Sidney is a devoutly religious person and there's no semblance of doubt in his attitude, and yet he is saying something very special about the poet who is somewhere in between divinity and the other sorts of discourse with which poetry is traditionally in rivalry: science, philosophy and history. And he says this is what's unique about poetry.

Only the poet disdaining to be tied to any such subjection [subjection, in other words, to things as they are], lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature. . . . He nothing affirms and therefore never lieth.

In other words, Plato is wrong. The poet is not a liar because he's not talking about anything that's verifiable or falsifiable. He is simply talking about the parameters of the world he has brought into being. Sidney thinks of it as a kind of magic. He invokes, for example, the science of astrology. The poet, he says, ranges freely within the zodiac of his own wit. He also invokes the pseudoscience of alchemy when he says that the poet inhabits a brazen world, and of this--"brazen" means brass--of this brazen world, he makes a golden world. In other words, poetry is transformational. In representing not things as they are but things as they should be, it transforms reality. All right. So this is an argument which in outline, once again, justifies the idea of literature as form, as that which brings form to bear on the chaos and messiness of the real.

Now I don't mean to say things just stood still as Sidney said they were until you get to Kant. A great deal happens, but one aspect of Kant's famous "Copernican revolution"inthe history of philosophyis his ideas about aesthetics and the beautiful and about the special faculty that he believes has to do with and mediates our aesthetic understanding of things, a faculty which he calls "the judgment"; so that in *The Critique of Judgment* of 1790, he outlines a philosophy of the beautiful and of the means whereby "the judgment" makes judgments of the beautiful. He does a great deal else in it, but I'm isolating this strand, which is what's relevant to what we're talking about. In many ways Kant, without knowing anything about Sidney, nevertheless follows from Sidney particularly in this, as you'll see.

I'm going to look sort of with some care at these passages so all will become clear, but particularly in this: Sidney--and I didn't exactly quote the passage in which Sidney does this but I urged you to believe that he does--Sidney actually ranks poetry somewhere between divinity and the other sciences. In other words, poetry is not the supreme thing that a person can do. Sidney believed this so much in fact that when he knew himself to be dying, having been mortally wounded in a battle, he ordered that all of his own poems be burned. From the standpoint of a devout person, he had no doubt that poetry was inferior to divinity. Now in a way that's what Kant's saying, too. In the passages you'll read, you'll see that the point is not that art and the judgment of the beautiful is the supreme thing that humanity can be engaged with. The point is only that it has a special characteristic that nothing else has. That's the point that this whole tradition is trying to make. This is the way Kant puts it, turning first to the second passage:

The pleasant and the good both have a reference to the faculty of desire [The pleasant is the way in which our appetency, our sensuous faculty--which Kant calls "the understanding," by the way--understands things. Things are either pleasant or unpleasant. The good, on the contrary, is the way in which our cognitive and moral faculty--which Kant calls "the reason"--understands things. Things are either to be approved of or not to be approved of, but in each case, as Kant argues, they have a reference to the faculty of desire--I want, I don't want, I approve, I disapprove], and they bring with them the former [that is to say, the pleasant], a satisfaction pathologically conditioned; the latter a pure, practical, purposeful satisfaction which is determined not merely by the representation of the object [that is to say, by the fact that the represented object exists for me, right] but also by the represented connection of the subject with the existence of the object [in other words, by the way in which I want it or don't want it, approve of it or don't approve of it].

My subjective wishes, in other words, determine my attitude toward it, whereas what Kant is saying is that my attitude toward that which simply stands before us as what is neither pleasant nor good, but is rather something else, doesn't exist *for me*. It exists in and for itself.

The next passage: "Taste is the faculty of the judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction."In other words, yeah, I still like it or don't like it, but my liking has nothing to do either with desire or with approval--moral, political, or however the case may be. I just like it or I just don't like it according to principles that can be understood as arising from the faculty of judgment and not from the faculty of the understanding, which is appetitive, and the faculty of reason, which is moral.

So with that said, perhaps just to add to that, the fourth passage: "Beauty is the form of the purposiveness of an object so far as it is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose." You say, "Whoa, what is *this*?" [laughs] [laughter] Kant makes a distinction between the purposive and the purposeful. What is the distinction? The purposeful is the purpose of the object in practical terms. What can it do? What can it do for me? How does it go to work in the world? What is its function among other objects? What bearing does it have on--in particular--my life? But the purposiveness of the object is the way in which it is sufficient unto itself. It has its own purpose, which is not a purpose that has any bearing necessarily on anything else. It has, in other words, an internal coherence. It has a dynamism of parts that is strictly with reference to its own existence. It is a form. It is a form and that form, because we can see it has structure and because we can see it has organization and complexity, is purposive. That is to say, it manifests its self-sufficiency.

So that's Kant's famous distinction between the purposive, which is the organization of an aesthetic object, and the purposeful, which is the organization of any object insofar as it goes to work in the world or for us. An aesthetic object *can* be purposeful; that is to say we can view it as purposeful. I see a naked body, which the art historians call a nude. Let's say I don't accept that it's merely a nude. I want it or I disapprove of it and, lo and behold, it's no longer aesthetic. I'll come back to that in a moment, but I hope you can see that that is a distinction between the purposive and the purposeful.

Now just in order to reprise these important distinctions, I want to turn to a passage in Samuel Coleridge who is, at least on this occasion, a disciple of Kant and is, I think, usefully paraphrasing the arguments of Kant that we have just been engaged in. This is the fifth passage on your sheet:

The beautiful [says Coleridge] is at once distinguished both from the agreeable which is beneath it [and notice the sort of stationing of the beautiful as Sidney stations it between what's beneath it and what's above it]--from the agreeable which is beneath it and from the good which is above it, for both these necessarily have an interest attached to them. Both act on the will and excite a desire for the actual existence of the image or idea contemplated, while the sense of beauty rests gratified in the mere contemplation or intuition regardless whether it be a fictitious Apollo or a real Antinous.

In other words, the judgment of beauty does not depend on the existence of the object for its satisfaction.

Now Oscar Wilde, ever the wag and a person who generated more good literary theory in ways that didn't seem like literary theory at all, perhaps, in the entire history of thinking about the subject, says in the famous series of aphorisms which constitute his "Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*--he concludes this series of aphorisms by winking at us and saying, "All art is quite useless." I hope that after reading these passages and enduring the explication of them that you've just heard you can immediately see what Wilde means by saying all art is quite useless. He's appropriating a term of opprobrium in the utilitarian tradition--oh, my goodness, that something would be useless, right?–he's appropriating a term of opprobrium and pointing out that it is an extraordinarily unique thing about art that it's useless; in other words, that it appeals to no merely appetitive or other form of subjective interest. We don't have to have an "interest" in it in the sense of owning part of a company. We don't have to have an interest in it in order to appreciate it. In other words, we can be objective about it. We can distance ourselves from our subjective wants and needs and likes and dislikes, and we can coexist with it in a happy and constructive way that is good for both of us, because if we recognize that there are things in the world which have intrinsic value and importance and what we call beauty, and yet are not the things that we covet or wish to banish, we recognize in ourselves the capacity for disinterestedness. We recognize in ourselves a virtue which is considered to be the cornerstone of many systems of moral understanding.

To realize that we're not interested in everything and merely because we're interested take a view of things, but that there are things that we don't have to have that kind of interest in and can nevertheless recognize as self-sufficient and valuable, is important. Wilde's suggestion, but I think also Kant's suggestion before him, is important for our recognition of our own value. By the same token, all this harping on the autonomy of art--that is to say, the self-sufficiency of art, the way in which it's not dependent on anything, or as Sidney says, the way in which it's not a serving science existing merely to represent things other than itself, right?--the way in which this is possible for art is, as also our own capacity to be disinterested is, a way of acknowledging that freedom exists: that I am free, that things are free from my instrumental interest in them, so that in general what's implicit in this view of art and this view of human judgment, and what makes it so important in the history of thought, is that once again--and this is not the first time we've brought this up in these lectures and won't be the last--it's a way of recognizing that in addition to all the other things that we are, some of them wonderful, we are also free. There is in us at least an element that is free, independent, serving nothing, autonomous. This idea of our freedom, and by implication of the freedom of other things, from our instrumental interests is what sustains the formalist tradition, and against various kinds of criticism and objection that we'll be taking up in turn as the case arises, sustains and keeps bringing back into the history of thought on these subjects the notion that form simply for its own sake--as the notorious Aestheticism movement at the end of the nineteenth century put it--is valuable.

All right. Now John Crowe Ransom, who was never at Yale but is nevertheless one of the founders or first members of a self-identified school of figures who called themselves the New Critics, published a book called *The New Criticism*,and that's [laughs] where the term "the New Critics" comes from. You may have noticed in your Wimsatt essay that there is a footnote to somebody named Joel Spingarn who wrote an essay called "The New Criticism" in 1924. Not to worry. That has nothing to do with the New Criticism. That just means criticism which is recent, [laughs] a different matter altogether. By the same token, there is the work of Roland Barthes and some of his contemporaries--Poulet, whom I mentioned, Jean Starobinski and others--that was called in the French press *La Nouvelle Critique*. That, too then is an instance of the New Criticism being used as a term, but that too has nothing to do with our subject.

The New Critics, the American New Critics as they are sometimes identified, were a school--and I use that term advisedly because they are self-identified as a group--a school of people who evolved this idea of the independent status--Ransom calls it a "discrete ontological object"--of the work of art and the means whereby it can be appreciated as independent in all of its complexity. Our first foray into the thinking of this school will be our reading of Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy*,*"which I'll get to in a minute; but, simply as a reprise, take a look at the two passages from Ransom which complete what's on your sheet and which, I think you can see, create a link between the sort of thinking you've encountered in reading "The Intentional Fallacy"and the tradition that I've been trying to describe.

Passage seven ought to be completely transparent to you now because it is simply a paraphrase of the passages I have given you from Kant and Coleridge: "The experience [says Ransom] called beauty is beyond the powerful ethical will precisely as it is beyond the animal passion. Indeed, these last two are competitive and coordinate." In other words, what they have in common with each other, ethical will and animal passion, is that they're both grounded in interest. Right? That's the point of Sir Kenneth Clark's word, "the nude." [pronounced "nyewd"] For the naked human being, as viewed both by the appetites and by moral reason, as a common term from the standpoint both of what Kant calls "the understanding" and from what Kant calls "the reason," the expression "naked body" is just fine; but if we do believe there is another category, the aesthetic, viewed by an independent faculty called "the judgment," we need another word for what we're looking at--modern painters like Philip Pearlstein and Lucian Freud would strongly disagree, but in a way that's the point. When we're looking at a *painting* of a naked body we don't say, "Oh, that's a naked body." We say, "That's a nyewd," and that distinction is what, as it were, bears out the implicit way, the semiconscious way, in which all of us acknowledge there to be a category that we call the aesthetic judgment.

On the other hand, a lot of people think it's all hokum, and in fact the predominant view in the twentieth century has been that there's no such thing as disinterestedness, that whatever we are looking at we have an interest in and form views of, and that this Kantian moment of dispassionate or disinterested contemplation is what the early twentieth-century critic I.A. Richards called a "phantom aesthetic state." The predominant view is of this kind of--but, just to do it justice in passing, there is a certain sense, is there not? in which we suddenly find ourselves, without meaning to and without being simply victims of any sort of cultural tyranny, standing in front of something, clasping our hands, tilting our head and feeling somehow or another different from the way we feel when we typically look at things. And that, too, is an intuitive way of saying, "Yeah, however rigorously we can define it or defend it, something like this does seem to go on in our minds at certain kinds of moments of experience." We just feel differently looking at a certain work of art or a certain landscape, let's say, than we feel looking at other sorts of things. Maybe we don't know why. Maybe we doubt that the difference is absolute in the way that Kant wants to insist it is. Nevertheless, we have in tendency feelings of this kind and we should acknowledge them because again, at least in terms of a weak understanding of these positions, it does tend to justify them. At least it explains to us why people can have had such thoughts.

Okay. Wimsatt--I keep saying Wimsatt. Again it's Wimsatt and Beardsley, but I already explained how that is. Wimsatt right off the bat attacks what he calls "the Romantic understanding of literature." Now what does he mean by Romantic? It's the attitude which supposes that a "poem," and that's Wimsatt's privileged word which I'll try to explain, that a poem is an *expression*--that is to say, is the expression of some passion or profound genius working its way into a form, but that the important thing is the expression. This much, by the way, Wimsatt has in common with Gadamer, because Gadamer doesn't talk much about authors either, and Gadamer is interested in what he calls meaning, the subject matter, *die Sache*. Right? He's not interested in *your* sort of expression of that meaning or *my* expression of that meaning. He's interested in the way in which a reader can come to terms with a meaning conveyed by a text, and that much, as I say, despite the profoundly different nature of their projects, Wimsatt and Gadamer have in common.

So a poem is not an expression but an independent object with a self-contained meaning, and if this meaning is not self-evident to the attentive reader then we don't judge the poem a success. This is where evaluation comes in. The success or failure of a poem depends on the realization of meaning. It doesn't depend on our going to the archive, finding out what the author said in his letters about it, finding out what he told his friends, or what he told the newspapers. It doesn't involve any of that. If the meaning is not clear in the poem, we judge the poem a failure. We don't refer--we have no reason to refer, if we respect the autonomy of the poem as such, we don't refer--we don't appeal to an authorial intention.

Hence, on page 811, the left-hand column, about a third of the way down:

"… [T]he design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art…"

It follows from this that even a short poem, even a short lyric poem--and here you *could* see Wimsatt "following" Foucault, though obviously not following but anticipating Foucault, and again they have nothing to do with each other, but there is this overlap--even a short poem doesn't really have an author. It has a "speaker," a figure speaking in the poem, that needs to be understood dramatically, that is to say as though the poem were one of Browning's or T.S. Eliot's dramatic monologues--in other words, so that the speaker of any poem on Wimsatt's view is a speaker endowed with a certain character, a certain viewpoint, a certain argument to be put forward, and our concern about the speaker has to be a concern within the poem about the way in which this character is elaborated, and not reinforced, somehow, by biographical reference to that which is not the speaker but the author standing back there somewhere behind the poem.

Now why focus on the "poem"? Notice that we never hear about literature. We never even hear about "poetry." The object of attention for an analysis of this kind is the poem. Well, the poem is, as John Donne puts it, a little world made cunningly. It's a microcosm. It is a distillation or quintessence. It is a model in other words for the way in which literature can be understood as world-making--not a representation, again, of things as they are but of things as they should be; whereby "things as they should be" is not necessarily an ideal but rather that which is formal, that which is organized, and that which has a coherence and makes sense self-sufficiently and within itself. That's why the poem, the lyric poem, is privileged among the forms of literary discourse in the New Criticism. All literature is by implication a "poem," [laughs] but the poem is the privileged site of analysis whereby this broader statement can be made to seem reasonable, hence the emphasis on the poem. The absence of the Romantic word "poetry" is therefore not insignificant. Poetry is that which just sort of spills out of me. It's the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. (Never mind that.) The New Criticism isn't interested in spontaneous overflows of powerful feelings. Wimsatt has his little joke about drinking a pint of beer, taking a walk. So the New Criticism just isn't interested in those sorts of spontaneous overflow. Sorry. [laughs] I won't go there. [laughter]

But in any case, he goes on. He goes on to say, "All right. If we're focused on the work of art in and of itself, on the poem, we obviously in thinking about what it means need to come to terms with three kinds of evidence." That is to say, some things have a bearing on what it means and some things don't. What does have a bearing is language--that is to say, words in the public domain which all of us share and which we can study in order to come to terms with the exact meaning of the poem. A certain word--this is, of course, what kept you in your high school classes for so long--a certain word has five or six different meanings. The New Criticism delights in showing how all five or six of those meanings do have some bearing on the meaning of the poem. That's all legitimate evidence. That is what one uses to build up the structure of the interpretation of the poem. What is not relevant is what I've mentioned already: what the author said about the poem in letters to friends, to newspapers and so on. That has no relevance.

Then Wimsatt acknowledges that there's a sort of messy third category of evidence which has to do with language and is therefore legitimate to a point, but also has to do with the author's idiosyncrasies--that is to say, the way that author in particular used language, certain coterie words, or simply a private misunderstanding of certain words. You've got to know when you're reading Whitman what he means by "camerado." It's not exactly [laughs] what the rest of us typically mean when we--well, we don't use that word exactly, but it's [laughter] [laughs] what we typically mean when we speak of comrades or comradeship. In other words, the word is loaded in ways that--Wimsatt would probably acknowledge-- need to be taken into account if we're going to understand what Whitman is up to. Now this is very tricky, and he spends the rest of his essay talking about the murky boundaries between types of evidence, type of evidence number two which is out of play and type of evidence number three which may be in play but has to be dealt with in a gingerly and careful way.

But I'm more interested, actually, in a footnote which arises from this argument about the idiosyncratic nature of language as a particular author may use it because the footnote says, you know what? That's just one consideration we bring to bear on the function of language in a poem. This footnote, number eleven at the bottom of page 814 over to 815, is just about as devastating and counterintuitive a pronouncement as is made anywhere in our entire syllabus, the most earth-shattering pronouncement that anybody could ever possibly make in the New Criticism. Well, look at this footnote:

And the history of words *after* a poem is written may contribute meanings which if relevant to the original pattern should not be ruled out by a scruple about intention.

*That* is bold. The great creator raised his plastic arm, right? Everybody knows Akenside didn't mean polymers, but now we're all into cyberborgs and we take all of this very seriously. In a way it's a tribute to the great creator and also an acknowledgement of the fact that the great creator lives in the Eternal Moment. He's not subject to history. The great creator knew in the eighteenth century that some day plastic would mean polymer, right? Obviously that's one of the divine attributes. Therefore, if the great creator chooses to raise his prosthetic limb, that is simply a way of understanding what it is like to be everything, omnipotent and omniscient in the Eternal Moment. In other words, if you take Wimsatt's eleventh footnote seriously, that is a perfectly legitimate way not to ironically undermine Akenside's line but actually to reinforce it and to give it a kind of formal richness which it does not otherwise have.

I realize that I'm out of time, and so I'll begin the next lecture by talking about a poem of Yeats called "Lapis Lazuli" written in 1935, in which he talks about the way in which people who build up things that have been destroyed are always "gay." And of course, if we invoke intention, Yeats doesn't mean that they're always gay in our sense. He is using the English translation of the German word *froehlich* from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science.* Yeats is an astute and careful reader of Nietzsche and in some ways is elaborating on what Nietzsche says in that book in his poem "Lapis Lazuli." At the beginning of the next lecture we will do the same thing with the word "gay" that we've just done with the word "plastic" and then we will go ahead and consider the essay of Cleanth Brooks and other aspects of the New Criticism.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 6 Transcript**

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| January 29, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Last time we were giving examples of what might happen if one takes seriously that extraordinary eleventh footnote in Wimsatt's "The Intentional Fallacy"in which he says that the history of words *after* a poem was composed may well be relevant to the overall structure of the poem and should not be avoided owing simply to a scruple about intention. Essentially, that's what Wimsatt says in the footnote. So I went back to the great creator raising his plastic arm and suggested that, well, maybe after all there might be some good way of complicating the meaning of Akenside by suggesting that the modern, anachronistic meaning of "plastic" would be relevant to the sense of the poem. This by the way--just because one can make this claim and, I think, make it stick in certain cases, doesn't mean that the proposition is any less outrageous. Just imagine [laughs] a *philologist* being confronted with the idea that the meaning of words at a certain historical moment isn't the only thing that matters in understanding the meaning of a poem.

So I just wanted to give another example a little closer to home in the poem of Yeats, the 1935 poem "Lapis Lazuli." I began talking about it last time. It's a poem which begins, "I have heard that hysterical women say / they are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow, / of poets that are always gay..." The storm clouds of the approaching war are beginning to gather. A lot of people are saying, "Enough of this kind of effete culture. We need to think about important things, particularly about politics and the social order"--by the way, a very powerful argument in 1935. In any case, Yeats was on the other side of the controversy and insisted, after all, that there is a continuing role for art, as indeed, on the other hand, there may well be even in such times. So he's sick of everybody saying they don't want to talk about painting, they don't want to talk about music, and they don't want to talk about poets who are "always gay."

All right. So then the poem continues. It involves a stone, a piece of lapis lazuli that has a kind of a flaw in it, which is like a "water-course," and where one can imagine a pilgrim climbing toward increased enlightenment. As the poem goes on, Yeats talks about the way in which civilizations crumble--that is to say, all things fall apart, but then it's possible to build them back up. He says, "All things fall and are built again / and those that build them again are gay."

Now, as I said last time, needless to say, Yeats was not aware of the anachronistic meaning that we may be tempted to bring to bear on the poem. Yeats is thinking of Nietzsche, he's thinking of a word, *froehlich*, which probably is best translated "joyous, energetically joyous." He is just borrowing that word from the translation of a book by Nietzsche.

Well and good but, if you were a queer theorist or if you were interested in making not a weak, but a strong claim for the importance of queerness in our literary tradition, you would be very tempted to say, this enriches the poem--not just, in other words, that they are energetically joyous as creators, but also that in our contemporary sense of the word they're gay. Now this again, as in the case of Akenside, may or may not raise the hackles of the philologists, but there's a certain sense in which from a certain point of view, it's difficult to deny that it doesn't lend a certain coherence, an additionally complex coherence, to the nature of the poem.

All right. Then we have *Tony the Tow Truck.* You're probably beginning to wish I would refer to it, so why don't I? In the second line of *Tony the Tow Truck,* we learn that "I live in a little yellow garage." Now of course, the *de*notation of the word "yellow," as Cleanth Brooks would say, is that the garage is painted a certain color. The *con*notation, which undoubtedly the author had no notion of, wasn't thinking of--this is a book for toddlers--the connotation is that somehow or another there's the imputation of cowardice, possibly also the derogatory imputation of being Asian. Maybe Tony is Asian. Well--okay. This has nothing to do with the text, we say, and yet at the same time suppose it did. We could interrogate the author psychoanalytically. We could say, "Hey, wait a minute. Okay. So you say it was painted yellow. Why don't you say it's painted some other color?" We could begin to put a certain amount of pressure on the text and possibly, as I say, begin to do things with it which are kind of a five-finger exercise--we'll be doing a lot more of that sort of thing--but which might work.

All right. These are examples of the extraordinary implications of Wimsatt's eleventh footnote, and also, I think, perhaps in advance of today's discussion, clarify to some extent the importance for critics of this kind of notion of unity. In some ways, everything we have to say today will concern the idea of unity. In other words, a connotation is valuable and ought to be invoked even if it's philologically incorrect if it contributes to the unity, the complex building up of the unity, of the literary text. If, on the other hand, it is what Gadamer would call a "bad prejudice"--that is to say, some aspect of my subjectivity that nothing could possibly be done with in thinking about and interpreting the text--then you throw it out. So the criterion is: is it relevant to the unified form that we as critics are trying to realize in the text? That criterion, as I say--not just for the sorts of semi-facetious readings we can do with Wimsatt's eleventh footnote but also for readings that may at least have some marginal plausibility--this sense of unity is what governs interpretive decisions of this kind.

All right. Now a word or two about the antecedents of the New Criticism: In the first place, the thirties and forties in the academic world bear witness to the rise of a canon of taste largely introduced by the great Modernist writers, particularly by T. S. Eliot. You may notice that Brooks, for example, has a kind of Donne obsession. He gets that from Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets," which is a review essay of a volume of Donne's poems edited by somebody named Grierson which made Donne overnight, for a great many readers, the central poet in the English tradition. Brooks is still, as I say, very much under the influence of this.

Well, Eliot, in "The Metaphysical Poets," says some rather interesting things that had far-reaching consequences for the New Criticism. He says, "Poetry in our own time--such is the complexity of the world we live in--must be difficult." He says that poetry has to reconcile all sorts of disparate experience--reading Spinoza, the smell of cooking, the sound of the typewriter. All of this has to be yoked together in the imagery of a good poem, particularly of a metaphysical poem, and this model of complexity is what matters both for modern literature and for literary criticism. Now by the same token, other Modernists like James Joyce are also contributing to this idea of the independent unity of the work of art. In "Stephen Hero" or "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,"you remember Stephen in his disquisition on form and Aquinas and all the rest of it argues that the work of art is something that is cut off from its creator because its creator withdraws from it and simply pares his fingernails, in the famous expression. It's very interesting. You remember that in the Wimsatt that you read last time, Wimsatt argues--I think probably thinking about that passage in Joyce--that the work of art is "cut off" from its author at birth. This is an umbilical cord he's talking about. It has no more connection with its author from birth on and roams the world on its own. Ideas like this, as I say, are taken from the aesthetic and practical thinking about the nature of the work of art that one finds in Modernism.

In the meantime, let's consider the academic setting. In the 1930s, when Ransom in particular is writing his polemical manifestos, *The New Criticism* and *The World's Body*,and attacking most of what's going on as it's being done by his colleagues, he has two things in particular in mind: in the first place, old-fashioned philology, the kind of thinking about the literary text that would insist that "plastic" means what it means in the eighteenth century--and a lot of that was being done. This was the golden age of the consolidation of the literary profession. Standard editions are being created. The great learned journals are in their early phase. Knowledge is actually still being accumulated having to do with the basic facts of the literary tradition. We didn't know a great deal about certain authors until this period of the flourishing of philology in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth century took hold and pretty much created for us the archive that we now use today in a variety of ways. So although the New Critics were fed up with philological criticism, I don't mean to be condescending toward it or to suggest that it didn't play a crucially important role in the evolution of literary studies.

Now the other thing that was going on, and here--I don't know, depending on one's viewpoint, perhaps some measure of condescension might be in order, but these two *were* spectacular figures--the other thing that was going on was that there was a vogue for what might be called "appreciative teaching." That is, the contemporary and colleague of I.A. Richards at Cambridge was the famous "Q," Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, whose mesmerizing lectures had virtually no content at all. They were simply evocations, appreciative evocations, of great works of literature. I have to say that at Yale, exactly contemporary with "Q" we had a similar figure, the person after whom Phelps Gate is named: the great William Lyon Phelps, who would enter the classroom, begin rapturously to quote Tennyson, would clasp his hands and say that it was really good stuff, and the students were so appreciative that they gave hundreds and thousands of dollars to the university ever after. In other words, this was *valuable* teaching, [laughs] but again [laughter] [laughs] the New Critics were fed up with it. This was the atmosphere they found themselves in, and what they wanted--and this anticipates the atmosphere that you'll see the Russian formalists found themselves in when we turn to them next week--what they wanted was something like rigor or a scientific basis or some sort of set of principles that could actually be invoked, so that the business of criticism could become more careful and systematic, less scattershot, less effusive and so on. So this is, in effect, the backdrop in which in the American academy--influenced, as we'll now see, by certain trends in the British academy--arose in the thirties and in the forties.

All right. Now the first figure I want to talk a little bit about, and the first figure whom you read for today's assignment, is I. A. Richards. Richards, before he joined the English department at Cambridge, was actually a psychologist, trained as a Pavlovian psychologist, so that when you read in his essay about "stimuli" and "needs," you see pretty much where you stand. His sense of the way in which the mind reacts to the world, to its experience, and the way in which it's an uncomplicated reaction, a resisting reaction, or an adjusting reaction, all has very much to do with Pavlovian principles. These govern to some extent Richards' understanding even of his literary vocation during the period when in 1924 he wrote *Principles of Literary Criticism*.For Richards, reading is all about experience--that is to say, the way in which the mind is affected by what it reads. And so even though his subject matter is literature, he's nevertheless constantly talking about human psychology--that is to say, what need is answered by literature, how the psyche responds to literature, what's good and bad about psychic responses, and so on. This is the intellectual focus, in other words, of Richards' work.

Now another aspect of his having been and continuing to be a scientist is that Richards really did believe, seriously believed, in *reference*--that is to say, in the way in which language really can hook on to the world. Verifiable and falsifiable statement is for Richards the essence of scientific practice and he cares very much about that. He does not, in other words, share with so many literary critics--perhaps even with Brooks, who follows him in making the fundamental distinction I'm about to describe--he does not share with the majority of literary critics and artists a kind of distaste for science. This, by the way, is also true of his student, Empson, who was a math major before he became an English major. Both of them take very seriously the notion that there can be a scientific basis for what one does in English or in literary studies.

So another aspect of it for Richards is--because he takes science so seriously--is that he actually reverses the idea that we talked about last time in Sidney, Kant, Coleridge, Wilde, and Wimsatt. He actually reverses the idea that it's art that's autonomous. If you look on page 766 in the left-hand column, you'll find him saying that science is autonomous, and what he means by that is that scientific facts can be described in statements without the need for any kind of psychological context or any dependency on the varieties of human need. It is autonomous in the sense that it is a pure, uncluttered and uninfluenced declaration of fact or falsehood.

Then he says:

To declare Science autonomous is very different from subordinating all our activities to it. [Here's where poetry comes in.] It is merely to assert that so far as any body of references is undistorted it belongs to Science. It is not in the least to assert that no references may be distorted if advantage can thereby gained. And just as there are innumerable human activities which require undistorted references [scientific activities] if they are to be satisfied, so there are innumerable other human activities not less important which equally require distorted references or, more plainly, fictions.

Here you see Richards' basic distinction between what he calls "scientific statement" and what he calls "emotive statement," the distinction between that which is truly referential--that which is incontrovertibly verifiable or falsifiable on the one hand, and that which is emotive on the other. Later on Richards changes his vocabulary, and he no longer talks about scientific and emotive language. Even more dangerously, from the standpoint of anybody who likes poetry, [laughs] he talks instead of "statement," meaning science, and "pseudo-statement," meaning poetry. You are *really* out on a limb if you're going to defend poetry--as Richards kept doing--as "pseudo-statement," but of course "pseudo-statement" is just another expression for what he calls here "fiction."

Once we sort of settle into this vocabulary, and once we get used to this clearly unquestioningly scientific perspective, why on earth do we need pseudo-statement or fiction at all? We know very well, by the way, that there are scientists who simply cannot stand to read poetry because it's false, right? Just as Richards says, there's always something kind of archaic or atavistic about poetic thinking. It's not just that it's not trying to tell the truth, as Sidney said--"nothing lieth because it never affirmeth." It is in fact, Richards goes so far as to say, following Plato, *lying*. Poetry is constantly getting itself in trouble in all sorts of ways--on page 768, for example. He says, sort of toward the top of the right-hand column, page 768:

It is evident that the bulk of poetry consists of statements which only the very foolish would think of attempting to verify. They are not the kinds of things which can be verified.

In other words, they're a pack of lies. It usually follows from this that somebody like this points out that whereas we all know that a democratic society is the best society to live in, poetry prefers feudal society: it makes better poetry. Whereas we all know that the universe is of a certain kind--we can't even call it Copernican anymore--poetry has this odd preference for Ptolemaic astronomy. In other words, everything about poetry is atavistic. It's a throwback to some earlier way of thinking. There is some kind of latent primitivism in poetic thinking, and Richards seems cheerfully to embrace this idea. That's what he means by "fiction" or "pseudo-statement."

So why on earth do we want it? We want it, according to Richards, because it answers needs in our psychological makeup that science can't answer. In other words, we are a chaos of desires. Some of them involve the desire for truth--that is to say, for what we can learn from science--but a great many of our desires have nothing to do with any notion of truth but, rather, are needs that require fanciful or imaginative fulfillment, fulfillment of other kinds. The reason this fulfillment is important and can be valued is, according to Richards, that these needs--unless they are organized or harmonized so that they work together in what he sometimes calls a "synthesis"--can actually tear us apart. Literature is what can reconcile conflicting or opposing needs, and Richards cares so much about this basic idea that in another text, not in the text you've just read, he says, shockingly, "Poetry is capable of saving us." In other words, poetry is capable of doing now what religion used to do. Poetry, you remember--this is a scientist--is no more true than religion, but it can perform the function of religion and is therefore capable of saving us. And so even despite the seeming derogation of the very thing that he purports to be celebrating in books like *The Principles of Literary Criticism,* Richards does hold on to an extraordinarily important feeling for the mission of poetry to harmonize conflicting needs.

That's the role of poetry and that's what it does, simply by evoking our wishes, our desires--irrespective of truth--in their complicated, chaotic form and synthesizing them organically into something that amounts to psychological peace. It's a little bit like Aristotle's idea of catharsis, which can be understood in a variety of ways, but Milton at the end of *Samson Agonistes* understands it in one way when he says, Now we have as a result of this tragedy "calm of mind, all passion spent." That could be the motto for Richards' work. The experience of art, the experience of poetry, and the reconciliation of conflicting needs results in a kind of catharsis, a "calm of mind, all passion spent".

All right. Now Richards had a student, an undergraduate student, William Empson, who had, as I say, been a math major who decided he'd switch to English. He went to Richards and he said he had an idea about ambiguity. He said he felt there was quite a bit that could be written about it, and so he wondered if Richards would mind if maybe he worked on that. Richards said, "Fine. Fine. Sounds terrific. Go do it." So a few months later Empson brought him the manuscript of one of the greatest books of criticism in the twentieth century ,and one of the most amazingly surprising: *Seven Types of Ambiguity.* The brief excerpt you have in your photocopy packet-- I trust that you have picked it up by this time at Tyco [copy center]--from Empson is taken from *Seven Types of Ambiguity.*

I think Empson is the funniest person who has ever written literary criticism. I think that his deadpan way of bringing things down to earth when they get a little too highfalutin' involves the skill of a genuine stand-up comic. His timing is perfect. He has, in other words, all of the attributes of a great comic writer. I've enjoyed reading him so much that when I was asked to write a book about him, I agreed to do so. I've always been like that. Byron was the only person I enjoyed reading during the nail-biting and tense period of studying for my orals. So I wrote my dissertation on Byron as a result of that--nothing complicated, no deep reason for doing these things.

But Empson I hope you enjoy. He's a page-turner, and his extraordinary brilliance as a critic is really just part of the experience of reading him. I'm particularly interested in the excerpt you have and what he does with his notions--because this is his way of responding to "enthusiastic" or appreciative criticism. One of the tricks of "Q" and Billy Phelps and all the other sort of authors and lecturers in this mode was to say that they read for "atmosphere," that there was something that one just felt along one's bloodstream or in the pulses when one encountered great literature, and their purpose as lecturers and as critics was to evoke the atmosphere of things. So Empson says, Well, atmosphere, certainly that exists and we can talk about it in all sorts of ways; but after all, what is the use of atmosphere? What is the use of any aspect of literature if, as good scientists, we can't analyze it or can't somehow or another account for it? If there is atmosphere in the passage I'm about to quote from *Macbeth*, it must be atmosphere of a certain kind and there for a certain reason. What follows, it seems to me, is one of the most staggeringly beautiful, wonderful, amazing riffs on a passage of literature that you can encounter. I'm sorry if I sound a little bit like Billy Phelps, but I do get excited. He quotes the passage from *Macbeth*. As Empson says, the murderers have just left the room, and Macbeth is sort of twiddling his thumbs, hoping it's getting dark because it's got to get dark before Banquo can be killed. So naturally he looks out the window to see [laughs] how the time is going, and this is what he says:

… Come, seeling Night,  
Skarfe up the tender Eye of pitiful Day  
And with thy bloodie and invisible Hand  
Cancel and teare to pieces that great Bond  
That keeps me pale!

Empson doesn't mention this word, "pale," but in juxtaposition with the crows and rooks it strikes me that it itself is an interesting moment in the passage.   
To continue:

*Light thickens, and the Crow*  
*Makes Wing to th' Rookie Wood.*

Empson italicizes that because while he has something to say about every part of the passage--which all good criticism by the way should do. If you quote something, say something about all of it. [laughs] Okay--but Empson italicizes these particular lines because it's going to be the true focus of what he'll say later.

Good things of Day begin to droope, and drowse,  
While Night's black Agents to their Prey's do rowse.  
Thou marvell'st at my words, but hold thee still [Lady Macbeth has come into the room];  
Things bad begun, make strong themselves by ill:  
So prythee go with me.

All right. So Empson is fascinated by this passage, and then he gives you, in the next few paragraphs, the amazing variety of grounds for his fascination. He says, Look. This is what people mean when they talk about atmosphere. It's not just something you feel on your pulse. It's something that can be described, something that can be analyzed. And I just want to touch on the last part of it. He says, "*Rooks* live in a crowd and are mainly vegetarian…"--Empson's the person who says that the ancient mariner shot the albatross because the crew was hungry. He points out that in the 1798 edition of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*,biscuit worms had gotten into the hard-tack, so naturally, he says, "The particular kind of albatross that the mariner shot, I am told, makes a very tolerable broth." [laughs] [laughter] This is the mode of William Empson.

So he begins here:

*Rooks* live in a crowd and are mainly vegetarian; *Crow* may be either another name for *rook*, especially when seen alone, or it may mean the solitary Carrion crow. This subdued pun [this ambiguity--remember, this is a book about ambiguity] is made to imply here that Macbeth, looking out of the window, is trying to see himself as a murderer and can only see himself in the position of the crow: that his day of power now is closing; that he has to distinguish himself from the other rooks by a difference of name, *rook-crow*, like the kingly title, only; that he is anxious at bottom to be one with the other rooks, not to murder them; that he can no longer, or that he may yet, be united with the rookery; and that he is murdering Banquo in a forlorn attempt to obtain peace of mind.

I'm not at all sure there's anything more to be said about that passage, which I think lays it to rest. It does so by insisting on a complex mode of ambiguity that governs the passage--not atmosphere. Sure, call it "atmosphere" if you like, as long as you're willing to subject it to verbal analysis, as long as you're willing to show how and why the atmosphere is exactly of the nature that it is, and that it arises, in other words--and here is the relationship between Richards and Empson--out of a complex state of mind; that poetry, the poetry of this speaker, this speaker/murderer, is attempting desperately to reconcile and harmonize, just as he is attempting desperately to be reconciled and harmonized with the society from which he has alienated himself and, of course, is failing. Macbeth is not Shakespeare. Shakespeare is representing him in poetry, attempting to do something which in the immediate psychological circumstances poetry can't do, but in the process evoking an extraordinary complexity of effort on the part of the mind to be reconciled through the medium of language. As I say, this is the sense in which Empson follows Richards.

But at the same time, there's something rather different between the two. First of all, Empson doesn't really kind of settle into a sense that it's all about the reader--that is to say, that it's all about the reader's experience of the literary. Richards is actually an avatar of figures like Iser, like Hans Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish--whom we'll be discussing later in the syllabus--who are interested in reader response: that is to say, in the way in which we can talk about the structure of reader experience. Empson is sort of interested in that, just as he's fascinated by the texture of textual evidence itself. He is also very interested--much more so than Richards, and certainly more so than the New Critics from whom he sharply diverges in advance in this respect--interested in authorial intention; that is to say, for him, literary criticism is always an appeal to authorial intention. Mind you, he ascribes to authorial intention the most amazingly outrageous things that other critics threw up their hands in despair about, but nevertheless it is for him always still an appeal to authorial intention. At bottom, Empson doesn't really settle into the rigorous consideration of the author, the text, or the reader as if they were separate functions. For Empson, there's a kind of a fluid and easy movement back and forth between what for hermeneutics are three very different phenomena: author, text, reader. For Empson, it's a kind of synthetic *mélange* that's ultimately an appeal to the author, but certainly involves both working on the text itself and also understanding its effects on the reader.

So all of this distances Empson from Richards to a certain extent, but the most important difference, I think, between Empson and the other figures we're discussing--a difference which makes it even a little bit complex to say that he's a precursor of the New Criticism--is that Empson very rarely concerns himself with the *whole* of a text. He isn't really interested in the unity of "the poem." He is simply interested in saying as much as he can about certain local effects, certainly with the implication, possibly, that this has a bearing on our understanding of, let's say, the whole of *Macbeth*; but he doesn't set about doing a systematic reading of the whole of Macbeth. He always zooms in on something, thinks about it for a while and then goes away and thinks about something else, leaving us to decide whether it has a genuine bearing on the entirety or on the literary wholeness or unity of Macbeth. Empson is interested in the complexity of local effects.

Another thing to say about Empson's perspective, which makes him differ sharply, I think, from Richards and from the later New Critics, is that Empson is perfectly willing to accommodate the idea that maybe--just as in the case of the psychology of Macbeth the character--that maybe poetry *doesn't* reconcile conflicting needs. Maybe, after all, poetry is an expression of the irreducible conflict of our needs. The last chapter of *Seven Types of Ambiguity,* his seventh ambiguity, is actually, as Empson said, about "some fundamental division in the writer's mind." There, you see, he diverges from his teacher, Richards. He's fascinated by the way in which literature doesn't unify opposites or reconcile needs but leaves things as it found them, but exposed in all of their complexity. Paul de Man more than once invoked Empson as a precursor of deconstruction, not of the New Criticism. For this reason--for the reason that he's not concerned with unity and that he's not concerned with the idea of the reconciliation of opposites--Empson, I think, can rightly be understood as a precursor of deconstruction, if only because deconstruction follows the New Criticism, of course, in being a mode of close reading; and there has never been a better close reader than Empson.

Before turning away from Empson, whose influence was widespread despite this divergence, it needs to be said that his purposes for close reading are actually very different from the purposes of the New Critics--the American New Critics, particularly Brooks whose preoccupation with unity is something he freely confesses and something that--well, we've got ten minutes, so I shouldn't rush ahead prematurely--but something that you can see to be at the heart of what Brooks is doing. Here Brooks, in *The Well-Wrought Urn*, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*,and the other books for which he's well known, uses a variety of different words to describe the way in which the complexity of literature is placed in the service of unification. In the essay you're reading here, he uses the word "irony." He admits that maybe he stretches the word "irony," but he tries to argue that the variety of effects that he focuses on in his essay have to do with irony. In another great essay, the first chapter of *The Well-Wrought Urn,* he talks about paradox. Obviously, these are related ideas, and elsewhere he takes up other ways of evoking the way in which complex feelings and thoughts are brought together.

Empson's word, "ambiguity," continues to play an important role in the work of the New Criticism. It is--at least, it puts itself out there as a candidate to be an alternative term that one might use if one got tired of saying "irony" or "paradox." [laughs] There are a variety of words, in other words. Another word given by the poet and critic Allen Tate, one of the founding figures of the New Criticism, is "tension"--that is to say, the way in which the literary text resolves oppositions as a tension; that is, a holding in suspension a conflict experienced as tension.

So there are these varieties of ways for describing what's going on in a text. It's interesting I think that if one thinks of *Tony the Tow Truck* one can think of--when you go home and study it, you'll see what I mean--there's a complex pattern of imagery, as it were, between pulling and pushing. There's a tremendous amount of pulling and pushing that goes on in *Tony the Tow Truck.* We'll revert especially to the notion of "pushing" in other contexts later in the course, but for the moment you can see the way in which there is a tension between that which pulls and that which pushes, which is one of the motive forces of the story. That, I think, is an example also: if it is *ironic* that Tony is now stuck and instead of pulling needs to be pushed, if it is in some Brooksian sense ironic that that is the case, we can understand that as irony or as tension or ambiguity.

Now there's one way in which *Tony* is probably not a good proof text for the New Criticism. You remember that in "My Credo,"the little sort of excerpt that you get at the beginning of the Brooks section in your anthology, Brooks says, "Poetry should be about moral things but it shouldn't point a moral." Obviously *Tony the Tow Truck* points a moral and so would be subject to a kind of devaluation on those grounds by the New Criticism--even though there are ways of reading *Tony*, as I've been suggesting, New Critic-ally.

All right. Now the idea of unity for Brooks, and for the New Critics in general, is that it be complex, that it warp the statements of science, and that it bring to bear a tension between the denotation and the connotation of words. The word "yellow" in the second line of *Tony the Tow Truck--*its denotation is that it is a certain color, the color that Tony's garage is painted. The connotation, I have suggested, is of the variety of kinds that one might gingerly approach in thinking about complicating the texture of the story. In any case, the tension between denotation and connotation is part of the way in which irony works. So the question again is--and the question it seems to me raised in advance by Empson--why should these sorts of tension, these movements of complex reconciliation, result in unity?

It's very interesting. Brooks's reading of "She Dwelt Among Untrodden Ways," the wonderful Lucy poem by Wordsworth, emphasizes the irony of the poem. Brooks feels that he's on very thin ice talking about Wordsworth and irony at all, but at the same time does bring it out rather beautifully, talking about the irony of the poem basically as the way in which you can't really say that Lucy can be a flower and a star simultaneously. She's a flower, she's perishable, she's half hidden, and she's ultimately dead and in the ground--whereas a star would seem to be something that she just can't be mapped onto if she is this half-hidden thing. But at the same time, Brooks says, "Well, after all she is a star to the speaker," and he's just saying, "She's a star to me; she's a flower half hidden, unnoticed to everyone else." The relationship between the depth of the speaker's feeling and the obscurity of Lucy in the world is the irony that the speaker wants to lay hold of and that reconciles what seem like disparate facts in the poem.

Well, now I just want to point out that close reading can always be pushed *farther*. That's the difficulty about close reading. It's all very well to say, "Look at me, I'm reconciling harmonies, I'm creating patterns, I'm showing the purpose of image clusters and all the rest of it," but if you keep doing it, what you have yoked together becomes unyoked again. It falls apart, or at least it threatens to do so. A contemporary of Brooks's named F. W. Bateson wrote an essay on this same poem, "She Dwelt Among Untrodden Ways," in which he points out--the poem's on page 802--that the poem is full of oxymorons, contradictions in terms: "untrodden ways." A "way" is a path, but how can there be a path if it's not trodden? What is the meaning of an untrodden way, or of "there are none to praise" her but "very few to love"? Why call attention not so much to the difference between "few love her" and "none praise her" as the notion that none praise her? This is palpably false because here's the poet praising her, right? So what does he mean, "none"? Why is he calling attention, in other words, to this logical disparity? "She lived unknown and few could know"--how can she be unknown if few know anything about her? In other words, the poem is full of complexities, but who says they're being *reconciled*? They're just sitting there oxymoronically, not reconciling themselves at all.

So Bateson's argument is that Wordsworth is calling attention to a conflict of emotion or feeling that can't be reconciled, hence the pathos of the ending, "[O]h, / the difference to me," and so on. This, as I say, is a different use of close reading. It's close reading which is not in the service of unity or of unification but recognizes that the very arts whereby we see a thing as a unified whole can just as easily be put to the purpose of blasting it apart again, and of calling our attention to that which can't be reconciled just as the speaker can't be reconciled to the death of Lucy.

Now the New Critics can, I think, be criticized for that reason. The aftermath of--the historical close reading aftermath of--the New Criticism does precisely that, if one sees deconstruction as a response to the New Criticism. It's not just that, as we'll see, it's a great many other things too. The deconstructive response consists essentially in saying, "Look. You can't just arbitrarily tie a ribbon around something and say, 'Ah ha. It's a unity.'" Right? The ribbon comes off. [laughs] "Things fly apart," as the poet says, and it's not a unity after all.

There is another aspect of the way in which the New Criticism has been criticized for the last forty or fifty years which needs to be touched on. The notion of autonomy, the notion of the freedom of the poem from any kind of dependence in the world, is something that is very easy to undermine critically. Think of Brooks's analysis of Randall Jarrell's "Eighth Air Force." It concludes on the last page of the essay by saying that this is a poem about human nature, about human nature under stress, and whether or not human nature is or is not good; and arguments of this kind, arguments of the kind set forth by the poem, "can make better citizens of us." In other words, the experience of reading poetry is not just an aesthetic experience. It's not just a question of private reconciliation of conflicting needs. It's a *social* experience, in this view, and the social experience is intrinsically a conservative one. In other words, it insists on the need to balance opinions, to balance viewpoints, and to balance needs, precisely in a way which is, of course, implicitly a kind of social and political centrism. In other words, how can poetry in this view--how can literature be progressive? For that matter, how can it be reactionary? How, in other words, can it be put to political purposes if there is this underlying, implicit centrism in this notion of reconciliation, harmonization, and balance?

That has been a frequent source of the criticism of the New Criticism in its afterlife over the last forty or fifty years. There's also the question of religion. There is a kind of implicit Episcopalian perspective that you see in Brooks's essay when he's talking about the Shakespeare poem, in which, under the aspect of eternity, inevitably things here on earth seem ironic. [laughs] There's always that play of thought throughout the thinking of the New Criticism as well. Naturally, one will think of things in ironic terms if one sees them from the perspective of the divine or of the eternal moment.

All right. Sorry to have kept you. I have to stop. We'll talk next week about other sorts of formalism beginning Tuesday with the Russian formalists, a movement of thought that's earlier than the New Criticism, and then we'll move from there. Then on Friday, there will be that lecture which makes up the Wolfgang Iser material from last week.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 7 Transcript**

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| February 3X, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** All right. So today we start a sequence which takes us through deconstruction, and it's a sequence which has genuine coherence. That is to say, these are figures all of whom are attentive to each other's thought, draw on each other, and build from the materials that we're going to start covering toward a certain--not a certain end, but toward a moment in which the materials of the tradition seem to be undermined, actually, in deconstruction, but in which they are still prominent and set the terms of debate. The relationship between the Russian formalists and the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, which we'll be taking up on Thursday, is a complex one. I'm going to say certain things about it, and you may find yourselves discussing this relationship in section.

I think much will come clear when we actually get into what's called "structuralism" and you read the essay by Roman Jakobson called "Linguistics and Poetics," Jakobson having spent the early part of his career as a card-carrying member of OPOJAZ, the journal of the Russian formalists; and then who, owing to various forces that I'll be talking about, emigrated first to Prague, Czechoslovakia where he joined a linguistic circle, which in a variety of ways proved to be the origin of what's called structuralism. Then, of course, he moved on to Paris where he knew Claude Levi-Strauss and influenced him and, ultimately, to the United States. The essay, "Linguistics and Poetics," which you'll be reading next week, I think will give you perhaps a clearer sense of the way in which the Russian formalists' work, and the work of Saussure--the foundational work of Saussure--in the *General Course in Linguistics* amalgamates in ways that are profoundly fruitful and influential for the subsequent course of structuralist and deconstructionist thinking.

So today we begin thinking about the Russian formalists, but I also do want to think of them as kicking off a tradition which, just in order to place them--vis-à-vis what you've been reading and hearing about already, one can say something like this about this tradition: it differs markedly from, and it's opposed to, hermeneutics in this one particular. It's one that is maybe initially counterintuitive but actually, I think, is rather important once you begin to think about it. Hermeneutics is, well, more or less by nature and by definition, interested in meaning. That is to say, the arts of interpretation are used for the purpose of discovering, uncovering, and arriving at meaning. Very frequently, as is the case in Gadamer, this meaning is called "the subject matter": that is to say, what--in thinking about literature in terms of form and content, let's say--we'd call "content." So in any case, hermeneutics is devoted to the discovery of meaning, and the art that it's concerned with is the art of interpretation.

Well, the Russian formalists differed very sharply in this regard because what they're interested in is precisely the way in which "literariness," as they call it--the devices of literariness--can be deployed so as to impede, to interfere with, and to hinder our arrival at meaning. If, in other words, hermeneutics is devoted to the possibility of communication and of understanding, the Russian formalists are interested in that special aspect of verbal communication called "literariness," which actually interferes with these very processes of communication and understanding. The roughening of the surface--celebrated by Shklovsky as a form of "defamiliarization"--is what slows us down, what gets in the way of our arriving at meaning, and does so for a variety of reasons that the formalists are engaged to attend to.

Now you may take note of the fact that what I'm saying isn't completely convincing, perhaps, to those who have been reading the New Critics and Wolfgang Iser and have noticed that they, too, are very interested in the ways in which literariness does involve special techniques and devices that slow us down. In other words, replacing the shortest distance between two points that we experience in a practical message, "literariness," as the formalists call it, or "poetic language," as they also sometimes call it and as the New Critics certainly call it, slows us down. It creates as a distance between two points, *rather* than a straight line, an arabesque. In other words, it makes us pause over what we're reading. It gets in the way of arriving too quickly at meaning, if indeed one arrives at meaning at all. The formalists are uniquely concerned, however, with the way in which literature is *put together*. Those titles that Eikhenbaum keeps talking about--*How* *Don Quixote* *was Made*, *How Gogol's* *Overcoat was Made*--reflect the preoccupation of the Russian formalists with how literature is put together. In other words, whereas the New Critics and Wolfgang Iser are interested in the roughening of form, they're interested in it for hermeneutic purposes. It slows us down, yes, but this slowing down is a means of enriching what we finally grasp to be the meaning of a text. So they are still engaged in the hermeneutic enterprise in interpretation.

The formalists are really relatively indifferent to questions of meaning and to questions of interpretation. They're interested in what they call "science." They're interested in structure. They're interested, in other words, in the way a text is put together. That is, I think, essentially the difference between what we have been talking about so far, even though there have been a variety of outlooks, and what we are talking about now. Temporarily, as we advance through the syllabus, we're bracketing or suspending our interest in meaning and focusing instead on how something is made.

Take, for example, *Tony the Tow Truck*. I mentioned that an interesting phenomenon in *Tony,* the text of *Tony,* is the tripartition of the "t" sound: "Tony," "tow," "truck." Just after we read in the text, "Tony the Tow Truck," we encounter a triadic or triple encounter with vehicles: Neato, Speedy, Bumpy. In other words, there's a three-ness which appears at a variety of levels in the text of *Tony the Tow Truck* which exactly corresponds to the aphorism of Osip Brik quoted by Eikhenbaum in your text: "repetition in verse is analogous to tautology in folklore."

Now we have uncovered something about the form, the structure, of *Tony the Tow Truck* in saying this, but we haven't discovered or uncovered a thing about the meaning of *Tony the Tow Truck.* Nothing follows from this really--I think--rather interesting observation that there's a kind of pervasiveness of triadicity. Nothing follows from this observation about the actual meaning of the text. Now if you're clever enough maybe you could [laughs] parlay it into a sense of the meaning of the text. Who knows? Maybe we'll try on some other occasion, but for the moment I think you can see that in making remarks of this kind about a text one has shifted the attention from meaning to structure. It's in that context that most of the observations we encounter in Russian formalism need to be understood.

Now the stress on taxonomy--in other words, the stress on the relationship among parts, the understanding of the various parts of the literary texts as "devices," which is to say, interrelated one with the others--this emphasis on taxonomy is one of the ways in which the formalists insist that what they're doing is scientific. Nobody can possibly miss in reading Eikhenbaum's rhetorically rather bizarre essay his obsession with struggle, with the fight, and with doing battle. You go on and say to yourself, "Good heavens. It's just talk about literature. [laughs] Relax. [laughs] It can't be that important." But for Eikhenbaum, there's obviously a lot at stake. I'll try to give you some social and historical reasons why this is the case, but in the meantime what he's struggling *for* is important to recognize, too.

In the very first sentence of the essay, you read the expression "the struggle for science"-- an interesting formulation, "the struggle for science." Now obviously, the struggle takes place against the backdrop of completely undisciplined and unsystematic thinking which Eikhenbaum identifies as the typical thinking of the universities, of the academy. It's a pretty state of affairs, in his view, when the most rigorous thinking that's being done about literature is being done in popular journals. That's part of the struggle, undoubtedly, but another part of the struggle is simply to reach some means, to break through to some means of understanding the thing that you're talking about. You want to talk about it systematically, but how can you talk about anything systematically if you don't know what it is? You need to pin down an object of study, a first principle from which other principles can emerge, and part of the process is to say, "Hey, it's not literature we're talking about. Who knows what literature is? Nobody's really ever known what literature is." What we're talking about is *literariness*--that is to say, certain devices that we can identify that perform a certain function--and maybe out of the identification of these devices, to evolve a theory that's more widespread.

Now I use the word "evolve" deliberately. In the backdrop, in the background, of that expression, "struggle for science," there are two key figures. The first is obviously Marx against the backdrop of the first great Socialist Revolution which eventually resulted in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, when the Russian formalist movement was at its height. Against the backdrop of Marx's thought pervading not just Russian life but beginning to pervade Russian government--against this backdrop, the idea of struggle, as in class struggle, is going to predominate. Eikhenbaum in this culture will be using such a word advisedly, almost familiarly, but at the same time it's very interesting that the kind of science he's thinking about is not just any science. You'll see this more and more clearly as you read through the text and as we talk about it. It's Darwinian science and it's very interesting that Darwin, as much as Marx, is all about struggle: the struggle for survival, the struggle for dominance. Notice the importance--and we'll come back to it-- of the word "dominant": "the dominant" in the thinking of the Russian formalists and the struggle for dominance among species in a habitat. So in literature you have something like--if you think in terms of literary evolution as Jurij Tynjanov does in the essay that the passage on your sheet concludes--if you think in those terms, you think about literary history itself as a sequence of changes in which devices and aspects of the literary text struggle for dominance within and over against other devices.

So it is simultaneously in his very first sentence a Marxist and a Darwinian vocabulary that Eikhenbaum is invoking, and that's what partly accounts for the strenuousness of his rhetoric. There is the backdrop of class struggle which is understood as crucial. There is the fermentation of Darwinian thought, which at the same time is understood as crucial. A great deal is at stake, and if those disorganized, unsystematic academics aren't attuned to the importance of these struggles--right, class struggle, the struggle for science, science as the science of struggle--if they aren't attuned to these currents, these contemporary currents, that's just another way of showing how irrelevant and obsolete they are.

Now "The Theory of the Formal Method," Eikhenbaum's essay that you've read for today, was written in 1927. In other words, it was written directly in the aftermath of a bombshell published by Leon Trotsky called *Literature and Revolution* in 1926. Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* is a brilliant book, an attack on many things and a defense of certain other things, but in particular and very painfully an attack on the formalists. Trotsky argues that the preoccupation with form in and for itself is a kind of aestheticism--something, by the way, which Eikhenbaum denies during the course of his text--a kind of aestheticism, turning its back on history and turning its back precisely on class struggle. Trotsky is not simple-minded in his literary taste, and he doesn't just sort of spontaneously insist that everybody has to write socialist realism. That doesn't, by the way, happen until 1934 when it became a kind of pronouncement of necessity at the International Soviet Writers Conference on that occasion.

In the meantime, Trotsky's book is a shot fired across the bow of those forms of "aestheticism"--quote, unquote--which can be understood as self-involved, self-preoccupied, and indifferent to history and class struggle. It's 1927. Things are changing. It's been ten years since the Revolution. There is a kind of taking hold of society and government by increasingly bureaucratized and strict forms of surveillance and management of social matters. Whether and to what extent the Russian formalists and their allies, the Futurists--among them Mayakovsky and others--felt a kind of antagonism or growing threat from the government is not wholly clear to me. It's been disputed and one doesn't know for sure. There is still a tremendous amount of intellectual ferment and excitement in the capitals of Russia. This is not a wasteland of thought by any means, and the Russian formalists are an important part of what's going on. Nevertheless, Trotsky's book is a provocation. It's a challenge, and Eikhenbaum's essay that you read for today is in part--to a degree that it can't really come out and talk about, or doesn't want to come out and talk about it--a response to Trotsky's book.

So there were criticisms in the air--but obviously he doesn't want to say much about that. There's one way in which he does talk about it, though. That is the marvelous exchange between the ethnographic critic Veselovsky and Shklovsky of 1917, which I'll return to; but for the most part, he stays away, seems at least to stay away, from the provocation and simply defends the right of the formalists to exist and the integrity of what they're doing. The obvious "enemies"--and of course, this is Eikhenbaum's language, so one needn't wince away from using it--the obvious enemies, in this case, are figures like Potebnya the academician, who in a way defended the premises of the Symbolists, which was the other very lively group of antagonists to the formalists--to the effect that poetry is all about imagery. It's all about patterns of thought. In the case of the Symbolists, it's thought arising from the unconscious and being reinforced by sound and by language; so that language is subsidiary to imagery and thought, a kind of handmaiden of it--the vessel, in other words, into which the energies of symbolic thought are poured. It's this basic antagonism, this difference of opinion, that Eikhenbaum wants to focus on and, indeed, does focus on.

At the same time, there is a feeling, somehow there is a feeling--and it's very clear in an essay by Jakobson called "The Generation that Squandered its Poets"--of something like bureaucratization that's taking hold, something like the an atmosphere in which our perceptions of the things around us become automated. Shklovsky in particular is very much preoccupied with the sense of the automatization or automism--I much prefer the latter word--of perception, the way in which we no longer really see what's around us. I quoted the other day Wallace Stevens saying that poetry should "make the visible a little hard to see." By the same token, Shklovsky insists, and his colleagues insist, that the business of the roughening of surface by means of various modes of literariness is to defamiliarize automated perceptions; to make us suddenly see again, to see the nature of the language that we're using, and, indeed, also to see--this is very clear, by the way, in the essay "Literature as Technique" in your anthology that I recommended that you read--at the same to see the world itself anew by means of devices of language that tear the film away from our eyes.

So defamiliarization, against the backdrop of a kind of gray uniformity that Jakobson in his essay on "The Generation that Squandered its Poets" called "byt"--I don't know how to pronounce that. I don't know a word of Russian, and so I actually try to avoid using the rather well-known Russian equivalents for these terms because I feel like an idiot. Yes, I see them in the text just as anybody else does, but since I don't really know what they mean except by means of the translation, why should I use them? But in any case, this is a well-known term used by Jakobson in this essay which is, like all such terms that somehow wander into other languages, difficult to translate. That's why they wander into other languages. It means something like a kind of dulled grayness or ordinariness of life. It's that backdrop--it's that sense of bureaucratized existence--that defamiliarization has, to a certain extent, the ideological purpose of dispelling and undermining. One has to recognize, in other words, that this motive, this motive force, stands behind the work of the Russian formalists, so that the claim to be strictly scientific needs to be hedged a little bit as a return of the aesthetic, or a return of value, understood as the insistence that life doesn't need to be all that dull. That really is implicit [laughs] in the Russian formalist viewpoint.

Literariness, then. What is literariness? It is those aspects of a text, the way in which those devices of a text that call themselves to our attention, are new: that is to say, the way in which they shake up perception through the fact that we're not used to seeing them. In a way, this call for that which is new is worldwide; at the same time you have Ezra Pound among the high Modernists in the West saying, "Make it new," as his slogan. You have the various observations of Eliot and Joyce and others, whom I cited last time in talking about the background to the New Criticism--all of them insisting on the necessity of difficulty, of novelty, of coming to terms with the immediacy of one's particular circumstances, and of getting away from that which is familiar and ordinary and vague. It is a transnational idea, in other words, which nevertheless has, obviously, certain specific applications depending on where it is. The newness that the Russian formalists are interested in is not just any newness. It has to do particularly with the palpable or roughened form of that which defamiliarizes.

Now how do we understand this form? "Form" as opposed to what? This is a crucial issue for the Russian formalists, which they handle very boldly. Part of their platform is that *everything* is form. There is no distinction, in other words, between form and content. That's the fundamental mistake, as they see it, that their enemies of various kinds make in their understanding, in their approach to literature. But, you know, the formalists' own basic distinctions are dualistic, aren't they: the distinction between poetic and practical language, the distinction between plot and story, the distinction between rhythm and meter? In all of these cases, you're tempted to say, "Well, gee. One of those must be form [laughs] and the other must be content--in particular, obviously "plot" and "story" where "plot" is the constructedness of the text and the "story" is what the text is about. Doesn't that sound a lot like form and content?" Well, I actually think the Russian formalists can be defended against the charge that, unbeknownst to themselves, they fall back in to form-content distinctions by insisting on this variety of dualities. I want to spend a little time suggesting and developing the way in which that defense could be undertaken.

Poetic and practical language: you've already been hearing this in I.A. Richards and in the New Critics. While the New Critics, in a variety of ways, insist that form is meaning, form is content and so on, they're still not really breaking down the distinction between form and content. There's an obvious sense in which they understand poetic language to be that in which form is predominant and practical language to be that in which content is predominant, but the Russian formalists see it in a slightly different way. Content is a function--or let me say practical language, the purpose, in other words, of communicating facts or of communicating at all, which we associate with practical language--is a function of poetic language. That is to say, it coexists with poetic language. It is an aspect of a text, the way in which it does communicate in other words, which has to be understood as existing in a dynamic, functional relationship with those aspects of the text in which literariness is dominant. It's not a question, in other words, of poetry or of a novel being somehow or another strictly a matter of poetic language. In poetry or the novel, you can argue that the poetic function--and this is the term Jakobson will ultimately use for it in his essay, "Linguistics and Poetics"--that the poetic function is the dominant; but that's not to say that practical language is absent or that it doesn't have its own function.

By the way, if we begin by talking about poetic and practical language, we're beginning where the Russian formalists began. As Eikhenbaum explains, in 1914 the first publication of their journal was entirely devoted to poetic sound, to the way in which sound seems, indeed is, not merely subservient to the elaboration of sense. One of the things, by the way, that Eikhenbaum does in passing is remind us that we should be on our guard against thinking that sound is onomatopoetic--that is, that it reflects the meaning of what it's talking about. When I say "pigeon," I don't really seem to have any particular sense of an onomatopoetic word, but if I use the Latin, *pipio*, which means "to chirp," all of a sudden I say, "Oh, that's onomatopoetic." Well, the formalists and also Saussure--this is one of the most important links between the formalists and Saussure--are very carefully on their guard against supposing that sound, that the ways in which we hear language, is onomatopoetic because that would suggest once again, in keeping with Symbolist ideas, that sound was subservient to meaning. The importance of the earliest work of the Russian formalists was the establishment of the idea that sound goes its own way and is not subservient to anything, that it is a device independent of, though interacting with, other devices, and that it doesn't exist for the purpose of elucidating anything. In fact, it exists, amazingly, in order to hinder understanding in the kinds of texts that we're inclined to call "poetic." It's repetitive; it's anti-economical; it's retardant.

Language of this source is a device, and in relation to other devices it's called a "function." We call it a function. That is to say it has a function; it has a function within our understanding of the way in which a text has structure. Every aspect of the structure of the text can be understood as having a function.

Take, for example, "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain." Now this is an example of a text in which alliteration is plainly predominant. It is repetitive, and we understand it to be somehow different from the ordinary way in which a fact is communicated; but if we are not Russian formalists, we're tempted to say, "Well, it's a mnemotechnic device introduced for the purpose of--that is to say, it's subservient to--the communication of a fact." By the way, I've never known whether it is a fact. [laughs] A lot of mountains are rainy. [laughs] The Pyrenees I suppose are dry. I really have no idea whether it's a fact, and it's not important in *My Fair Lady* whether it's a fact. What's important in *My Fair Lady* is to repeat the repetitiousness of verse--[spoken with heavy emphasis on rhythm] "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain"--in terms of the tautology of the plot. Eliza Doolittle tries repeatedly to say that but, just like Neato and Speedy failing or being unwilling to push Tony out of his problem, so Eliza repeatedly says [with a cockney accent], "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain." That's not good enough, and so the repetition in the plot reinforces the repetition of the sound in question. Whether or not it's a fact is completely immaterial to Eliza, it's completely immaterial to Henry Higgins, and it's completely immaterial to the outcome of *My Fair Lady*. What's important in *My Fair Lady* is the functionality of repetition in the transformation of the principal character into a lady, right? So in formalist terms, that's the way we have to understand what, if we weren't formalists, we would suppose, as I say, to be a mnemotechnical device for the purpose of communicating something about the weather in Spain. Right? I think it's interesting to think in those terms about the relationship among devices.

Now the point is that yes--and this is what emerged from subsequent thought in the Russian formalist movement--the first wave or phase had to do strictly with sound, but then they began to say, "Well, what about this notion of device? What about the way in which--maybe the best thing to do if we're going to avoid keeping once and again and again and again falling in to the trap of making one aspect of the text subservient to other aspects, merely there for the purpose of reinforcing content--if we're going to avoid doing this, if we're going to see the text as a text that has a structure, hadn't we better say that everything in it is form, that everything in it is a device? How are we going to do that? Because it would certainly seem that texts *refer* to things."

Well, yes, they do, so why don't we call that to which they refer--for example, in the case of socialist realism or indeed realism of any kind, why don't we call that to which they refer the "society function"? Why don't we say, "Oh, yeah, in a certain kind of text, the dominant device in that text is referentiality, is the way in which the real world is hooked onto and that can be understood as a device with respect to other devices." It becomes, at certain moments in the evolution of forms according to the Russian formalists, the dominant. You see, this is the way in which you avoid the form-content distinction. You say, "Oh, so-called content. What other people call content is a device like any other, and it engages in the struggle for dominance with all the other devices that one can identify as aspects of literature."

Take the distinction between plot and story. There you would really think the formalists are on thin ice. Plot, yes, we all agree that's the constructed-ness of the story. That's the way the story is put together, how the overcoat is made, and so on. But story, that's what the plot is *about*, and if that's what the plot is about, how can we avoid calling it content? Well, it's very interesting. In the first place, notice that sometimes story can be the dominant in obviously formal terms. I think of that story that all of you have probably read in school, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien. It's a list of the contents of the knapsack of a soldier during the Vietnam War, just a list of the contents. Of course, all these items in the knapsack are evocative and what they do is they suggest a plot. By the end of the story, in other words, there is implied a plot. It's just the opposite of the usual relationship between plot and story. Ordinarily, a plot constructs something which is implied--that is to say, that which happens, that which we can talk about in paraphrase or as a subject matter outside the text--but here in O'Brien's story, you're given the subject matter. The subject matter itself becomes the dominant device, and it implies in your imagination a way to construct it, but the way to construct it is not the dominant. The way to construct it is something that's up to you. What's the dominant in the text is just the stuff, the stuff in his knapsack listed with as little implication as possible. So that's an instance of the way in which you can see the relationship between plot and story as a relationship of devices, even though it's awfully tempting to say, "Oh, the story's just the content and the plot's the form"--but no. The formalists don't want to keep that distinction for the reasons that I have been trying to develop.

Any device can be the dominant at a given moment in the development of literary history. Any device can be the dominant. In *Hiawatha,* Longfellow's *Hiawatha,* meter is the device. You know how it goes. Well, in Tennyson sound is the device, "the murmurous haunt"--oh, I have no memory at all today. I'm mixing it up with a line of Keats, and I'm going to say something else about Keats. I'll just tell you that Tennyson thought the two most beautiful words in the English language were "cellar door" and that audible beauty was his preoccupation in the making of poetry. So we can say that the dominant device in Tennyson's poetry, as in much Victorian poetry--certainly Swinburne's--is sound, and in Keats we can say that the dominant device is imagery, with his famous emphasis on synesthesia and the way in which the various senses merge in the evocation of images.

In other words, of course the academicians and the Symbolists were obsessed with imagery, but that's not to say that a Russian formalist can't deal with imagery. In a certain poet, the image, the image patterns, can certainly be recognized as the dominant device. That would probably be the case, for example, with Keats. In Gertrude Stein, the dominant is repetition undoubtedly. In Wordsworth or Joyce or Woolf, the dominant is perhaps not formal. Think of the feeling that Wordsworth's blank verse just kind of disappears into prose. I don't think that's quite true, but there's a general feeling that, as Matthew Arnold said, Wordsworth has no style. In Wordsworth or Joyce or Woolf, the dominant is the interiority of consciousness--that is, the way in which what we call stream of consciousness or the inwardness of thought *motivates*--this is another word that you encounter in Eikhenbaum's essay--motivates everything else that goes on in the text. In other words, an enormous variety of aspects of literature, understood as "literariness," can become the dominant.

Now as soon as we start talking about things like the dominant, we are also aware of the evanescence of dominance. What is culinary in one generation--and here I'm alluding to a passage quoted by Eikhenbaum--for example, the devices of crime fiction prior to the work of Dostoyevsky, become absolutely central. He's thinking primarily of *Crime and Punishment,* but this is true of other works of Dostoyevsky as well, so that the devices of the dime-store detective novel actually then become the motivating dominant of a mainstream literary form, but then they in turn run their course and are replaced by some other dominant. In other words, once you start thinking about the evanescence of dominance, you're also thinking about literary history.

One of the most false charges--and it was a charge leveled by Trotsky among many others against the Russian formalists--is that they ignore history, the same charge so often leveled against the New Critics. They don't at all ignore history. Almost from the beginning, but increasingly during the twenties, they turned their attention to the problems of literary historiography, and they said some rather bracing things about it. In your text on page 012, the left-hand column--I'll keep referring to those stamped numbers, the left-hand side of your Tyco [copy center] text--we find Eikhenbaum evoking an exchange of opinion between the ethnographic critic Veselovsky and Victor Shklovsky:

He [Shklovsky] [Eikhenbaum says, a third of the way down] had encountered Veselovsky's formula, a formula broadly based on the ethnographic principle that "the purpose of new form is to express new content [new content, in other words, being those social and historical and environmental forces that oblige literary techniques to change]…

That's the "ethnographic" position. That's the word used. It is obviously also the materialist, or, social position. History produces literature; and not just literary history, but social history, produces literature. Shklovsky disagreed and he decided to advance a completely different point of view.

The work of art arises from a background of other works and through association with them. The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art to forms existing prior to it… Not only parody [parody, by the way, is a very, very broad term in Russian formalist thought, in a way simply meaning change--that is to say, the way in which one text inevitably riffs on another text in elaborating its own devices and emphases and in search of a new kind of dominance], but also any kind of work of art is created parallel to and opposed to some kind of form. *The purpose of new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality* [that is to say, lost its power to defamiliarize, lost its power to take the film away from our eyes].

Now this--as you think about it, you say to yourself, That's all very bracing and daring but Veselovsky is right. [laughs] We know literature is produced by historical forces. What does it mean, a new form comes about only to replace an old form which has ceased to be aesthetically viable? How does that happen? You know, you've got to appeal to social forces if you're going to talk about change. That really does seem to me to be the spontaneous conclusion we are inclined to draw. That's why I gave you (to offset this conclusion) the extraordinary passage on your sheet, the end of Tynjanov's "On Literary Evolution," written also 1927, written also, in other words, in response to Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. This is what Tynjanov says:

In formalist historiography, the prime significance of major social factors is not at all discarded. [In other words, we're not just playing a game here. We, too, understand the relevance of what we call "the society function."] Rather it must be elucidated in its full extent through the problem of the evolution of literature. This is in contrast to the establishment of the direct influence of major social factors [and here comes the amazing part of this utterance, which I think is truly remarkable] which replaces the study of evolution of literature with the study of the modification of literary works, that is to say their deformation.

You see the distinction. In natural selection, certain things happen. There is mutation. New genes emerge as dominant, no longer recessive or latent, and organisms change. That's evolution, but organisms change against a backdrop--you know, organisms are changing like crazy. In comes the prehensile thumb, and the next thing you know you get a colossal earthquake, and the possessor of the prehensile thumb disappears from the earth--which is to say, very possibly the human species will never develop. That's the *modification* of a form. It strikes me that it's a remarkable distinction. You will get in any period spontaneously the sorts of impulses that bring about socialist realism, but if you have a *ukase* from above telling you that if you're going to write, it has to be socialist realism, that's a modification. That is the modification of what would and does evolve in and of itself within an understanding of literary historiography.

The distinction, it seems to me, is compelling. The only objection to be made to it perhaps indeed is that much of the time, it's just more trouble than it's worth to enforce it. It would drive us into such baroque circumlocutions and avoidances of the obvious to say, "Oh, social factors have nothing to do with this," [laughs] that we might as well just sort of--not give the distinction up, because I think it's very important always to have it in the back of our minds. It's important in Darwinian terms to have it in the back of our minds, and that's what Tynjanov is insisting on. That's why he calls his essay "On Literary Evolution," not literary "revolution" but literary "evolution." I think it's terribly important to keep the distinction in the back of our minds even if we find it, in practical terms, well nigh impossible and possibly even in many contexts a waste of time to be perpetually enforcing it. It is nevertheless a distinction that does exist, once you think about it, that deserves to exist and deserves to be remembered when we think about the variety of ways in which literary history can be written.

Now I'm going to stop there. Time's up. There is a little more to say, I think, and certainly the possible ways in which Russian formalism is subject to critique need quickly to be passed in review. We'll do all this next time before we get into Saussure.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 8 Transcript**

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| February 5, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So I'm going to be pointing to the board, at least in theory. I suppose I expect to be pointing to the board a little bit more today than ordinarily. The usual function of my [chalk] equivalent of Power Point isn't quite the same today because I'm taking an interest in some of these diagrammatic matters as well and, as I say, I will be pointing to them.

All right. So to begin I'm actually going to postpone something that you're probably already wondering about, although it will come into this lecture on a couple of occasions--that is to say, the full relationship in terms of the influence of both movements--between the Russian formalists and Saussure's notion of semiology and semiotics--until next week when we discuss Roman Jakobson's essay, "Linguistics and Poetics," where I think the relationship between the two movements in which he himself was involved will become clearer and will come into focus more naturally than if I tried to outline what the connection between the two movements is now. So that is an aspect of our sequence of lectures, beginning with the last one, that will be postponed until next week.

Now semiotics is not in itself a literary theory. As we'll learn from Jakobson next week, literature can be understood--or what he calls the study of literature, "poetics"--can be understood as a subfield of semiotics, but semiotics is not in itself a literary theory. In other words, perhaps to your frustration, what you read today has nothing at all, in and of itself, to tell you about literature. This isn't the last time this will happen during the course of the syllabus, but then of course, our job is to bring out the implications for literature of texts that we read that don't have any direct bearing on literary study. The important thing about Saussure and the discipline of semiotics is the incredible influence that it has had on virtually every form of subsequent literary theory. That's what we need to keep in mind. Semiotics evolves into what is called "structuralism," which we'll be considering next week. That in turn, as it were, bequeaths its terminology and its set of issues and frameworks for thinking to deconstruction, to Lacanian psychoanalysis, to French Marxism, and to binary theories of race, colonization and gender--in other words, to a great deal that we will be studying subsequently on this syllabus. So while again, what we read for today is not in itself literary theory, it is nevertheless crucially formative for a great many of the developments in literary theory that we'll be studying.

Now as an anecdotal or conjectural aside--I've always found this so fascinating I can never resist talking about it--there are various texts in our field--the history of criticism, literary theory--texts that are considered foundational but which curiously enough, *a la* Foucault, don't actually have an author. Aristotle's *Poetics* we know actually not to have been one of the texts written by Aristotle but rather to be a compendium of lecture notes put together by his students. This is one of the reasons why in the golden age of Arabic scholarship in the Middle Ages, there was so much dispute about the *Poetics.* The manuscripts we find from this period are full of marginal notes where the scholars are chiding each other and saying, "No, no, no. It can't be that way." In other words, in a way it's a disputed text and it is not written by Aristotle, but it's also a foundational text. Aristotle is considered the "father of criticism," and yet he is also what Foucault would call a "founder of discursivity."

Well, the odd thing is it's exactly the same with Saussure, who can be considered the father or patriarch of a certain kind of literary theory as I have just indicated. Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* is not something written by Saussure but is a compendium of lecture notes written by his students in a series of lectures that he gave from 1906 to 1911 and then gathered together in book form by two of his disciples who were linguists. Now it's odd that this text does have the same formative function. Scholars who go to Geneva go for a variety of reasons when they look at the Saussure archive. Some of them are predisposed to dislike Saussure and to hope that they can somehow discredit him by learning more about things that he thought that aren't actually in the text. Others like Saussure and feel that he needs to be rescued [laughs] from his compositors, and yet others go in an attitude of worship and hope that the archive will yield to them full confirmation of the integrity of the text we call the *Course in General Linguistics*; so that in a way, the study of the Saussure archive, given the volatile relationship of that archive with the actual text that we have, is a kind of map that, if one were to study it, one could associate with the history of thinking about literary theory in the twentieth century.

This is really all neither here nor there. I just find it interesting that two people who are incontestably [laughs] founders of discursivity in the field that we study are in fact not strictly speaking authors, [laughs] somehow or another confirming the insight of Foucault in the essay that we began by reading. Anyway, enough of that. We have to try to figure out what Saussure is up to. Let's move on to begin to do so.

What is semiology? It's the study of existing, conventional, communicative systems. All of these systems we can call "languages," and "language"--that is to say, the words that we use when we speak to each other--is one of those systems. Other systems: the gestures that mimes use, semaphores, railroad semaphores and a stoplight--red, green, yellow--are all semiotic systems. In other words, all of them are modes of communication with which we function, the intelligibility of which allows us to negotiate the world around us. Semiotics has expanded into every imaginable aspect of thought. There is a Darwinian semiotics, understanding the relationships among species in semiotic terms. There is, in other words, a semiotics of virtually every imaginable thing understood as a language made up of a system of signs--signs we'll be getting to in a minute--but in the meantime, it's important to understand what semiology actually is. That's what it is.

Oh, I meant to ask you. How many of you did not bring the passages that I sent to you by e-mail last night? All right. We have them here and they'll be passed around. We have about twenty-five copies, so don't take one if you don't need it.

I am going to be turning to the second passage on the sheet in which something about the nature of these systems, I think, can be made clear. "Language," says Saussure, "is not a function of the speaker." Here of course he is talking about human language. "It is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual." Now what does this mean? The fact that human language is not my language--that is to say, the fact that it doesn't originate in me, the fact that it's not, in other words, my private language--suggests, of course, a certain loss because it means that when I speak, when I use language in speech, I'm using something that is not strictly my own. It's conventional--that is to say, it belongs in the public sphere to all of us, and there's perhaps a certain sort of Romantic loss in that. Wouldn't it be nice if language in some sense were my own?

But the incredible gain which makes language something like the object of science that Saussure is hoping to secure--this is one of the things, obviously, that he has in common with the formalists--the incredible gain is that if language is not private, if it's not my own, if it's not something that I can make up as I go along, and if, in other words, it is conventional, belonging to all of us, then that's precisely what allows it to be communicative. It is a system of signs, in other words, that we can make use of, that we recognize as signs precisely because they exist among us as something that can be shared in common. This then is the object of Saussure's attention as a linguist and as a semiotician.

Now what's implied in this idea is that language is something that we use. The best way to say it and the quickest way to say it is that I don't speak language. Language as something that exists as an aggregate all at once, arguably--and this is something that's going to come up again and again as we come back to these coordinates that we'll be touching on from time to time today also--arguably, language as an aggregate is something virtual. You remember that Freud said we have to infer the unconscious from the erratic behavior of consciousness. There's got to be something back there, so we're going to call it "the unconscious" and we're going to try to describe it. It is very much the same with language, or "langue" as Saussure calls it. What we *do* is *speak,* and when we speak, of course, we say correctly that we "use" language, but we still need to know what language is and we need to understand the relationship between language and speech.

Now we can understand language as a kind of aggregate of everything that's in the lexicon, in the dictionary, together with everything that would be in some sort of ideal or utterly systematized set of rules of grammar and syntax, but there is no real aggregate of that kind. In other words, it exists, it's there to be put together partly as a matter of experiment and partly as a matter of conjecture by the linguists; but as a composite thing existing in a spatial simultaneity, *synchronically*, language is something that in a very real sense, as is the case with Freud's unconscious, we infer from speech. Now speech is what we do. Speech is the way in which we appropriate, deploy and make use of language, and Saussure calls that "parole." *Parole* is the unfolding in time of a set of possibilities given in space, that set of possibilities being what Saussure calls "langue."

Now language is a system of signs. What is a sign? Saussure's famous diagrams make it clear enough. [Gestures to board.] We have above the line a concept and we have below the line a sound image. In other words, I think of something and that thinking of something corresponds to a sound image that I have ready to hand for it. That can be understood in terms of thinking of the concept "tree"--that's why this is in quotation marks, I speak Latin--and knowing that the sound image correlative to the concept tree is "arbor," right, I can think of [laughs] something like that [drawing of a tree], something in some way resembling that. By the same token--I still speak Latin--the sound image corresponding to it is "arbor." I may or may not get back to this today, but in this question mark [on the board next to a sign diagram in which the signified tree is written over the signifier arbor, neither of them in quotation marks] is the secret of deconstruction, all right?-- just [laughter] to keep you poised and on tenterhooks.

In the meantime, what Saussure is doing with this relationship above and below the line is, he is saying that there is an *arbitrary* relationship between the concept and the sound image. The concept he calls a "signified" and the sound image he calls a "signifier." A sign, in other words, is made up of two sides in, as it were, a thought moment: a relationship between that which is signified and that which signifies it. It's to be understood that we have to think of them together. They're not divisible. Their relationship is necessary but, as we'll see in a minute, arbitrary, and each sign is like that. The way in which we put signs together is to take these bundles, these binary relationships between a concept and a sound image, and adjust them in an unfolding sequence. That's how we speak. That's how we make a sentence.

All right. So in a way the idea that a signifier, a sound that I make, *arbor*, refers to a *concept* and by implication, by a very powerful and strong and necessary implication, not to a *thing*--is not in itself new. The idea that a word signifies an idea and not an object is already fully developed in John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* and is more or less commonly agreed on ever afterwards and is, as I say, in itself a conventional thought that Saussure adapts and makes use of. But what is new in Saussure and what really is foundational in semiotics as a science is two things that Saussure then goes on to say about the sign. The first thing he has to say is that the signified-signifier relationship, as I said, is arbitrary. And the second thing he has to say is that the way in which we know one sign from another--either studying language in the aggregate, whereby clusters of signs exist in associational relation to each other, or studying it in speech acts, in speech, whereby signs exist next to each other in a sequence--the way in which we understand what a sign means is *differential*. So that what's new in Saussure's thinking about the relationship between signified and signifier is that the sign tied up in this relationship is both arbitrary and differential.

Okay. This is a first walk through some essential ideas. I want to go back to the distinction between language and speech and refer you to the first passage which--now all of you have it--is on your sheet, because like the Russian formalists, Saussure is chiefly concerned in outlining what he means by "semiology" to establish the semiological project as a science. Like the Russian formalists--and in a way like the New Critics--talking about their "academic" colleagues, Saussure is vexed by the messiness and lack of system in the study of linguistics. This is what he says in this first passage. He says:

If we study speech from several viewpoints simultaneously, the object of linguistics appears to us as a confused mass of heterogeneous and unrelated things.

This is speech. [Gestures towards the horizontal axis of the coordinates on the board.] I'm a linguist and so what do I do? I study speech, I study speeches, and if I do so, and if I keep thinking about it in a variety of ways, all sorts of frameworks jostle for attention. Saussure continues:

This procedure opens the door to several sciences, psychology, anthropology, normative grammar, philology and so on which are distinct from linguistics but which claim speech in view of the faulty method of linguistics as one of their objects. As I see it, there is only one solution to all the foregoing difficulties. From the very outset [and this is [laughs] a really peculiar mixed metaphor] we must put both feet on the ground of language and use language as the norm of all the other manifestations of speech.

It's as if he's trying to hold language down. [laughs] "Stay there. Stay there." We put both feet on the ground of language so that we have it intelligible to us as a system, as something that can be understood, precisely, differentially, that can be understood in the variety of ways in which language organizes signs.

It might be worth pausing over the variety of ways in which we can think of signs in language, all of which have to do with the way in which a given sign might be chosen to go into a speech sentence. Take the word "ship." "Ship" is very closely related in sound to certain other words. We won't specify them for fear of a Freudian slip, but that is one cluster. That is one associational matrix or network that one can think of in the arrangement of that sign in language, but there are also synonyms for "ship": "bark, "boat," "bateau," a great many other synonyms--"sailboat," whatever. They, too, exist in a cluster: "steamship," "ocean liner," in other words, words that don't sound at all the same, but are contiguous in synonymity. They cluster in that way. And then furthermore "ship" is also the opposite of certain things, so that it would also enter into a relationship with "train," "car," "truck," "mule," modes of transportation, right? In all of these ways, "ship" is clustered associationally in language in ways that make it available to be chosen, available to be chosen as appropriate for a certain semantic context that we try to develop when we speak.

So that's the way a sign works in language. This is the tip of the iceberg for any given sign. By the way, in what I'm saying, I oversimplify by supposing that the basic unit of language is a word. The linguists know that that's not at all necessarily the case. Linguists can work at different levels of abstraction with language. Sometimes the basic unit is the phrase, but some other times the basic unit is the phoneme--that is to say, the single sound unit--or if one's studying language as a system of writing it might be the syllable. It could be the letter understood either graphically or audibly, and the variety of ways in which one can choose a basic unit in the study of linguistics means that you need a special word for that unit, which is characteristically "the tagmeme." In other words, whatever you are thinking of as your systematizing, your understanding, of language, and as the basic constituent unit--"the word" being probably one of the less popular choices, [laughs] even though that's the one I've just used--the blanket term for that is "the tagmeme." So you can understand the associational nature of signs also as tagmemic.

Then of course, since there is a certain amount of semantic payoff, let's say, even when you're talking about a phoneme--especially because, as Saussure will say, and as I'll get back to, in the misleading onomatopoetic drift of language, perhaps a certain sound has certain connotations, meaning the sound may cluster in an associational network. But depending on the unit chosen, the associational networks will differ.

But at any level they will still exist as a matrix. In other words, how else could we have any sense of systematicity in language? It is always probably the case that when I speak I won't choose just any word. e. e. cummings actually boldly experimented with this principle and he attracted the attention of the linguists, particularly a linguist named Dell Hymes. e. e. cummings wrote sentences like "He danced his did" where "did" is obviously not a word you would have supposed to be in any way involved in a relevant associational cluster. "He danced his did": that is in every sense a misfire, as one school of thinking about language would call it, and yet at the same time, cummings thumbs his nose at us and deliberately uses that word almost as though he were issuing a critique of semiotics but at the same time such that semiotics would probably have available to it its ways and means of refutation. A certain amount of ingenuity is all that's required to notice that the "d" sound or "duh" reiterates the "d," the "duh" sound in "danced," and that there are all sorts of combinatory pressures on his consciousness to choose "did" as opposed to some other seemingly irrelevant word.

So in any case, you can still, even with these egregious examples, understand language even in its infinite variety nevertheless as associational and as clustering its available signs in ways that make them more readily to hand for choice than they might be, all other things being equal. Well, in any case, so language is a system of signs. The signs are both arbitrary and differential.

Now what does this mean? This is actually the second thing, maybe, that we learn under the influence of what we call "literary theory" and the thinking that surrounds it about the nature of perception. If the sign is both arbitrary and differential--that is to say, if there is no such thing as a *natural* sign, something that is linked by nature, by the nature of the thing and the word together with the thing--if on one side of the border, as Saussure puts it, we look at a cow and say, "ochs," and if on the other side of the border we look at a cow and say, "boeuf," and if we cross a considerable body of water and we look at a cow and say "cow," plainly the relationship between the *thing* and the sign--the matrix signifier, signified--just doesn't exist. So signs are arbitrary-- and they're also differential. I have to be able to distinguish between all the signs I use in any communicative sequence. How do I do it? By putting in signs which are not other signs. The sign is not linked to the natural world by any natural means, and the sign is not linked to other signs by any natural means. I don't know a unit of language-- which I use to communicate with you-- positively. I know it *negatively*. I know it only because it is *not everything else*. Its direct relationship with the thing that's most closely adjacent to it somehow either through similarity or dissimilarity can never be a relationship of identity. It's not that other thing, but, generally speaking, the point about a sign is that it's not *any* other thing. This is true even in homonyms. This is true even of seemingly identical signs, because each has its use value and is only intelligible as that which it exists to mean in a certain context.

So it is always the case that I can only know what I know if it's a question of being communicated with, having something rendered intelligible for me, negatively. I can't know it because it just *is* that sign. I don't know it positively. I'm about to give an example of this which I hope will flesh out what I'm trying to get across; in the meantime, let's look at a couple of passages in Saussure that may make the point. Now not on the version of the sheet that I passed out today [laughs] but on the version that I sent electronically last night, there is a fifth passage, and that passage is actually a combination of formulations by Saussure that are in two separate parts of your text. The first one is on page 844. Can this possibly be correct? I [laughs] hope it can. No, it is not correct. It's page 845, the lower left-hand column where Saussure says:

Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others as in the diagram, [just below it]…

In other words, the value of a term--I say something, I utter a sound--the value of that sound cannot be determined except by its context. I can't know it except by the way in which it differs from everything that surrounds it.

He goes on to say--this is on page 847 about halfway down the left-hand column:

… [A] segment of language can never in the final analysis be based on anything except its noncoincidence with the rest. *Arbitrary* and *differential* are two correlative qualities.

And then again another passage on page 846, the right-hand column halfway down: "… [C]oncepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system." Now probably this is hard to accept intuitively. We feel as we process the world around us that we know things for and as what they are. I look at something and I know what it is, forgetting that possibly I only know what it is because of a context in which indeed it is not those other things that are linked to it.

Now I want to take an example. I could use any example but I'm going to use something which plainly does move around among various semiotic systems. It's a piece of language but it also belongs to other sorts of semiotic systems as we'll immediately see. I want to use the example of the red light. Now in a stoplight, which is probably just about the simplest semiotic system that we have--it only has three, one is tempted to say, variables plainly differing from each other: red, yellow and green--we have two ways of thinking about the red light. If we think that our knowledge is positive, we say "red" in a red light means stop. It comes spontaneously to us to say "red light" means "stop."

Now if all we have to go on is just this semiotic system, it's going to be kind of hard to put up resistance to that sort of thinking because by the same token we'll say "yellow" means "pause," "green" means "go." These three lights with their respective colors just do positively mean these things. Everybody knows it, and I'm certainly not thinking when I approach an intersection that when the red light goes on--I'm not saying to myself, "Oh, not yellow, not green." [laughter] My mind just doesn't work that way. All right, but still it's a red light, right, and our hypothesis is that the red light has positive value in the sense that it means a certain thing. It means, we say, "stop." Well, suppose the red light appeared on or as the nose of a reindeer. In that case the red light would be a beacon which means "forward," "go," "follow me," "damn the torpedoes." Right? [laughs] We've got to get these presents distributed. No time to waste. And we race off--perhaps risking an accident, who knows? [laughs] --we race off under the compulsion of the meaning of the red light, which is "go," right?

Now by the way, there's an anecdote, the truth of which I've never been able to ascertain, that during the cultural revolution in China, Madame Mao very much disapproved of the fact that red lights meant "stop" because red is, of course, the color of progress. It ought to mean "to go forward" with everything behind it, but needless to say her thoughts on the subject were never implemented because [laughs] if one day red light means "stop" and the next day red light means "go," there might be a few problems. This, by the way, is a way of showing the fact that everything which appears in a semiotic system is conventional, right? I mean, there is an emptying out of positive meaning in the very awareness that, after all, the red light could mean "go"--I'm about to go on and give more examples. It's conventional. Whatever the convention is within a system of differences, that's what makes the sign intelligible.

All right. Just some other examples: a red light over a street door. Well, that doesn't mean "stop." That means "go in," "come in," right? And of course it exists in a semiotic relationship to a white light over a street door which means "this is my house; if you wish you can ring the bell but I'd just as soon you stayed out." This light is probably on to keep burglars away and so: "stop," right? The red light is intelligible, in other words, within that semiotic system. Now over an auditorium door--and of course we've already been gazing at that light back there, and it's not a good example. I wish it didn't say "exit," but it does say "exit," because that kind of weakens my point, but over many auditorium doors a red light just hangs there. Obviously, it doesn't mean "come in" in the sense of the red light over a street door. It means "go out," right? "This is the way out. This is the way you get out of here," not "This is the way you get in here." There are a lot of ways in which a red light means neither "stop" nor "go," but we are sort of confining ourselves so far to the ways in which a red light has something to do with locomotion or the lack thereof. In each new system, you can see it takes on a new meaning always with respect to whatever it is not.

Well, we can continue. On a light-up valentine it means "don't stop, go." It has the function, in other words, of negating its own meaning in another semiotic system, in this case the semiotic system of the stoplight. On an ambulance or a police car--admittedly, many of these lights are blue these days but let's suppose that, tradition prevailing, that they are still red--they mean "get out of the way" or "stop," right? In other words, they probably bear a distant relation to the semiotics of the stoplight, and that's probably why red was chosen for ambulances and police cars: because they put into your head the notion of "stop." But it's a notion that's complicated in this case by the equally imperative notion "get out of the way," which doesn't at all necessarily entail stopping but rather accelerating in a different direction.

All of that somewhat complicates the picture, but at the same time, I think you can see that there is a connection between those semiotic systems. It's a weak system in terms of color. In the case of the ambulance and police car, it's more a question of brightness. As I say, red tends to be chosen, but then if you get lab experiments showing that that particular color of gas blue is somehow or another sort of more invasive of your consciousness than red is, then you move away from the arbitrariness of the choice of red as a color. As I say, there's a certain instability which could never apply in the semiotics of the stoplight because there it's not so much a question of the brightness of the color--although that has been experimented with, as you know--but rather the insistence that the color is just that color.

Then finally--and here is where, in a way, this is perhaps the most interesting thing because it forces us to show the complexity, to see the complexity, of semiotic relationships: a red light, just to return to the Christian holiday, a red light on a Christmas tree. Now our first thought is, Oh, aha, that has *no* meaning, right? It's no use talking about the negative relationship between a red light and a green light and a yellow, white, or blue one--whatever the other colors on the Christmas tree are--because they all have the same value. They're all bright, they're all cheerful, they all say "Merry Christmas," etc., etc., etc. So what are you supposed to do with that? Here you've got a red light which doesn't seem to enter into this sense of the arbitrary and differential.

Well, that's because it's actually not a gross constituent unit in a semiotic system, right? "Bright lights" is the gross constituent unit and the variety of those bright lights, which is a matter of aesthetics, is, ironically enough, neutralized by the common signifier governing our understanding of them, which is "bright lights"--in this case, particularly on a tree or festooning another ornament that has some sort of comparable value. Once you get that, once you get the value, "Christmas tree," as opposed to "red lights," "red lights" being perhaps a part of some Christmas trees, then you see that you're back in a semiotic system and a very obvious one, because a Christmas tree is a not-menorah, not-Kwanzaa candles. A Christmas tree, in other words, is a sign that can only be understood intelligibly in terms of a certain cultural understanding. We think of course, oh, we know what that is, and of course probably we do, but we're misled in supposing that that's the key to the understanding of it as a sign, because it's very possible to imagine a circumstance in which someone wouldn't know what it was, forcing us despite its familiarity to ask ourselves, "Well, what is it and how do we know what it is?" Then we realize once again that we can only know what it is if we come to understand--in this case, probably, it's best to say a cultural system, understood as a semiosis, within which it appears.

So this last version of the red light introduces interesting complications which I don't think should confuse us. I think they should actually show us a little bit more about how we can understand the organization of the things around us and within us as systems of signs. We know that we've already learned from Heidegger and the hermeneutic tradition that we know them *as* something, but it remained to show *how* we know them. That is to say, we don't know them positively. I mean, Heidegger raises the interesting fact that we spontaneously recognize something. But that's one of the things which could be dangerous for semiotics because it would make us think or assume that we know things positively--without thinking, in other words, "I know that that's an exit sign, I don't know that it's a white thing with red marks on it, but I know that it's an exit sign"; but I can't know that, the Saussurian argument goes, without knowing that it is not all the things that it's not. If it were all the things that it's not, or if it were identical to all the things that somehow or another it's not, then I would be in a very difficult situation because I wouldn't have any means of knowing it in particular. The very fact that I need to know it in particular is what makes me need to know it negatively. In other words, we now know two things about how we perceive things from the standpoint of this subject matter, and it's very useful to put them together, the fact that we always know things first--before we "just have them there before us"-- but at the same time the fact that it's misleading to think that our knowing them first means that we know them positively; we know them first but we also know them negatively, in negation of other things.

Okay. So let me just return once again to the way in which sign systems are intelligible because lots of- there are going to be lots of moments in a course like this in which what we seem to be saying is that, "Oh, we can't know anything," or "We don't know what we know," or "How do we know what we know?" Maybe we're skirting rhetorical questions of that kind, but we're really not. What we're talking about today is how we *do* know things. Right? If we take semiotics seriously, it gives us a rather sophisticated means of understanding precisely how we know things, but it insists that we know things because of their conventional nature: that is to say, because they are conventions existing within a system of conventions insofar as we recognize them--things, signs--as existing, because if we're thinking about a thing, we're thinking about that thing as a sign in semiotics. If we don't know that, if we don't recognize its existence in a system--if we can't think what system it belongs to, perhaps to put it in a better way--that's tantamount to saying we really don't know what it is. I think the more we think about it, the more we realize that we only know what it is if we know the system that it belongs to, which is to say, all of the things related to it which it is not. Right?

Okay. So the intelligibility of sign systems is their conventionality. That's why it's impossible for anybody to come along and say, "Oh, I don't like the fact that the red light is red. It's symbolically the wrong move. Let's make the red light the symbol of 'go.'" And now with the ecological movement it would be very difficult to make the green light the symbol of "stop," and in any case all sorts of complications would arise. [laughs] Right? But in the meantime you see that we can't mess with conventional systems by imposing the individuality of our will on them and expecting anything to change. A seeming exception is the fact that sometimes individuals can, through the exertion of their influence and prestige, actually change the way we speak about things. This is a seeming exception. Think about the way Jesse Jackson almost single-handedly convinced us that we should use the expression "African American" even though it's a cumbersome, polysyllabic expression which you would think somehow or another would be intuitively rejected because it's so hard to say, but it worked. He convinced us all to say "African American." You say to yourself, "Ah ha! There is an example of somebody taking language by the scruff of the neck and changing it as an individual, exerting an individual will over against the conventional nature of language."

The semiotician's answer to this is it never could have happened simply as an act of agency, as an act of will. It had to be acquiesced in. You needed the community that makes use of linguistic conventions to acquiesce in a change of use. Remember, language exists synchronically: it only exists in a moment, in a moment of simultaneity. We study language diachronically--that is to say, we study its history. We study its unfolding in time. Now this unfolding is not, according to the semioticians--and here's another link with the Russian formalists--is not a question of studying the way in which language is changed from without--that is to say, studying the way in which, for example, an individual can rise up and insist on changing one of the signs; but rather a sequence of synchronic cross-sections. From moment to moment, language changes, but if we're to understand it as language we have to honor its simultaneity. In that case, we understand it as a sequence of cross-sections rather than something that somehow organically changes through time. At each cross-section, people are either willing to use a certain sign in a certain way or they're not. That's the crucial thing: if they're not willing, the use of the sign doesn't work, which confirms the idea that nothing can be changed simply by individual agency in and of itself.

All right. I need to come back to synchrony and diachrony. I'll do so next time and probably in subsequent lectures because we're going to keep using these coordinates. We're going to keep using the things that exist in space, virtual or not, and the things that unfold in time in their relationship with each other as we continue to try to understand these basic principles which shape so much of subsequent literary theory. Thank you.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 9 Transcript**

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| February 10, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Last time I lectured under the illusion that--I really should get in the habit of looking at the syllabus--that all you had been assigned for Thursday's lecture was the Saussure. Lo and behold, I did take a glance at the syllabus over the weekend and realized that you'd also been assigned the Levi-Strauss, so we have a little bit of ground to cover today. I think we can do it. I think I want to reserve something like a critique of structuralism for the beginning of Thursday's lecture, because it segues very nicely into what we'll have to say about Derrida. I already promised that somehow or another the critique of structuralism just was deconstruction. I hope to be able to demonstrate that on Thursday; but I do want to get up to the point of launching a critique of structuralism on two or three grounds, and so I hope to be able to move along fairly quickly today.

Now another thing that got left out, even given the proviso that it was only about Saussure on Thursday, was an adequate account of the relationship between synchrony and diachrony and the pivotal importance of this concept, not only for semiotics but for its aftermath in structuralism, and also for its relation to the Russian formalists; because you remember that in talking about function, the formalists who undertook to think about literary history and the problems of literary historiography were very much engaged in the notion that a function in a given text could be understood in two different ways. There was the syn-function, which was the relationship between that function and all of the other functions in the text--in other words, viewed as an aspect of that text, but there was also of the same function its auto-function, which is the way in which it persists and recurs throughout the history of literature sometimes as the dominant, sometimes latent or recessive, but always in one form or another there.

Now in Saussurian linguistics, the relationship between synchrony and diachrony is very much the same. To consider language *in toto* is to consider it at a given moment synchronically. That is to say, you don't think of language as a system if at the same time you're thinking of it unfolding historically. Jakobson, you will notice, introduces an element of time into the synchronic analysis of a semiotic system by saying that you've got to take account both of archaic and innovative features, but nevertheless they are simply flagged as archaic or innovative and not understood as changing in time as long as they are read or analyzed synchronically. But at the same token, a system does change through time. A semiotic system, language, the history of literature, the history of poetics--whatever it might be, changes through time, and to analyze that change through time you think of it diachronically.

Now Saussure argues that the relationship among the parts of something viewed synchronically--a semiotic system, let's say--are not necessary in the sense that they might be any number of other relationships, but they are nevertheless fixed. That is to say, they are what's there and they can't be other than what they are, whereas through time, if you're studying a semiotic system or studying language or whatever it might be, change takes place and it's necessary. You're looking back on it and it simply did happen, [laughs] so change is determinant in some sense. But at the same time, it's not regular. This, by the way, is a challenge to certain ideas in traditional linguistics like, for example, the one you probably all know: the great vowel shift. A structuralist's view of language has to argue that the great vowel shift, in which every vowel sound goes up a notch in some mysterious period between the medieval and the early modern, that this only has the appearance of regularity but that it is actually a diachronic phenomenon that can't be understood in terms of regularity. So the relationship between synchronic and diachronic is of that kind.

Now matters are complicated a little bit on those occasions in your reading when people are talking about the way in which a mass of material--a system of language or other semiotic system, let's say--is inferred from existing data: in other words, the way in which I infer language, *langue*, from a sentence, *parole*--I'm actually concealing from you that in fact Saussure uses a third term, *langage*, to talk about the sum of all sentences, but we won't get into that--the way in which language is inferred from *parole*. Now language, in other words, is viewed as something in space, that is to say--or as Levi-Strauss calls it, "revertible time," meaning you can go backward and forward within it, but the temporal unfolding is not the important thing about it. So in space, whereas *parole*, speech, unfolds in time so that *parole*, because it is temporal--because any speech any of us makes is in a certain sense historical, [laughs> because the beginning of the sentence is earlier in history than the end of the sentence--for that reason, there's a relationship between diachrony and the unfolding of *parole*, or of a sentence or of an utterance which is parallel, though at the same time admittedly confusing. One doesn't really want to talk about a sentence as diachronic, but at the same time it does exist on that horizontal axis in which things in a combinatory way unfold in time.

All right. So much then for synchrony and diachrony, something we can't get away from. It's in a way the central fact of structuralism but which I don't think I did adequate justice to at the end of the last lecture. Now structuralism. There was an incredible aura about structuralism in the 1960s. It crashed on the shores of the United States coming in from France in a way that stunned, amazed, and transformed people's lives. People like Kant reading Hume woke up from their dogmatic slumbers or, at least, that they felt that that's what they were doing when encountering structuralism. I think to me it happened when I was a graduate student at Harvard and absolutely nobody else was paying any attention to it at all. At Yale, Johns Hopkins, and Cornell people were paying attention to it, but at Harvard I was initiated to structuralism by a bright undergraduate who seemed to be the only [laughs] person in Cambridge who knew anything about structuralism. Boy, did he know about structuralism, and he got me up to speed as quickly as he could; but it was a phenomenon that was transformative intellectually for people in the academic, and beyond the academic, world all over the country. Of course it led, in all sorts of ways, to most of what's been going on in theory ever since.

The amazing thing about it is that as a flourishing and undisputed French contribution to literary theory, it lasted two years because in 1966 at a famous conference, Jacques Derrida, whom we'll be reading on Thursday, blew it out of the water. I'll come back to that. At the same time, to say that it really only lasted two years simply isn't fair. The lasting contribution of structuralism as it's indebted to semiotics, but on its own terms as well, is something one still feels and senses throughout literary theory. The concrete contributions, not all between 1964 when the first structuralist texts were translated in this country and 1966 when the conference in Baltimore took place, but the lasting concrete contributions are also terribly important. There's a wonderful book called *On Racine* by Roland Barthes. Those of you interested in French neoclassical theater cannot imagine, if you haven't read it already, reading a more bracing book. There is an essay on Baudelaire, "Les Chats," or "The Cats," written conjointly by Levi-Strauss and Jakobson, an extraordinary performance which was the model of a good deal else that was done in the academy during that period. The anthropologist Edmund Leach wrote a structuralist analysis of Genesis in the Bible. Indeed, it's no accident that he writes about Genesis, as I will indicate in a minute.

Then subsequently, and in addition to all of that, probably the most lasting and rich contributions of the structuralists were in the field that we know as narratology. We'll be taking a look at that when we read Peter Brooks' text in conjunction with Freud a couple of weeks from now, but in the meantime the key texts in narratology are, again, by Roland Barthes in a long, long essay called "The Structural Analysis of Narrative" in which he approaches a James Bond novel as a system of binary pairs and unpacks a deep structure in the novel as a result of this binary analysis; important books by Tzvetan Todorov, crucial among them *The Grammar of The Decameron*; and then a good deal of work published in a series of books called *Figures* by Gérard Genette, whom you will find quoted repeatedly in the work of Paul de Man that you'll be reading for next Tuesday. All of this work and a great deal else in the theory of narrative, narratology, is directly indebted to, or is actually an aspect of, structuralist thought.

Now I promised that I would talk a little bit about the relationship between formalism and semiotics as it clarifies itself in the work of writers like Levi-Strauss and, in particular, Jakobson. Structuralism takes from formalism, as you can see from Jakobson's analysis, the idea of function. Jakobson is originally, of course, himself a member of the school of Russian formalists. He eventually immigrates to Prague, where he is in a circle of people who are already calling themselves structuralists, and moves from there to Paris and then to the United States. So Jakobson, of course, is the one figure who definitely harkens back to both worlds, having been a formalist and having become a structuralist. One can see the amalgam of these two sets of ideas in his work.

From formalism then, you get the idea of function and the relationship between syn-function and auto-function, which becomes the relationship between synchrony and diachrony. From semiotics you get the idea of negative knowledge--that is to say, in Levi-Strauss' analysis of the Oedipus myth, for example, the notion that there is no true version, there's no originary version, and there's no sort of positive version of the myth of which everything else is a version. You simply know what you know as it is differentiated from the other things that you know--one of the essential premises of semiotics, which is essential, at the same time, in structuralism, because here's where structuralism can be understood as an entity in itself. Unlike formalism, structuralism has an ambition with respect to the object, to the nature of the object, which is quite new.

I think that the best way to epitomize that is to turn to an aphorism of Roland Barthes' in the essay "The Structuralist Activity," on page 871 toward the bottom of the right-hand column, where Barthes says, "Structural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it..." This is the moment in which you can see the radical difference between what structuralism is doing and what formalism is doing. Formalism takes the object and it doesn't decompose it. It sees the object as it is; it just breaks it down into its respective functions, showing them dynamically in relationship with each other and as a system of dominance and subordination, all of it understood as the way in which something is made, the way in which it is put together--but there's no question of anything other than the object. Gogol's "Overcoat," Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* Sterne's *Tristam Shandy*:these are objects, and there's no question of somehow or another creating a virtual object, for example "the novel," out of one's remarks about individual texts. In a way, though, that's what, as you can see again from Levi-Strauss' analysis of the Oedipus myth, structuralism is doing.

As Barthes says, "Structural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it…" What he means by that is that you take a bunch of variants or versions, you take a bunch of data--not necessarily all the data, but a representative amount of the data relevant to any given idea or concept--and then you say, and this is where he gets into the idea of gross constituent units: "What are the basic constituent units of all of these items of data? Oh, yeah. I see we can put them into a pattern." We'll work on this a little bit in a minute. "Yeah, I see how this is working. As a matter of fact, there is a kind of virtual object that I can begin to observe as I organize the data that I garner from all the individual entities or versions that fall under this umbrella." That's the recomposition not of any particular object, but of a kind of virtual object which begins to emerge from one's analysis: in the case of Levi-Strauss' text, the meaning of the Oedipus myth. That's the virtual object that structuralist analysis arrives at by arranging, analyzing and classifying the data that it can get from all of the available versions of the Oedipus myth. So structuralism decomposes but not just for the sake of seeing how something works, like taking apart the parts of an engine, but rather in order to lend the parts to an analysis of a body of materials that makes it possible to recompose all of those parts in a new virtual object. That's what's going on in what Barthes calls "the structuralist activity."

So quickly let's take a look at the Levi-Strauss chart, if you want to call it that, of the Oedipus myth which is on page 864 in your text and just say a word or two about it. He takes a lot of versions. Let's not trouble ourselves with how many. He doesn't have nearly as many versions by the way as he would have if he were studying a North American Indian myth or the sorts of myths that he did study in a variety of versions as an anthropologist, but he has some versions--one of them, by the way, Freud's version, one of them Sophocles' version, and a variety of versions besides those. He says, "Hmm, as you look at these various versions [gestures towards graph on chalkboard], you can see that certain things are basically happening, and they fall into certain discrete categories. We can put them in columns--that is to say, in terms of the way in which they share a common theme, but we can also put those columns in a row so that we can analyze the way in which the columns relate to each other." For example, there's a group of events, happenstances, sort of naming accidents and so on, that falls into a column called "over-determination of blood relations." That is to say, when Antigone tries to bury her brother and goes to the wall for that, in ways that you might find excessive, that's an over-determination of blood relations.

Then you notice that at the same time, there's a series of actions in the myth--going all the way back to Oedipus' family history and then down through the history of his offspring and so on--a series of actions which have to do with the undervaluation of blood relations. People, well, they don't really seem to care as much about blood relations as they should, and as a result of that, bad things happen, too. Then there's a column of issues which have to do with the way in which recurrently, in all of the versions of the myth, there seems to be a strange preoccupation with that which is born from the earth: monsters, the teeth of monsters that are scattered and become the alphabet in the story of Cadmos, and the variety of ways in which heroes have to confront monsters as Oedipus confronts the sphinx. All of these monsters are understood as not being born from parents, or as being born from two things, but instead as emerging from the earth. They are thonic, or "autochthonous" in Levi-Strauss' word.

There seems to be a strange preoccupation with autochthony in this myth, but this is offset by the way in which--that is to say, with fending off autochthony, as if the crucial thing were to insist on the binary parental relationship that produces us, to be reassured in our humanity by the idea that one of us is born from two. But then on the other hand, there are all kinds of things in the myth which are also preoccupied with autochthony in precisely the opposite way. Lambda, the letter that begins so many of the names of the figures in Oedipus' genealogy--Labdacus, Laius and so on--lambda looks like a limping person, right? Oedipus means "swell foot," "one who limps." What emerges in the fourth column is the idea that there are signs of autochthony in our own makeup. The reason we limp is that we have a foot of clay, that something of the earth from which we were born sticks to us, and this is a recurrent pattern, a recurrent idea, in the unfolding of the Oedipus myth. It's a peculiar thing, but notice that this is one of those occasions on which the myth explodes into other cultures. Adam means "red clay." Adam is born from the earth in the sense that red clay is taken from the earth and he is created, and there seems to be this same preoccupation with autochthony in the Oedipus myth as well, one of the interesting links of that myth with the Christian myth of the origin of man.

So you've got four columns: over-evaluation of blood relations, under-evaluation of blood relations, denial of autochthony, and persistence of autochthony. I'm going to leave it at that for now because we'll come back later to see what interesting thing is going on in the way in which these four columns, all about two versus one: that is to say, whether or not we are born from two or born from one. I want to come back to that in the context of showing that in a certain way, the question of whether things--ideas, for example--come from two, two different things, or whether ideas come from one object, is after all this question is itself an allegory of the structuralist activity. That's what structuralism itself is about. That's what makes it so interesting and even perhaps peculiar that Levi-Strauss is able to find not just any thought in a myth but the very thinking that he himself is doing about the myth. That, of course, may have something to do with your sense that surely decomposing in order to recompose, creating a virtual systemic object--notice that I have made this a dotted line [gestures towards chalkboard]--that there is a kind of a circularity in that. I hope I have explained Levi-Strauss' four columns intelligibly, but if you look at those [laughs] four columns you say to yourself, "How on earth did he come up with that?" He himself says, "Oh, well, maybe I could have done it some other way," and you say to yourself, "How can this become decisive? How can it become authoritative?" Right?

You can see what he's doing--and by the way you can confirm it by thinking of things that he leaves out. Jocasta hangs herself, but he doesn't mention that. It's not in any of the four columns, but obviously that has something to do--you can take your choice--either between the over-determination or under-determination of blood relations. She feels guilty because she committed incest, right? Oedipus at his birth is hamstrung and exposed on Mount Cithaeron. Levi-Strauss doesn't mention that either, but obviously that's why Oedipus limps. Oedipus is a limping person like the letter lambda, right? So plainly that must have something to do with the persistence of autochthony. Finally, if you read *Oedipus at Colonus*, at the end of it Oedipus, when he dies, is swallowed up by the earth; "dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return." The equivalent of this in the Oedipus myth is that "where I came from [the earth] is where I will go." He becomes a kind of genius of the place at Colonus. As a result of having been swallowed up there, he becomes a kind of presiding spirit or genius of the place. So all of those things which we ourselves thought of--he didn't think of them and he didn't put them in his diagram--can, however, be put in his diagram. If that's the case, we have to say to ourselves, "There might be something in this. Maybe this is a plausible and interesting way of arranging these materials." So I really do think that ought to be said in defense of what may seem, however, to be a somewhat arbitrary exercise.

Now turning to Jakobson, you may say with all this emphasis I've been throwing on "decomposing in order to recompose" that you don't see that going on in what Jakobson is saying. You may say to yourself, "Well, he seems to be just doing formalism. He breaks any speech act into six functions. He talks about the inter-determinacy of those six functions with a certain result. That sounds just like formalism," you say. Well, one way to show the way in which what Jakobson is doing is structuralist is to say that after all in this essay--there's a lot more of the essay, by the way, which your editor doesn't give you. It's mostly about versification, which is the long-standing specialty of Jakobson's work: Russian versification, Czech versification and so on, a little technical, but it is all about the poetic function. After all, this essay is about the poetic function, what the formalists would call literariness.

But Jakobson has a real contribution to make to this notion of the poetic function, and what it is is basically this: the poetic function--and I'm going to quote this for the first time. It's on page 858 in the left-hand column and it's a mouthful. "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." Now you understand. "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." What is the principle of equivalence? If you've got that, you've got a good deal of it. The principle of equivalence can be understood as what Jakobson in the "aphasia" essay calls "metaphor," that is to say the way in which--you remember last time I talked about how signs cluster in the vertical axis [gestures towards chalkboard], and if we understand language as a system, there are some signs that relate to other signs in ways that they probably don't relate to yet other signs. Then I had an incredible lapse of memory. I couldn't remember a synonym for "ship," but I hope that I got my point across to you and indicated that there are varieties of ways in which any given sign clusters with other signs. Those ways of clustering are what Jakobson calls "the principle of equivalence."

What is it? Well, it's the way in which signs either are similar to each other or are dissimilar to each other. If that sounds too vague, maybe it's better not to use language of difference or similarity but actually to use language of opposition: in other words, the way in which signs are virtually synonymous, or the way in which signs are really and truly opposed to each other. Obviously, it stretches just as in versification. You don't just have full rhyme; you have slant rhyme. These relationships stretch in varieties of ways of this kind, but the principle of equivalence is the way in which signs understood as phonemes, lexemes, tagmemes--how ever you want to understand them--the way in which signs are similar or dissimilar. The readiness with which we combine signs of that kind is what a person attending to the poetic function looks for. If the utterance seems to involve a predominance of equivalences of various kinds, then this utterance, which is unfolding on the axis of combination, right [gestures towards chalkboard], is the result of having projected that principle of equivalence--call it metaphor, call it a principle of similarity or dissimilarity--from the axis of selection; that is to say, that axis, perhaps a virtual one, in which language is a system to the axis of combination, that real axis--because nobody doubts the existence of speech--that real axis in which language is not a system but has become speech unfolding in time.

The principle of the poetic function, however, can be understood then as the metaphorization of what is otherwise metonymic. In other words, if I put together a sentence, what I'm doing is I'm putting words next to each other, and that's what metonymy is. Metonymy is a selection of signs, if you will, that go appropriately next to each other according to the rules of grammar and syntax and according to the rules of logic, right; but also perhaps in the ways in which the rhetorical device of metonymy can be understood. If I say "hut" instead of "house"--I'm using an example actually taken from Jakobson's "aphasia" essay--and if I say, "The hut is small," there is a metonymic relationship implied with houses, shacks, mansions, and other sorts of edifice, but which can only really be resolved, perhaps, by the unfolding of the logic of the sentence as in when I say, "The hut is small." So combinatory processes--borrowing the rhetorical term "metonymy" as "that which is next to each other"--are basically metonymic. The available signs to be selected, on the other hand, on the axis of selection are selected for certain purposes if they are metaphoric. Obviously, if I'm just making a sentence, I'm not selecting signs because they're metaphoric. I select them because they go easily next to each other, either for reasons of grammar or syntax or logic.

Now let's look at Jakobson's six functions [gestures towards board] taken all together. I think this is by no means difficult, and I think that Jakobson's analysis of the six functions is just absolutely, totally brilliant. In fact, I'm so profoundly convinced by what Jakobson says about these six functions that I really think there isn't much [laughs] else to say about an utterance. Obviously in different registers there's lots to say, but in the spirit of Jakobsonian analysis there's no possible complaint you can make about this except possibly one, which I probably won't get to until next time. In the meantime, it's just staggeringly effective.

Let me use the example of an expression which is surely as uninteresting--I've groped as much as I could to find the most uninteresting possible expression to show the way in which any utterance whatsoever entails these six functions: "It is raining." Oh, boy, "Excitement rains," as they say. In any case, let's say that I am an addresser--that is to say, I'm a Romantic poet. I say--probably ill advisedly if I'm a poet, but I'm a Romantic poet--I say, sort of waking everybody up when I say it, "It is raining." All right. What do I mean [laughs] if I'm a Romantic poet? What I mean to say is "I'm singing in the rain" or "It's raining in my heart." In other words, I'm expressing something emotional in saying "It is raining," so that sense of the expression "It is raining" is what Jakobson calls the emotive function.

Now I'm being addressed. The thrust of the message is toward the addressee. It's being spoken by an addresser, but it's aimed at an addressee. That addressee is a small child going out the door without his coat on, and his mother or father says, "It is raining," right, which means--of course as a conative function, as a command, as something which has a design on the addressee--what it means is "Put your coat on." But you don't necessarily say, "Put your coat on." You say, "It is raining," and that's the conative function. That's what Jakobson calls "the set to the addressee": that is to say, the basic dominant bearing that the message has, the "set," is a set to the addressee.

Now there's a context for any utterance. This much I suppose none of us would think to disagree with: I'm a weatherman, I'm a meteorologist, right? I don't even have to look out the window. I look at my charts and I announce confidently through the microphone, "It is raining." Right? Everybody takes me seriously. The referential function of "It is raining" is supposed to convey information. I'm a weatherman, and I'm supposed to know what I'm talking about. So if a weatherman tells me "It is raining," I believe that it is raining. I put my hand out the door and, sure enough, it is raining, and the referential function--the dominant in the expression "It is raining" as referential function--has been confirmed. I don't expect the weatherman to be telling me somehow secretly that he's crying when he says "It is raining," right? [laughter] Right? I expect him to tell me the truth about the weather, right, and that's what I'm listening to him for.

All right. Now "the set to the contact." Jakobson gives you those wonderful examples from Dorothy Parker's representation of a date: "Oh, boy. Well, here we are, yeah, here we are, [laughs] yeah, we sure are here," and so on, right--in other words, in a state of abject and acute nervousness filling the air with words, right, so that you're on a date, right, and you can't think of anything to say. [laughs] I really feel sorry for you. [laughs] [laughter] You're on a date and you can't think of anything to say so you say, "It is raining," and of course your interlocutor says, "Yeah, it's raining," and you say, "It's raining hard," and she says, "Well, yeah. Maybe it'll stop soon." So the conversation continues, and that's phatic function--checking to make sure the contact is working: "testing one, two, three; can you hear me?" That's what the set to the contact is: anything that confirms that you're actually sort of in communication with somebody, and anything we can say has that component. I mean, if I'm a physicist and I'm going out on a date with another physicist, I say, "E equals MC squared." Only I'm not saying "E equals MC squared"; I'm filling the air with words. So once again, it's the set to the contact, and any message in the right context has that function. The set to the code is when we're not sure that we adequately share the code with another person on a given occasion so that we back away from simply saying things to make sure that what we're saying is clear, in other words to define them. I say, "There's a mare in the field." Somebody says, "What is a mare?" "Well, it's a female horse." "Well, it's a female horse" is the metalingual function.

But we're talking about "It is raining." This is where it really gets interesting. [laughs] The most interesting thing about "It is raining" in terms of these six functions is metalingual, because what on earth is "it"? Right? Somebody tells me "It is raining." I say, "What? What are you talking about? What is 'it'? I have absolutely no idea what you're saying." I've noticed that other languages have this same weird phenomenon" "Il pleut," "Es regnet." What on earth does any of that mean? What is "il"? What is "es"? What is "it"? Is it God? Is it Jupiter Pluvius? Is it the cloud canopy? Well, it sort of is the cloud canopy, but that's sort of clearly not what's meant by "it," right? "It" is a kind of grammatical and syntactical anomaly which is extremely difficult even for linguists to analyze and to explain; so that when I try to say, "It is raining," I can expect, if I am talking to a literalist, of course, the metalingual function to kick in and, in fact, bite me in the shin. It's no picnic with the metalingual function in mind saying, "It is raining." What kind of a definition of "it" is "It's raining?" [laughs]

So problems arise but they're interesting problems, and they are a function, one of the six functions, of the expression "It is raining." Poetic function is unfortunately not very interesting. That's the one drawback of this example, but there's still plenty to say: "ih-ih" and the "ih" in *raining*, which one can hear--the double "ih" in *raining*, the monosyllables suggesting a kind of a quick declaration of something followed by a sense of duration that one always feels when one is aware of rain coming: that "It is rainnnnnnning," so that the duration of prolongation of the word has a kind of semantic value indicating to us that this is something ongoing--in other words, a variety of ways in which the poetic function of "It is raining" can be considered. For the poetic function to be dominant--as I suggested when I said a Romantic poet wouldn't be very smart if he or she said "It was raining"--would really be taxing for anyone who wanted to make it so. But any function could be the dominant in a certain situation of any given utterance.

So that then, sort of, perhaps serves to suffice as an analysis of Jakobson's understanding of the structure of an utterance. It has a structure insofar--that is to say a metaphoric as opposed to a metonymic structure insofar as we observe the presence of some kind of pressure from the axis of selection, the principle of equivalence and the axis of selection, bringing itself to bear on the way in which the combination takes place. It's just incredible that you say, "It is raining." What could be more prosaic than "It is raining?" All of a sudden you notice that string of "i's." You notice all kinds of other things about it. The way in which the most banal utterance is combined is likely in one form or another almost unavoidable. I suppose I should use the strong argument and say "unavoidably": is likely unavoidably to entail aspects of the poetic function. Where the poetic function is dominant you have literariness, and that of course, is the old object of scientific attention of the Russian formalists; but it is refined in a way that, I think, is structuralist by Jakobson because he insists on the binary nature of the process of combining elements from the axis of selection if they are equivalent--binary being "same," "opposite," "similar," "dissimilar," and the variety of patterns in which those relations, "same," "opposite," "similar," and "dissimilar," can be launched into use.

Now I've actually reached the point at which possibly I could get involved in some elements of critique, and I suppose I'll begin. I may not finish but we can always carry over into the next lecture. So since we've been talking about Jakobson, let me call your attention to one problem in what seems to me otherwise to be a truly remarkable exercise of thought. That problem arises on page 858. He himself recognizes that it's a problem. He acknowledges it's a problem, but he wants to say that he's solved it in saying what he says. It's about two thirds of the way down the page and it's about the relationship between the poetic function and the metalingual function, between the set to the message and the set to the code, as he puts it. This is what he says:

It may be objected [Yes, and here we are objecting, right?] that metalanguage also makes a sequential use of equivalent units when combining synonymic expressions into an equational sentence: *A = A* (*"Mare is the female of the* *horse"*). Poetry and metalanguage, however, are in diametrical opposition to each other [They're not the same, right? They're in diametrical opposition to each other]: in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation [in other words, to prove that one term can be understood in terms of other terms], whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence.

Okay. Now in one sense this is true, obviously. Yes, that is, I know when I'm speaking metalanguage and I know when I'm speaking poetry. Maybe you know it too, but what Jakobson has actually done is he's sort of exposed a structuralist nerve, because he has appealed to intention: that is to say, he's said the metalingual expression has one intention and the poetic expression has another intention. What does that mean? It has a genesis; it has an origin in an intending consciousness just as in traditions that are not structuralist, things have origins in prior causes and not in their structural relationship between two things. In other words, if structuralism is a critique of genesis, as is the case with Edmund Leach's analysis of the biblical text Genesis, as is the case certainly with Levi-Strauss' understanding of the Oedipus myth, from two and not from one--if structuralism is a critique of genesis, what happens when you have to make a distinction between two entities in your system, the poetic function and the metalingual function, in terms of their genesis: that is to say, in terms of the intention that stands behind them?

As I said, the example seems trivial because we're all more than prepared to agree with Jakobson that we know the difference when we see it between the metalingual and the poetic functions, but he's not actually saying we know the difference when we see it. Maybe it would have been better if he had said, "Well, anybody can see what's metalingual and what's poetic." Maybe it would have been better if he had. What he says instead is that metalingual is intended to do one thing; poetic is intended to do another thing.

That opens, actually, a can of worms about all six functions. I stand here in front of you and I say "It is raining." How do you know what I am intending, right: whether I'm nervous and sort of just being phatic; whether I am really unhappy or happy; whether I think you're crazy--it is in fact raining outside and I don't see any coats; or whether I am actually sort of just masquerading as an English professor--I am really a meteorologist? You don't know any of these things. You have to infer an intention, right? If you infer an intention in order to make these distinctions, how can the structuralist imperative of structure rather than genesis be preserved intact? How can we insist that we know things negatively and not positively if we have to infer a direct cause, a positive cause, in order to grasp distinctions even between the six functions? That's a rhetorical question with which I don't necessarily agree but it is a potential objection that you may wish to explore on your own.

Now the critique of Levi-Strauss I have already hinted at, but there's another aspect of it too. That I will defer until next time because you'll find that the essay of Derrida's that you're reading is largely about Levi-Strauss, so it will make a natural segue between what we're talking about today and what we'll be talking about Thursday, to return first to certain aspects of Levi-Strauss' argument and then get going with what Derrida is saying. Thank you. See you then.

[end of transcript]

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 10 Transcript**

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| February 12, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So anyway, to get launched on today's topic, obviously we confront one of the more formidable figures on our syllabus, a person who recently passed away and who in his last years and into the present has had a kind of second life as a person who in his later work didn't at all repudiate his earlier thoughts or indeed his earlier style, but nevertheless did begin to apply central aspects of his thinking to ethical and political issues. He and a number of other writers like, for example, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, are the figures whom we identify with what's called "the ethical turn" in thinking about texts, literature and other matters that is very much of the current moment. Hence Derrida's reputation and the tendency of people interested in theory to read him is alive and well today, but the materials that we are reading for this sequence of lectures date back much earlier.

The essay that you read in its entirety for today, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Language of the Human Sciences," was delivered on the occasion of a conference about "the sciences of man" at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. It was an event that was really meant to be a kind of coronation of Claude Levi-Strauss, whose work had burst upon the American scene only a few years earlier. Levi-Strauss was there. He gave a talk, he was in the audience, and Derrida's essay was widely taken--far from being a coronation of Levi-Strauss--as a kind of dethroning of Levi-Strauss. I have to tell you that Levi-Strauss, who is still alive, a very old man, expresses great bitterness in his old age about what he takes to be the displacement of the importance of his own work by what happened subsequently. What happened subsequently can, I think, be traced to Derrida's lecture.

One of the million complications of thinking about this lecture and about Derrida's work in general--and, for that matter, about deconstruction--is indeed to what extent it really is a significant departure from the work of structuralism. There is a self-consciousness in the thinking about structure that we find in many places in Levi-Strauss that Derrida freely acknowledges in his essay. Again and again and again he quotes Levi-Strauss in confirmation of his own arguments, only then in a way to turn on him by pointing out that there is something even in what he's saying there that he hasn't quite thought through. So it is not anything like, even as one reads it in retrospect, a wholesale repudiation or even really a very devastating critique of Levi-Strauss. Derrida, I think, freely acknowledges in this essay the degree to which he is standing on Levi-Strauss's shoulders.

In any case, this extraordinary event in the imaginations of people thinking about theory in the West did, however, tend to bring about a sense of almost overnight revolution from the preoccupation we had in the mid-sixties with structuralism to the subsequent preoccupation we had throughout the seventies and into the early eighties with deconstruction. Derrida was, of course, a central figure in this. He was here at Yale as a visitor in the spring for many years. He influenced a great many people whose work is still current throughout the United States and elsewhere. He--after that--had a comparable arrangement with the University of California at Irvine and his influence there continued, a key figure whom many of us remember from his period at Yale as a galvanizing presence. The idea that there was what was called by one critic a "hermeneutical mafia" at Yale arose largely from the presence of Derrida together with our own Paul de Man and, more loosely connected with them, Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom--and also a scholar named J. Hillis Miller, whose departure for the University of California, Irvine resulted also in Derrida's decision to go there and be with Miller rather than to continue to stay here.

That was the so-called Yale school. It generated extraordinary influence in some circles but, well beyond its influence, an atmosphere of hostility which had in many ways to do, I think, with what might still be called "the crisis in the humanities" as it is widely understood by state legislators and boards of trustees as somehow or another something needing to be overcome, backed away from, and forgotten [laughs] in the development of the humanities in academia. The reasons for this we can only imply, I think, probably, in the context of a course of this nature, but are nevertheless fascinating and will recur as we think not just about deconstruction itself but about the sorts of thinking that it has influenced.

Now you have now read some Derrida. You've read all of one essay and you've read part of another, "Différance," and you've found him very difficult. Indeed, in addition to finding him very difficult you've probably said, "Why does he have to write like that?" In other words, "Yeah, okay. He's difficult, but isn't he making it more difficult than it needs to be?" you say to yourself. "I've never seen prose like this," you say. "This is ridiculous. Why doesn't he just say one thing at a time?" you might also want to say. Well, of course it's all deliberate on his part, and the idea is that deconstruction is, as a thought process, precisely a kind of evasive dance whereby one doesn't settle for distinct positions, for any sort of idea that can be understood as governed--this is what "Structure, Sign and Play" is all about--as governed by a blanket term, what Derrida often calls a "transcendental signified." We'll have much more to say about this.

Derrida's prose style--its kind of a crab-like, sideways movement around an argument--is meant as rigorously as it can to avoid seeming to derive itself from some definite concept, because, of course, deconstruction is precisely the deconstruction of the grounds whereby we suppose our thinking can be derived from one or another definite concept. Also--this is to be kept in mind, and this is of course one of the key distinctions between Derrida and de Man--we'll have more to say about distinctions between them on Tuesday: Derrida is not a *literary* theorist. Though he sometimes does talk about texts that we call "literary," indeed he very often does, nevertheless Derrida's position and the logic of that position suggest that we can't really reliably discriminate among genres. In other words, we can't use genre *either* as a blanket term; and therefore he is one of the people--one of the most influential people in persuading us that there's no such thing as literature, legal texts, theological texts, philosophical texts, or scientific texts. There is *discourse*, and to think about the field of texts is to think about something which is full of *difference*. [laughs] Needless to say, it's the central word in Derrida, which is nevertheless not classifiable or categorizable, and so for that reason we can't really say Derrida is specifically a literary theorist.

Now I've been talking so far about difficulty and confusion, but in view of the fact that we're all in a state of tension about this--I'm in a state of tension about it too--let me remind us that we've already been doing deconstruction and that much of what's problematic in reading Derrida really has already been explained. Let's begin with a kind of warm-up sheet which we can anchor in these little drawings I've made [gestures towards chalkboard]. Obviously, you look at these drawings and you say, "Ah ha. That's the vertical axis," right? Of course, once we get to feminism, feminism will have certain ideas of its own about the vertical axis. We will be getting into that when the time comes.

In the meantime the Eiffel Tower [gestures towards chalkboard] is a wonderful way of showing the degree to which the vertical axis is *virtual*. That is to say, if you ever saw a dotted line standing upright, it's the Eiffel Tower. There's nothing in it. It's empty. It's transparent. Yet somehow or another, if you're at the top of it--if you're in the viewing station at the top of the Eiffel Tower--suddenly all of Paris is organized at your feet. That is to say, it's a wonderful axis of combination that you're looking at. It is just there with its landmarks, not having the same kind of status as that which you are standing on, but rather just in a kind of row as the key signs, as it were, of the skyline of Paris: so you get the Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe and so on, all sort of lined up in a row, and there it is. Guy de Maupassant in a famous anecdote complained rather bitterly about this, according to Roland Barthes in an essay called "The Eiffel Tower":

Maupassant often ate at the restaurant in the tower [up here someplace] [gestures towards the chalkboard] even though he didn't particularly like the food. "It's the only place," he said, "where I don't have to see it."

In other words, if--as Saussure says, once again--we "put both feet squarely on the ground" of the Eiffel Tower, we're liberated from the idea that somehow or another it's a governing presence. If we're actually there, we no longer have to worry about the way it organizes everything around it into a kind of rigorous unfolding pattern. After all, there's a very real sense in which we infer the Eiffel Tower from its surroundings. It's built in the nineteenth century. It's by no means causative of the skyline of Paris. It's something that comes in belatedly just as *langue* comes in belatedly with relation to speech. The Eiffel Tower is a virtuality that organizes things, as one might say, arbitrarily.

Sort of as a reflection on these same ideas, you get the famous poem of Wallace Stevens. I am sure you recognize this as Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar," but I will quickly quote to you the poem.

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild. [As Derrida would say, the center limits free play, right?]  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

In other words, it is arbitrarily placed in the middle of the free play of the natural world, a free play which is full of reproductive exuberance, full of a kind of joyous excess which is part of what Derrida's talking about when he talks about what's "left over": the surplusage of the sign, the *supplementarity* of the sign. There's an orgasmic element in what Derrida has in mind, so that when he speaks of "the seminal adventure of the trace," toward the end of your essay, you want to put some pressure on that word "seminal." Well, in any case the jar is just arbitrarily in the middle of that, organizing everything without participating in the nature of anything. It is, in other words, a center which is outside the structure: "a center which is not a center," and we'll come back to that in a minute.

Now the Twin Towers--and I first started using this example decades before 2001--the Twin Towers have a kind of poignancy and pathos today that they would not have had then; but what they suggest is in a way today--which overwhelms us with grief--the ephemerality of the vertical axis. The Twin Towers had the same function in New York that the Eiffel Tower has in Paris. It was a wonderful place from which to see the city, a wonderful place from which to feel that everything was organized at its feet. There's a very fine essay about the Twin Towers--again, long before 2001--by Michel de Certeau, which makes this argument in sustained form. I recommend it to you.

In any case, it's another example that we can take from our experience of the uneasy sense we may have that to infer a spatial moment from which the irreducibly temporal nature of experience is derived--to infer a moment from the *fact* of this experience as a necessary *cause* of it--is always problematic. It always necessarily must, as Derrida would say, put this sense of a spatial full presence of everything there at once in systematic order--as Derrida would say, must put that "under erasure." In other words, in a certain sense you can't do without it. Derrida never really claims that you can do without it. If you want to get a sense of structure, you've got to have some sort of inference of this nature, but at the same time it had better be in *quotes* because it is always tenuous, ephemeral, dubious even as to its existence, and necessarily needs to be understood in that way.

All right. Now other ways in which we've already been involved in the subject matter of what you've been reading today: take a look at page 921, a couple of passages in which Derrida is quoting Levi-Strauss on the nature of myth. Once having quoted you these two passages from Levi-Strauss, here's where I'll return just for a moment to Levi-Strauss's analysis of the Oedipus myth and show you how it is that Derrida is both benefiting from what Levi-Strauss has said and ultimately able to criticize Levi-Strauss's position. Bottom of the left-hand column, page 921:

"In opposition to epistemic discourse [that is to say, the kind of discourse which has some principle or transcendental signified or blanket term as its basis--in other words, something which in a given moment makes it possible for all knowledge to flow from it], structural discourse on myths--*mythological* discourse--must itself be *mythomorphic*. It must have the form of that of which it speaks." [And Derrida then says] This is what Lévi-Strauss [himself] says in [the following passage taken from one of Levi-Strauss' most famous books] *The Raw and the Cooked.*

I just want to quote the end of it, the middle of the right-hand column, still on page 921. Levi-Strauss says:

"In wanting to imitate the spontaneous movement of mythical thought, my enterprise, itself too brief and too long, has yet to yield to its demands and respect its rhythm. Thus is this book on myths itself and in its own way a myth."

In other words, here is a moment when Levi-Strauss is admitting something about his own work which he is not admitting in his analysis of the Oedipus myth in the essay from *Structural Anthropology* that you read last time.

What Levi-Strauss is saying here is that his approach to myth is itself only a version of the myth. That is to say, it participates in the mythic way of thinking about things. It uses what in the *Structural Anthropology* essay he calls "mythemes" or "gross constituent units" of thought. It deploys and manipulates those gross constituent units of thought in the ways that we saw, but notice what Levi-Strauss is saying in that essay *as opposed to* the passage Derrida has just quoted. He says in effect, "This form of the myth is scientific. One of the versions that I have made use of to arrive at this scientific conclusion is, for example, Freud's version of the Oedipus myth. In other words, Freud, Sophocles, all of the other versions I have at my disposal, have equal merit as versions, but none of them is a transcendental signified, none of them is a blanket term, and none of them is the causal explanation or meaning of the myth. The meaning of the myth is discoverable only in my science."

Now, of course, Freud himself thought he was a scientist, and his reading of the myth was also supposed to be scientific. What was Freud's reading of the myth about? Two or one! [laughs] It was, in other words, about the problem of incest, the problem of the over-determination of blood relations and the under-determination of blood relations. It was a thorough examination of that problematic leading to the conclusion that that's what the myth was about. In other words, Levi-Strauss's conclusions are already anticipated in Freud. Furthermore, what is Levi-Strauss doing? He's denying the influence of Freud, right? It's my myth, not his myth--right?--which of course is precisely what happens in the primal horde. It is a perfect instance of the Oedipus complex. Levi-Strauss is repudiating the father and, in repudiating the father, showing himself to fall into the very mythic pattern that Freud had been the first to analyze. Okay? So when you say that what you're doing is scientific in a context of this sort, you are making yourself vulnerable. The moments in this essay in which Derrida is criticizing Levi-Strauss are those moments in which Levi-Strauss has unguardedly said something on the order of "My work is scientific"; but there are lots of occasions, and he always quotes Levi-Strauss to *this* effect, when Levi-Strauss is not saying that--when Levi-Strauss is conceding that his work, that is to say his viewpoint, disappears unstably into the thing viewed.

All right. Now also take a look at--because we've been doing this too--take a look at page 917, the left-hand column, where Derrida is talking not about Levi-Strauss but about Saussure. Here he's talking about the nature of the sign, and he is concerned, very much concerned, about this relationship between the concept and the sound image--which is to say, the signified and the signifier--that is the basis of the science of Saussure: that is to say, the relationship that's involved in the pairing of signified and signifier is the basis, the cornerstone, of the science of Saussure. So here's what, a little more than halfway down, the left-hand column, page 917, Derrida has to say about that. He says:

… [T]he signification "sign" has always been comprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word signifier itself which ought to be abandoned as a metaphysical concept [which is to say, a transcendental signified: in other words, the idea that the concept in some sense generates the signifier--right?--which is the basis of Saussure's thinking about this].

Here's where I come back to that example that I already gave you with a question mark next to it when I was talking about Saussure. Suppose I think of the relationship between "signified" and "signifier" as the relationship between two *terms*--because after all, one way of signifying the concept "tree" [gestures towards the board] is to write the word "tree" and put quotation marks about it. So if I take away the quotation marks, all I have is the word with no indication that it's a concept. Notice that this is now a relationship which Jakobson would call "metalingual." What it suggests is that "tree" is another word for "*arbor*." In other words, it's a relationship not between a signified and a signifier but between a signifier and a *signifier*, so that the binarism of the relationship is broken down, and we begin to understand the combinatory structure of speech or writing as one signifier leading to another--*I* think-- signifier: Derrida says in effect, "Let's banish the word 'signifier,'" but he might as well say, "Let's banish the word 'signified.'" I think a signifier, and it triggers by association--as Saussure would say--it triggers by association a subsequent successive signifier, which triggers another, which triggers another. That's what gives us, in the language of deconstruction, what we call "the chain," the signifying chain: not an organizational pattern but an ever self-replicating and self-extending pattern, irreducibly linear and forward-progressing through a sequence of temporal associations.

One of the things that happens when you demystify the relationship between a concept and a signifier or a sound image is that you also demystify the relationship between a *set* of associations, which exist somehow in space, and the way in which association actually takes place, which is necessarily in time: in other words, if one signifier leads to another--if like history, where there's one damn thing after another, speech is one damn signifier after another--then that is actually the nature of the associations that Saussure has been talking about in the first place. But it doesn't exist in a systemic space; it exists in an unfolding time, right? These are some of the implications of no longer being satisfied with the way in which a sign can be understood as a concept to which we attach belatedly a signification, a signifier. What we have is a situation in which we find ourselves caught up in a stream of signification, all of which is, in a certain sense, there before we came along and are moved, as down a stream, by the way in which one signifier succeeds another in ways that later on, as we take up concepts like "supplementarity" and *différance*, we can think of a little bit more precisely.

Okay. So now finally then, there's one other way in which Derrida's essay from the very outset confirms what we've been saying about the crisis of structuralism being the need to deny ordinary understandings of *genesis* or cause. In structuralism, if something emerges, it emerges from *between* two things. That is to say, it's not *this* and it's not *this*, or it "emerges" as that which is not this, not this. It doesn't, in other words, derive from an antecedent single cause as an effect. It emerges, on the other hand, as difference within a field.

Now that's what Derrida is talking about with extraordinary intensity of complication in the first paragraph of your essay, page 915, left column, first paragraph: his first words uttered at the famous conference in- at Johns Hopkins in 1966. He says:

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event" [*évênement*, something which emerges, something which is there now and wasn't there before]…

That's the most problematic issue for structuralism. When structuralism thinks about how yesterday things were different from the way they are today, it has to say: yesterday there was a certain synchronic cross-section of data, and today there's a slightly different synchronic cross-section of data. But structuralism is unable and furthermore--much more importantly--*unwilling* to say anything about how yesterday's data turned into today's data--in other words, to say anything about *change*. It sees successive cross-sections, and it calls that "history." I am anticipating here, and we'll come back to this in other contexts: but it doesn't say "one thing led to another"; it says "one thing after another"--in my facetious reference to history as I have already given it to you.

Now this is what Derrida is deliberately struggling with in this first paragraph:

… an "event" [quote, unquote], if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural--or structuralist--thought to reduce or to suspect. But let me use the term "event" [quote, unquote] anyway, employing it with caution and as if in quotation marks. In this sense, this event will have the exterior form of a *rupture* [that is to say, an emergence among things, right--a rupture: the volcano parts and there you have lava, right--an event] and a *redoubling* [a redoubling in the sense that "something has happened"].

As Bob Dylan would say in effect, "Something has happened, but it's not something new. It is, in fact, a replication of what was unbeknownst to you because, Mr. Jones, you don't know very much of what was, unbeknownst to you, there always--as Derrida says--already: something that emerges but at the same time presses on us its status as having already been there, always already been there."

All right. So in all these sorts of ways, understanding structuralism as a problematic critique of genesis--because it's still very hard to grasp, to accept the notion of things not having been caused--why *can't* we say things were caused, just for example?--the notion of the sign as an arbitrary relationship between a substratum of thought which is then somehow or another hooked onto a derivative series or a system of signifiers; the notion of getting outside of myth and being scientific, and the notion that we can ascribe reality to the vertical axis--all of these are ways of questioning the integrity, the security within its skin, of structuralism we have actually already undertaken. I only want to suggest to you with this long preamble that much of the work that lies before us is actually in the past and we have already accomplished it.

Now "Structure, Sign and Play" is a critique of "structurality." It's not just a critique of structuralism. It's a critique of the idea of anything that has a center, one which is at the same time an enabling causal principle. In other words, I look at a structure and I say it has a center. What do I mean by a center? I mean a blanket term, a guiding concept, a transcendental signified, something that explains the nature of the structure and something also, as Derrida says, which allows for limited free play within the structure; but at the same time the structure has this kind of *boundary* nature. It may be amoeboid but it still has boundaries--right?--and so at the same time limits the free play within the structure. That's like the New Critics saying that a text has structure. It has something that actually in the phenomenological tradition is called an "intentional structure." Kant calls it "purposiveness"--that is to say, the way in which the thing is organized according to some sort of guiding pattern.

But to speak of an intentional structure as a center is not at all the same thing as to speak of an intending person, author, being, or idea that brought it into existence, because that's extraneous. That's something prior. That's genesis. That's a cause, right? The intending author, in other words, is outside, whereas we can argue that the intentional structure is inside. But that's a problem. How do you get from an intending author to an intentional structure and back? A center is both a center and not a center, as Derrida maddeningly tells us. It is both that which organizes a structure and that which isn't really qualified to organize anything, because it's not *in* the structure; it's outside the structure, something that imposes itself from without like a cookie cutter on the structure, right? This then is an introductory moment in Derrida's thinking about centers.

On page 916 in the lower left-hand column, he talks about the history of metaphysics as a history of successive appeals to a center: that is to say, to some idea from which everything derives, some genesis or other that can be understood as responsible for everything that there is. The list is very cunningly put together. This is bottom of the left-hand column. It's not necessarily chronological, but at the same time it gives you a sense of successive metaphysical philosophers thinking about first causes, origins, and about whatever it is that determines everything else. I'll just take up the list toward the end: "transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth." Notice that though the list isn't strictly chronological, man nevertheless does succeed God. In other words, he's thinking about the development of Western culture. In the Middle Ages and to some extent in the Early Modern period, we live in a theocentric world. Insofar as he understands himself as man at all, man understands himself as a product of divine creativity, as something derived from God, as one entity among all other entities who participate and benefit from the divine presence. But then of course, the rise of the Enlightenment is also the rise of anthropocentrism, and by the time the Enlightenment is in full cry you get everybody from Blake to Marx to Nietzsche saying not that God invented man, but that man invented God. Man has become the transcendental signified. Everything derives now in this historical moment from human consciousness, and all concepts of whatever kind can be understood in that light.

But then of course he says, having said "man," [laughs] he says "and so forth." In other words, something comes after man. Man is, in other words, an historical moment. There are lots of people who have pointed out to us that before a certain period, there was no such thing as man, and in a variety of quite real senses, after a certain moment in the history of culture, there is also no such thing as man. The argument Derrida is making about the emergence of his "event" is that a new transcendental signified has actually substituted itself for man. In other words, the world is no longer anthropocentric; it's *linguistic*. Obviously, the event that Derrida is talking about--the emergence, the rupture, an event which makes a difference--is the emergence of language.

What I really want to talk about here is something that is on page 916, the right-hand column:

The moment [of emergence--the event, in other words, about halfway down] was that in which language invaded the universal problematic [in other words, that moment in which language displaced the previous transcendental signified, which was man]; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse--provided we can agree on this word--that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences.

He's making a claim for language while *erasing* it. In other words, he's painfully aware that language is just the new God, the new Man. Many critiques of deconstruction take the form of saying that deconstruction simply instrumentalizes language, gives it agency, and gives it consciousness as though it were God or man and then pretends that it isn't. This is a common response to deconstruction.

Derrida is aware of it in advance. He says in effect, "Look, I know we're running this risk in saying everything is language," or, if you will here, everything is discourse. At the same time, we are saying something different, because hitherto we had this problem: in other words, we had the problem of something being *part* of a structure--that is to say God is immanent in all things, human consciousness pervades everything that it encounters--in other words, something which is part of a structure but which is at the same time outside of it. God creates the world and then sort of, as Milton says himself, "uncircumscrib'd withdraws," right? God is not there. God is the *Dieu caché*: God is the hidden God who is absent from the world and is, in effect, also the structure of the world. The same thing can be said of man. Man brings the sense of what the world is into being and then stands aside and somehow sort of takes it in through an aesthetic register or in some other remote way.

Language doesn't do that. Language is perpetually immersed in itself. Derrida is claiming that language is different in the sense that it makes no sense to talk about it as standing outside of what's going on. This is an essential part of the critique of structuralism. Language is not *other* than speech; it is perpetually manifest in speech, right? It's simply a distinction that can't be maintained, which is why he calls it an "event." In other words, something of significance has happened, Mr. Jones, and that is language, right?

All right. So I suppose in the time remaining and, alas, there isn't a lot of it, we'd better ask what "language" is. We've talked about it. We've had a great deal to do with it, but of course we still haven't the slightest idea what it is. Soon we'll know. First of all, we'd better say, as is already clear from what we've been quoting, language is not quite Saussurian. That is to say, it is not a system of signs understood as stable relationships between a concept world and a world of signifying. It is not a world in which language can be understood as somehow or another a means of expressing thought. Deconstruction calls into question the distinction between language and thought in calling into question the distinction between signifier and signified, so it's not quite Saussuria--even though, as Derrida says, it can't do without a Saussurian vocabulary.

Another problem is--and also related to the critique of Saussure--is that this idea that what's inward, what is essential, is something that can be *voiced* and should be voiced; so that if I think a sign is a way of talking about the expression of a thought, notice that I call--if I am Saussure--that expression a "sound image." In other words, language, according to Derrida, in the Saussurian tradition seems to privilege sound over script, over what is graphic. He claims that this is a hidden bias in the whole history of metaphysics. Why, in other words, should we think of language as speech, as voice? Why do we think of voice--in the sense of the divine *logos*, the word: "in the beginning was the word"--why do we think of voice as a kind of fully present simultaneity that is absolutely present precisely in consciousness or wherever it is that we understand language to derive from? What's so special about voice? Why do they say all of these terrible things about writing? Writing is no different from voice. Voice, too, is articulated combinatorially in time. Voice, too, can be understood as *inscribed on the ear*. This is a metaphor that Derrida frequently uses, as a kind of writing on the ear. The distinction, which Derrida takes to be metaphysical, that Saussure wants to make between something primary, something immediate and underivative--voice--and something merely repetitious, merely reproductive, merely a handmaiden to voice--namely writing--needs to be called into question.

Now this is the point at which we need to say something about a number of key terms that Derrida uses to sustain this sort of criticism of traditional ideas of language. The first has to do with the notion of supplementarity. A supplement, he points out, is something that either completes something that isn't complete or adds to something that already *is* complete. For example, I take vitamin C. I also drink a lot of orange juice, so I've got plenty of vitamin C, and if I take a vitamin C pill I am supplementing something that's already complete; but if I don't drink any orange juice, then of course if I take a vitamin C pill I am supplementing something that's not complete, but either way we always call it a supplement. It's very difficult even to keep in mind the conceptual difference between these two sorts of supplement.

Now a sign traditionally understood is self-sufficient, self-contained. Saussure has made it a scientific object by saying that it's both arbitrary and differential, but a sign understood under the critique of deconstruction is something that is perpetually proliferating signification, something that doesn't stand still, and something that can't be understood as self-sufficient or independent in its nature as being both arbitrary and differential. It is a bleeding or spilling into successive signs in such a way that it perpetually leaves what Derrida calls "traces." That is to say, as we examine the unfolding of a speech act, we see the way in which successive signs are contaminated. That's not meant to be a bad word but suggests being influenced, one might say, in the sense of "open the window and influenza," by those signs that precede it. Supplementarity is a way of understanding the simultaneously linear and ever proliferating, ever self-complicating nature of verbal expression.

Now *différance* is a way, among other things, of talking about the difference between voice and writing. There is a difference between voice and writing even though they have so much in common. Voice and writing, by the way, are not a stable binary. There are no stable binaries in Derrida. The difference between voice and writing is that writing can give us all kinds of indication of difference that voice can't give us. Part of the interest of misspelling *différance*, as Derrida insists on doing, is that we can't, in terms of voice as sound, tell the difference between *différance* and *différence*. Actually, one can, slightly, but it's not a difference worth lingering over. *Différance*, in other words, with its substitution of the *a*--and remember the riff in the essay "Différance" on *a* as a pyramid, as alpha, as origin, and as killing the king because the king, remember, is the transcendental signified: God, man and so forth. The riff on the *a* in *différance* as all of those things is something that we can only pick up if we understand language as writing, because in speech these modes of difference don't register.

*Différence* (with an e) is simply the Saussurian linguistic system, a system of differences understood as spatial: that is to say, understood as available to us as a kind of smorgasbord as we stand in front of it. *Différance* introduces the idea of *deferral* and reminds us that difference--that is to say, our understanding of difference, our means of negotiating difference--is not something that's actually done in space; it's done in time. When I perceive a difference, I perceive it temporally. I do not understand the relation among signs as a simultaneity. I want to, if I want to pin it down scientifically, but in the actual--as Joyce would say--stream of consciousness, I understand difference temporally. I defer difference. I unfold. I successively negotiate difference, and in doing that I need the concept of *différance*.

All right. There a couple of things that I want to say about the key moves of Derrida. I will mention those next time. I will also look over my notes and see what I might say further about these troublesome terms and their relation to Derrida's understanding of language so that Tuesday our introduction will still have to do with Derrida and then we'll move into thinking about de Man.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 11 Transcript**

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| February 17, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** I'd like to start with a little more discussion of Derrida before we turn to de Man. I know already that I'm going to forego what for me is a kind of pleasure---perhaps it wouldn't be for you--which is an explication of the last extraordinary sentence in Derrida's essay on page 926 in the right-hand column. I'm going to read it to you just so you can reflect on it. What I'd like to do is suggest to you that if you still haven't determined on a paper topic, you might very well consider this one. You may not find it congenial; but supposing that you are intrigued by Derrida to account for this last sentence, to show how it picks up motifs generated throughout the essay, how it returns the essay to its beginning, and to consider very carefully its metaphors--it reflects on its own metaphors--I think you might find intriguing. The passage is:

Here there is a sort of question, call it historical, of which we are only glimpsing today, the *conception*, *the formation, the gestation, the labor*. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the business of childbearing--but also with a glance toward those who, in a company from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnamable, which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.

Well, there is a sentence for you and, as I say, I don't have time to explicate it but I commend it to you as a possible paper topic if you're still in need of one.

Now I do want to go back to the relationship between Derrida and Levi-Strauss. I suggested last time that while in some ways the essay really seems to stage itself as a critique of Levi-Strauss, to a remarkable degree, confessed or unconfessed, it stands on the shoulders of Levi-Strauss; at the same time, however, having made use of Levi-Strauss finding a means of distancing himself from the source text. Take, for example, page 924 over onto 925 when he quotes from Levi-Strauss' introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss on the subject of the birth, event, or emergence of language. What he quotes from Levi-Strauss would seem, on the face of it, to have exactly the same kinds of reservation and hesitation about the emergence or birth of language that Derrida himself has. Levi-Strauss writes:

Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance in the scale of animal life, language could only have been born in one fell swoop. Things could not have set about signifying progressively. Following a transformation the study of which is not the concern of the social sciences but rather of biology and psychology, a crossing over came about from a stage where nothing had a meaning to another where everything possessed it.

In other words, bam! All of a sudden you had language. You had a semiotic system, whereas before, yesterday, or a minute ago you had no language at all. In other words, there's no notion that somehow or another suddenly I looked at something and said, "Oh, that has a meaning," and then somehow or another I looked at something else and said, "Oh, that has a meaning," and in the long run, lo and behold, I had language--because the bringing into existence of the very thought of meaning, Levi-Strauss wants to argue, instantly confers meaning on everything. In other words, you don't have a gradual emergence of language. You have, like lava emerging from a volcano, a rupture. You have something which suddenly appears amid other things: something which is latent in those things, although they don't in themselves have it until you confer it on them, namely that which confers meaning--language.

So this is Levi-Strauss' argument, and Derrida is interested in it because he recognizes its affinity with his own hesitation in talking about events, births, emergence and so on. At the same time, he points out by way of criticism that to suppose that yesterday there was no language, there were just things as they are without meaning, and that today there is language--that things have meaning as a result of there now being in place that semiotic system we call language--he points out that this means that culture somehow or another must come after nature. There was nature; now there is culture, which is very much like an event or birth in the older sense. In fact, as soon as we have culture--Levi-Strauss expresses this feeling especially in a famous book called *Tristes Tropiques*--as soon as we have culture, we begin to feel overwhelming nostalgia for nature; but, says, Derrida, "What is this nostalgia other than the fact that the very thing we're nostalgic for comes into existence as a result of the nostalgia?" In other words, there is no nature unless you have culture to think it. Nature is a meaningless concept just like the lack of meaning within nature, where there's no culture until culture comes along and says, "Oh, not so much there is nature, but I'm terribly unhappy because before I came along, there was nature." Right?

This is the nostalgia or regret of the ethnographer who says, "Now as a result of this terrible Eurocentrism, as a result of the terrible ethnocentrism of the Europeans studying these things, we no longer have a savage mind." That is to say, we no longer have the kind of mind which flourishes in nature, in a natural environment. You can see ramifications of arguments of this sort for environmentalism as well as for ethnography. It's a fascinating argument, but the bottom line is this. Even this critique, and it is a critique of Levi-Strauss because he's saying, "Oh, Levi-Strauss, that's very interesting what you say about language, but you've forgotten that this means that you yourself must think nature preceded culture even though culture brings nature into being."

But this very critique leveled against Levi-Strauss, he could have found in Levi-Strauss and does find it on other occasions. Levi-Strauss' famous book, *The Raw and the Cooked,* essentially stages this critique in and of itself. What do you mean, "raw"? "Well, somebody's sitting in a field eating a carrot. That's raw," you say, but wait a minute: what is this notion of "raw"? You can't have a notion of "raw" until you have the notion of "cooked." I sit in my field. I'm eating my carrot. I hold it up and I say, "This is raw? It's ridiculous. 'Raw' as opposed to what?" Right? So there can be no "raw" without, in a certain sense, the prior existence of "cooked." "Cooked" brings "raw" into being in exactly the way culture brings nature into being.

Now to pause over this for a moment, we realize that sort of this basic move--a move that, when you start to think about it, we've been encountering ever since we started reading in this course of readings--is not so much the inversion of binaries as the calling into question of how they can exist apart from each other. In other words, the question of criticizing the origin of one state of things out of or after another state of things, the process of criticizing that is basically--and I'm sorry to be so reductive about it but I really can't see the distortion in saying this--is basically saying, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Right? It is a declaration of absolute interdependency among the things that we understand in binary terms but that we take somehow one to be causative of the other when we think about them.

This is really the basic move of deconstruction, but it's a move which anyone who studies philosophy as well as literary theory will encounter again and again and again, all the way from Hegel right on through the post-deconstructive thinkers we encounter for the rest of our syllabus--perhaps preeminently among them the gender theorist Judith Butler. Again and again and again you will encounter this idea in Butler. It's a question of saying, "How on earth would you ever have the concept 'heterosexual' if you didn't have the concept 'homosexual' in place?" Right? The absolute interdependency of these concepts is, again, central to her argument and to her understanding of things. Obviously, we'll be returning to that in the long run.

Now I want to pause a little bit more, then, in this regard over Derrida's distinction between writing and speech--writing, *ecriture*. This is a distinction which is not meant sort of counter-intuitively to suggest that somehow or another, as opposed to what we usually think, writing precedes speech--not at all. He's not saying that we've got it backwards. He's just insisting that we cannot understand writing to be derivative. We cannot say writing came into being belatedly with respect to speech in order to reproduce, imitate, or transcribe speech. Writing and speech are interdependent and interrelated phenomena which do different things.

Last time we spoke about *différance*. We said that the difference between *deference* with an *e* and *différance* with an *a* can't be voiced. It's a difference, or *différance*,that comes into being precisely in writing, and it's only in writing that we suddenly grasp the twofold nature of *différance* as difference and deferral. I'd like to pause a little bit--this will be my segue to de Man--over an interesting example in French which we don't have in English but is, I think, so instructive that it's worth pausing over [writes on chalkboard "est/et"]. You remember last time--and there is a slight voicing difference here just as there is also a slight voicing difference: *deference*, *différance*, but it's not a big voicing difference. It's not something that's easy to evoke and get across, whereas in writing it's perfectly obvious. For one thing, the *s* in *est*, which means "signification," [laughs] is dropped out of this word when you say it, *est* [pron. *ay*], the word for *is*--which is also the pronunciation for *et*, the word for *and*. Now these two words precisely express in French what Derrida is trying to describe as the double meaning of supplementarity. *Is* in the sense of the metaphor--"This is that, A is B," understood as a metaphor--is a supplement that completes a whole. It's a means of completing a whole through the declaration that A is B.

But *is* has another sense which is not a rhetorical sense, because metaphor is sort of the heart of rhetoric, the rhetorical sense A is B--when, by the way, we know perfectly well that A is not B. How can A be B? A is only A. In fact, it's even a question whether A is A, but it's certainly not B, right? This much we know. In the grammatical sense there is no sort of mystification about the metaphor. In the grammatical sense, this word is the means or principal of predication whereby we say one thing is another thing: the mare is the female of the horse, for example. Notice that the relationship between the rhetorical *is* and the grammatical *is* is basically the relationship between what Jakobson calls the "poetic function" and the "metalingual function." As you'll see in de Man, there is an irreducible tension between the rhetorical sense of this word, which claims metaphoricity, and the grammatical sense of this word, which makes no such claim but is simply the establishment of predication in a sentence.

Now the word *est* or *et*, which is almost like *est*, reinforces the idea of the supplement, not as the completion of something that needs it to be complete--the fulfillment of meaning in a metaphor--but rather "supplement" in the sense of adding on to something that's already complete. The appositional, sort of grammatical, perpetual addition of meaning in the expression *and* or *et* is after all very much like what Jakobson calls "metonymic": that is to say, the contiguous adding on of things, making no claim to be metaphorical just like grammatical predication. So the tension or the system of differences that can be established simply by looking at these two similarly voiced words, I think, gives us a kind of emblem or paradigm for what Derrida calls "supplementarity" and what de Man calls the irreducible tension between, difference between, and conflict between rhetoric and grammar. That is the main topic of what we have to say about de Man today.

Now last time I said a little bit about the presence of Derrida and de Man together, together with a scholar named J. Hillis Miller, and scholars who associated themselves with them--Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom--in a kind of period of flourishing in the seventies and early eighties at Yale called abroad "the Yale school," subject to much admiration in the academy and much vilification both within and outside the academy. But this was a moment of particular and headlined notoriety in the history of academic thinking about literature, and a moment in which academic thinking about literature had a peculiar influence on topics much broader than literature. It began to infiltrate other disciplines and was in general a high-spirited horse for that certain period of time.

Then Miller eventually in the eighties went to Irvine, Derrida followed him there, and in 1983 Paul de Man died, and the main force of the movement began to give way to other interests and other tendencies and trends both here at Yale and elsewhere. Then shortly after de Man's, death there was a revelation--which is mentioned by your editor in the italicized preface to "Semiology and Rhetoric"--about de Man which was horrible in itself and made it impossible ever to read de Man in quite the same way again, but which was also, I have to say, precisely what the enemies of deconstruction were [laughs] waiting for. That was the fact that in his youth, de Man, still living in Belgium, the nephew of a distinguished socialist politician in Belgium, wrote for a Nazi-sponsored Belgian newspaper a series of articles anti-Semitic in tendency, a couple of them openly anti-Semitic or at least sort of racially Eurocentric in ways, that argued for the exclusion of Jews from the intellectual life of Europe and so on. These papers were gathered and published as Paul de Man's wartime journalism, and there was a tremendous furor about them similar to the revelations, which had never been completely repressed but grew in magnitude as more and more was known about them--the revelations about Heidegger's association with the Nazi government. In the late eighties, there was a furious public argumentation back and forth among those who had read de Man, those who hadn't who were opposed to his work, and those who scrambled in one way or another to attempt to defend it to preserve his legacy and also the legacy of deconstruction.

Now all of this is a matter of record and I suppose needs to be paused over a little bit. One of the texts of de Man--also in the book called *Allegories of Reading* where you'll find also a version of the essay "Semiology and Rhetoric" that you read for today--one of the essays that those who had actually read de Man actually argued about in a persistent fashion is called "The Purloined Ribbon." It has to do with the passage in Rousseau's *Confessions* where Rousseau has stolen a ribbon in order to give it to a serving maid to whom he felt attraction, and then when he was asked who had done it, or did he know anything about who had done it, he blurted out her name, Marion. De Man says this really wasn't an accusation--in fact, this was just a meaningless word blurted out--that there is no possibility really of confession, that there is no real subjectivity that can affirm or deny guilt or responsibility: in other words, a lot of things that, needless to say, attracted the attention of a public that wasn't perhaps so much concerned that he had written these articles but that he had never for the rest of his career admitted having done so; in other words, that he had suppressed a past. Nobody really believed he still had these sympathies, but the whole question was, why didn't he fess up? Why didn't he come clean? Of course, they took "The Purloined Ribbon" to be his sort of allegorical way of suggesting that he couldn't possibly confess because nobody can confess, there's no human subjectivity, etc., etc., etc.

So, as I say, there was a considerable controversy swirling around this article, and just as is the case with Heidegger, it has been very difficult to read de Man in the same way again as a result of what we now know. Let me just say though also that--and I think this was largely confessed by the people engaged in the controversy although some people did go farther--there is no cryptically encoded rightism either in de Man or in deconstruction. There are two possible ways of reacting to what deconstruction calls "undecidability," that is to say the impossibility of our really being able to form a grounded opinion about anything. There are two possible ways of reacting to this, one positive and one negative. The negative way is to say that undecidability opens a void in the intellect and in consciousness into which fanaticism and tyranny can rush. In other words, if there is a sort of considered and skillfully argued resistance to opinion--call that "deconstruction"--then in the absence of decently grounded, decently argued opinion, you get this void into which fanaticism and tyranny can rush. That's the negative response to undecidability, and it's of course, a view that many of us may entertain.

The positive reaction, however, to undecidability is this: undecidability is a perpetually vigilant scrutiny of all opinion as such, precisely in order to withstand and to resist those most egregious and incorrigible opinions of all: the opinions of fanaticism and tyranny. In other words, you can take two views in effect of skepticism: [laughs] the one that it is, in its insistence on a lack of foundation for opinion, a kind of passive acquiescence in whatever rises up in its face; and on the other hand, you can argue that without skepticism, everybody is vulnerable to excessive commitment to opinion, which is precisely the thing that skepticism is supposed to resist. Now this isn't the first time in this course that I've paused over a moment at a crossroads where you can't possibly take both paths [laughs] but where it is obviously very, very difficult to make up one's mind. More than one can say or care to admit, it may ultimately be a matter of temperament which path one chooses to take.

All right. Now in any case, while we're on the subject of deconstruction in general and before we get into de Man, let me just say that there is one other way, if I may, not to criticize deconstruction. It's always supposed popularly that deconstruction denies the existence of any reality outside a text. Derrida famously, notoriously, said "there is nothing outside the text," right? What he meant by that, of course, is that there's nothing but text. That is to say, the entire tissue, structure, and nature of our lives--including history, which we know textually is all there is--our lives are textual lives. That's what he meant. He didn't mean to say the text is here, the text contains everything that matters, and nothing else exists anyway. What he meant to say is that there is "nothing but text" in the sense that absolutely everything we ordinarily take to be just our kind of spontaneously lived existence is, in fact, mediated in the ways we've already discussed at length in this course, and we'll discuss more by our knowledge and that our knowledge is textual, right?

That's what he meant but, as I say, it's widely misunderstood, and de Man in the fourth passage on your sheet returns to the attack against this popular supposition and says:

In genuine semiology as well as in other linguistically oriented theories, the referential [and notice the citation of Jakobson here] function of language is not being denied. Far from it. [In other words, it's not a question of the idealist who was refuted by Dr. Johnson who kicked a stone and leaped away in terrible pain saying, "I refute it thus." Nobody denies the existence of the stone, right? That is not at all the case. Reality is there, reality is what it is, and the referential function is perpetually in play in language, trying to hook on to that reality.] What is in question is its authority for natural or phenomenal cognition. [That is to say, can we know what things are--not that things are but what things are using the instrument of language? De Man goes on to say very challengingly:] What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism. [In other words, ideology is nothing other than the belief that language, my language--what I say and what I think in language--speaks true.]

That's the position taken up, not at all the same thing as saying what's out there doesn't exist--nothing to do with that.

All right. Now de Man's early career was influenced--I'm not speaking of the very early career in which he wrote these articles, but the early career involving the essays which were collected in his first book, *Blindness and Insight.* His early career is mainly influenced by French intellectualism, in particular Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and the argument of *Blindness and Insight* is largely to be understood not so much in terms of de Man's later preoccupations with linguistics as with the negotiation of Sartre and existentialism into a kind of literary theory. The texts, in particular the text called "Criticism and Crisis"--the first one that I quote on your sheet--can best be read in those terms; but soon enough, de Man did accept and embrace the influence of Saussure in linguistics and structuralism, and his vocabulary henceforth took these forms. The vocabulary that we have to wrestle with for today's essay is taken in part from Jakobson's understanding of the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, and we will have more to say about that.

But in the meantime it's probably on this occasion, once we accept them both as having come under the influence of the same form of linguistic thinking, to say a little bit about the similarities and differences that exist between Derrida and de Man. Now similarly, they both take for granted that it is very difficult to think about beginnings, but at the same time, one has to have some way, some proto-structuralist way, of understanding that before a certain moment--that is to say, before a certain synchronic cross-section--things were different from the way they were in some successive moment. So in the second passage on your sheet to which I'll return in the end, we find de Man saying, "Literary theory can be said to come into being when"--that is de Man's version of the event, and he agrees with Derrida in saying, "Well, sure God came into being; man came into being; consciousness came into being. That's all very well, but they're just head signifiers in metaphysics. There's something different about language." Right?

What both Derrida and de Man say about the difference when one thinks of language coming into being, from thinking about all those other things coming into being, is that language does not purport to stand outside of itself. It cannot stand outside of itself. It cannot constitute itself. It is perpetually caught up in its own systematic nature so that it's a center. We have to resist excessive commitment to this idea of it being a center, but it is at least not a center which somehow stands outside of itself and is a center only in the sense that it is some remote, hidden, impersonal, distant cause. Language is caught up in itself in a way that all of these other moments were not. Then also, I think that you can see the similarity to Derrida and de Man's way of insisting on these binary relations as interdependent and mutual, comparable to the sort of thing that I've been talking about in Derrida.

Take page 891 and 892 for example, the very bottom of 891 over to 892. De Man says:

It is easy enough to see that this apparent glorification of the critic-philosopher in the name of truth is in fact a glorification of the poet as the primary source of this truth...

Now he does not mean, as Freud, for example, meant in saying, "The poets came before me and the poets knew everything I knew before I knew it." He does not mean that at all. What he means is what he says in the following clauses.

[I]f truth is the recognition of the systematic character of a certain kind of error, then it would be fully dependent on the prior existence of this error.

In other words, truth arises out of error. Error is not a deviance from truth. Right? Error is not a poetic elaboration on things which somehow, as it does in Plato's view, undermines the integrity of that truth identified by philosophers. On the contrary, philosophy properly understood is what comes into being when one has achieved full recognition of a preexisting error. That is the way in which de Man wants to think about the relationship precisely between literature and other forms of speech.

In saying that, I want to move immediately to the differences with Derrida. Derrida, as I said, believes in a kind of seamless web of discourse or discursivity. We are awash in discourse. Yes, we can provisionally or heuristically speak of one form of discourse as opposed to another--literature, law, theology, science and so on--but it is all easily undermined and demystified as something that has real independent integrity. De Man does not believe this. De Man thinks, on the contrary, that there is such a thing as literariness. He follows Jakobson much more consistently in this regard than Derrida does. Again and again he says that the important thing is to insist on the difference between literature and other forms of discourse.

There are all kinds of passages I could elicit in support of this. Let me just quickly read a few, page 883, about two thirds of the way down the left-hand column, where he's sounds very much like a Russian formalist talking about the what literature, in particular, has exclusively that other forms of discourse don't have. He says:

… [L]iterature cannot merely be received as a definite unit of referential meaning that can be decoded without leaving a residue. The code is unusually conspicuous, complex, and enigmatic; it attracts an inordinate amount of attention to itself, and this attention has to acquire the rigor of a method. The structural moment of concentration on the code for its own sake cannot be avoided, and literature necessarily breeds its own formalism.

In the interest of time, I'm going to skip over a few other passages that I was going to read to you in reinforcement of this insistence, on de Man's part, that literature differs from other forms of discourse, the remaining question being: literature differs from other forms of discourse how? Well, it is the disclosure of error that other forms of discourse supposing themselves to refer to things remain unaware of. Literature knows itself to be fictive. Ultimately, we reach the conclusion that if we're to think of literature, we're to think of something that is made up: not something that is based on something but something that is made up.

In the first passage, the statement about language by criticism, that sign and meaning can never coincide, is what is precisely taken for granted in the kind of language we call "literary." Literature, unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of this knowledge. It is the only form of knowledge free from the fallacy of unmediated expression--in other words, free from the fallacy that when I say "It is raining," I mean I'm a meteorologist and I mean it is raining. Literature, when it says "It is raining," is not looking out of the window, right? This is after all perfectly true. The author may have been looking out of the window, [laughs] but literature, as we encounter it and as a text, is not looking out of the window. How can a text look out of the window? When literature says "It is raining," it's got something else, as one might say, in view:

All of us [de Man continues] know this although we know it in the misleading way of a wishful assertion of the opposite, yet the truth emerges in the foreknowledge we possess of the true nature of literature when we refer to it as fiction.

This is why in the last passage on your sheet from the interview with Stefano Rosso, de Man is willing to venture on a categorical distinction between his own work and that of his very close friend, Jacques Derrida. He says:

I have a tendency to put upon texts [and he means literary texts] an inherent authority which is stronger, I think, than Derrida is willing to put on them. In a complicated way, I would hold to the statement that the text deconstructs itself [In other words, literature is the perpetual denial of its referentiality], is self-deconstructive rather than being deconstructed by a philosophical intervention [that which Jacques Derrida does--that is to say, Jacques Derrida bringing his sort of delicate sledgehammer down on every conceivable form of utterance from the outside--right--rather than being deconstructed by a philosophical intervention from outside the text].

So those are some remarks then on the differences and the similarities between de Man and Derrida.

Now "Semiology and Rhetoric" historically comes near the end of the period that "Structure, Sign, and Play" inaugurates. That is to say, it is published in *Allegories of Reading* and is a text which we can date from the early 1980s. Well, it was published originally as an article in 1979, but this is also near the end of a period of flourishing that Derrida's essay inaugurates, and other things have begun to become crucial. Even before the death of de Man and the revelations about his past, there were a lot of people sort of shaking their fists and saying, "What about history? What about reality?" I've already suggested that in a variety of ways this is a response that can be naïve but it is still very much in the air. De Man says in this atmosphere of response--at the top of page 883, the left-hand column, he says:

We speak as if, with the problems of literary form resolved once and forever and with techniques of structural analysis refined to near-perfection, we could now move "beyond formalism" toward the questions that really interest us and reap, at last, the fruits of the aesthetic concentration on techniques that prepared us for this decisive step.

Obviously, I think by this time you can realize what he's saying is if we make this move, if we move beyond formalism, we have forgotten the cardinal rule of the Russian formalists: namely, that there's no distinction between form and content--in other words, that we in effect can't move beyond formalism and that it is simply a procedurally mistaken notion that we can. That's the position, of course, pursued in this essay. The task of the essay is to deny the complementarity--the mutual reinforcement even in rigorous rhetorical analysis like that of Gerard Genette, Todorov, Barthes and others, all of whom he says have regressed from the rigor of Jakobson--to deny that in rhetorical analysis rhetorical and grammatical aspects of discourse can be considered collusive, continuous, or cooperative with each other.

Now I've already suggested the problems that arise when you consider this term even in and of itself. I'm actually ripping off, by the way, an essay of Jacques Derrida's called, hm [laughs] [laughter]-- anyway, it's that essay and [laughter] now you'll never know my source. [laughter] In any case, Derrida, too, in this essay which [laughs] [laughter] is at pains to argue that you can't reduce grammar to rhetoric or rhetoric to grammar. So as we think about these things as I suggest, we've already introduced what de Man drives home to us. He says, "Boy, this is complicated theory. I'm in over my head, so I better just get practical and give you some examples of what I mean." So he takes up "All in the Family" and talks about the moment in which Archie becomes exasperated when Edith begins to tell him that the difference between bowling shoes laced over and bowling shoes laced under--this in response to Archie's question, "What's the difference?" In other words, Archie has asked a rhetorical question. "I don't care what the difference is" is the meaning of the rhetorical question. Edith, a reader of sublime simplicity, as de Man says, misinterprets the rhetorical question as a grammatical question: "What is the difference? I'm curious to know." Then she proceeds to explain that there's lacing over, on the one hand, and lacing under, on the other hand. Archie, of course, can't stand this because for him it's perfectly clear that a rhetorical question is a rhetorical question.

De Man's point is a question is both rhetorical and grammatical, and the one cannot be reduced to the other. Both readings are available. He complicates, without changing the argument, by then referring to Yeats' poem "Among Schoolchildren," which culminates you remember--it has a whole series of metaphors of attempting, seeming at least to attempt, the synthesis of opposites concluding: "how can we can tell the dancer from the dance?" Another question, right? Now the rhetorical question completes the usual reading of the poem. The answer to the rhetorical question is that we can't tell the difference between the dancer and the dance. They are unified in a synthetic, symbolizing, symbolic moment that constitutes the work of art, and all the preceding metaphors lead up to this triumphant sense of unity, of symbolic unity, as the essence of the work of art--a unity which, by the way, entails among other things the unity of author and text: the unity of agent and production, the unity of all of those things which, as we've seen, much literary theory is interested in collapsing. How can we tell the dancer from the dance?

Well, de Man says, "Wait a minute though. This is also a grammatical question." If you stop and think of it as a grammatical question, you say to yourself, "Gee, that's a very [laughs] good question, isn't it, because, of course, the easiest thing in the world is to tell the dancer from the dance. [laughs] I am the dancer and this is the dance I am doing and [laughter] obviously they're not the same thing," right? What nonsense poetry speaks. It's perfectly ridiculous. There is also a grammatical sense which won't go away just because your rigorous, sort of symbolic interpretation insists that it should go away, right? Then de Man, who happens to be a Yeats scholar--he published a dissertation on Yeats and really knows his Yeats--starts adducing examples from all over the canon of Yeats to the effect that Yeats is perfectly knowing and self-conscious about these grammatical differences, and that there is a measure of irony in the poem that saves it from this sort of symbolizing mystification. He makes a perfectly plausible argument to the effect that the question is grammatical rather than rhetorical. He's not claiming--and he points this out to us--that his explication is the true one. That's not his point at all. He's claiming only that it is available and can be adduced from what we call "evidence" in the same way that the symbolic interpretation, based on the rhetorical question, is available and can be adduced from evidence--and that these two viewpoints are irreducible. They cannot be reconciled as traditional students of the relationship between rhetoric and grammar in studying the rhetorical and grammatical effects of literature take for granted.

That's his argument. It's a kind of infighting because he's talking about two people who are actually very close allies. He's saying they're doing great work but they forget this one little thing: you cannot reconcile rhetoric and grammar. Every sentence is a predication, and if every sentence is a predication, it also has the structure of a metaphor; and the metaphor in a sentence and the predication in a sentence are always going to be at odds. A metaphor is what we call a poetic lie. Everybody knows A is not B. A predication, on the other hand, usually goes forward in the service of referentiality. It's a truth claim of some kind--right?--but if rhetoricity and grammaticality coexist in any sentence, the sentence's truth claim and its lie are perpetually at odds with each other. Just taking the sentence as a sentence, irrespective of any kind of inference we might make about intentions--we know perfectly well what Edith intends and what Archie Bunker intends. It's not as if we're confused about the meaning of what they're saying. It's just that other meanings are available, and since they're not on the same page, those two other meanings coexist painfully and irreducibly at odds, right?

But there are cases--suppose Archie Bunker were Arkay Debunker. Suppose Archie Bunker were Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Derrida came along and said, "What is the *différance*?" Right? [laughter] That would be an entirely different matter, wouldn't it, because you would have absolutely no idea whether the question was rhetorical or grammatical, right? There it wouldn't be possible to invoke an intention because the whole complication of Derrida is precisely to raise the question about not knowing, not being able to voice the *différance* between difference and *différance* and not knowing whether Archie is right or whether Edith is right.

Proust I don't have time for, but it's a marvelous reading of that wonderful passage in which--remember that he's set it up at the beginning of the essay with a kind of wonderful, cunning sort of sense of structure by talking about the grandmother in Proust who's always driving Marcel out into the garden because she can't stand the interiority of his reading. Well, later on in the essay de Man quotes this wonderful passage in which Marcel talks about the way in which he brought the outside inside as he was perpetually conscious of everything that was going on out there during the process of his reading, so that ultimately in the charmed moment of his reading, there was no difference between inside and outside. In other words, a metaphor, a rhetorical understanding of the relationship between inside and outside has been accomplished, but then grammatical analysis shows that the whole structure of the passage is additive--that is, adding things on--and is complicating and reinforcing an argument without insisting on identity, on the underlying identity on which metaphor depends; so he calls this metonymic.

By the way, I'm going to leave also to your sections the strange confusion that ensues in taking a rhetorical device, metonymy, and making it synonymous with grammar on the axis of combination. I leave that to your sections. In the meantime he says, "No, no, no then. I guess this passage isn't rhetorical after all. It must be metonymic--but wait! It is spoken by a voice. There is this wonderful overarching voice that unifies everything after all. This is what I call," says de Man, "the rhetoricization of grammar, right--but wait! That voice is not the author. That voice is a speaker. That voice is Marcel performing his wonderful sort of metaphoric magic, but we know that the author is painstakingly putting this together in the most laborious kind of composed way, making something up in an additive way that's not rhetorical at all; it's grammatical. This is a supreme writer putting together long sentences and so wait a minute. It must be, after all, a grammaticization of rhetoric," the whole point of which is that the worm of interpretation keeps turning. All right? It doesn't arbitrarily stop anywhere because rhetoric and grammar remain irreducible. We have to keep thinking of them as being uncooperative with each other. Okay, have to stop there--might add a word or two--but on Thursday we turn, I'm afraid with a certain awkwardness; I wish there were an intervening weekend, to Freud and Peter Brooks. In the meantime, we'll see you then.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 12 Transcript**

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| February 21, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Well, now today is obviously a kind of watershed or transition in our syllabus. You remember we began with an emphasis on language. We then promised to move to an emphasis on psychological matters, and finally social and cultural determinants of literature. So far we have immersed ourselves in notions to the effect that thought and speech are constituted by language or, to put it another way, brought into being by language and that thought and speech have to be understood as inseparable from their linguistic milieu--language here being understood sometimes broadly as a structure or a semiotic system.

Now obviously our transition from language-determined ideas about speech, discourse, and literature to psychologically determined ways of thinking about discourse and literature has a rather smooth road to follow because the first two authors who borrow from Freud and understand their project to a degree in psychoanalytic terms are nevertheless using what is now for us an extremely familiar vocabulary. That is to say, they really do suppose that the medium of consciousness to which we now turn--the psyche, the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious--they really do suppose that this entity, whatever it may be, can be understood in terms that we take usefully from verbal thought and from linguistics. Lacan famously said, as you'll find next week, "The unconscious is structured like a language," and Brooks plainly does agree. You open Brooks and you find yourself really apart perhaps--I don't know how well all of you are acquainted with the texts of Freud. We'll say a little bit about *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* which is the crucial text for our purposes; but plainly apart from the influence of and the ideas borrowed from Freud, you'll find Brooks writing on what for you is pretty familiar turf.

For example, he begins by borrowing the Russian formalist distinction in trying to explain what fiction is between plot and story. I feel that I do ultimately have to cave in and admit to you that the Russian words for these concepts, plot and story, are *syuzhet* and *fabula* respectively, because Brooks keeps using these terms again and again. I've explained my embarrassment about using terms that I really have no absolutely no idea [laughs] of the meaning of except that I'm told what the meaning of them is in the books that I am reading, which are the same books that you're reading. In [laughs] any case, since Brooks does constantly use these terms, I have to overcome embarrassment and at least at times use them myself. They're a little counterintuitive, by the way, if you try to find cognates for them in English because you'd think that *syuzhet* would be "subject matter," in other words something much closer to what the formalists mean in English by "story." On the other hand, you'd think that *fabula* might well be something like "plot" or "fiction," but it is not. It's just the opposite. *Syuzhet* is the plot, the way in which a story is constructed, and the *fabula* is the subject matter or material out of which the *syuzhet* is made.

All right. In addition to the use of the relationship between plot and story, we also find Brooks using terms that are now, having read Jakobson and de Man, very familiar to us: the terms "metaphor" and "metonymy." There's plainly a tendency in modern literary theory to reduce all the tropes of rhetoric to just these two terms. When needed, they back up a little bit and invoke other terms, but the basic distinction in rhetoric, as literary theory tends to understand it, is the distinction between metaphor--which unifies, synthesizes, and brings together--and metonymy, which puts one thing next to another by a recognizable gesture toward contiguity but which nevertheless does not make any claim or pretension to unify or establish identity--to insist, in short, that A is B. These two terms, as I say, are understood reductively but usefully to be the essential topics of rhetoric and appropriated by modern theory in that way.

Now Brooks then uses these terms in ways that should be familiar to us, as I say. We have now been amply exposed to them in reading Jakobson and de Man. So there is a language of language in Brooks' essay, "Freud's Masterplot," despite the fact that the framework for his argument is psychoanalytic and that he is drawing primarily on the text of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.*

So what does he take from Freud? What interests Brooks about Freud? He is, by the way, a distinguished Freudian scholar who knows everything about Freud and is interested, in fact, by every aspect of Freud, but for the purpose of constructing the argument here and in the book to which this essay belongs, the book called *Reading for the Plot*--for the purposes of constructing that argument, what he takes in particular from Freud is the idea of structure: the idea that, insofar as we can imagine Freud anticipating Lacan--Lacan himself certainly believed that Freud anticipated him--the idea that the unconscious is structured like a language. In terms of creating fictional plots, in terms of the nature of fiction, which is what interests Brooks--well, what does this mean? Aristotle tells us that a plot has a beginning, a middle and an end. "Duh!" of course, is our response, and yet at the same time we can't understand a degree of mystery in even so seemingly simple a pronouncement. A beginning, of course--well, it has to have a beginning. We assume that unless we're dealing with Scheherazade, it has to have an end, but at the same time we might well ask ourselves, why does it have a middle? What is the function of the middle with respect to a beginning and an end? Why does Aristotle say, as Brooks quotes him, that a plot should have a certain magnitude? Why shouldn't it be shorter? Why shouldn't it be longer? In other words, what is the relation of these parts, and what in particular does the middle have to do with revealing to us the necessary connectedness of the beginning and the end: not just any beginning or any end but a beginning which precipitates a kind of logic, and an end which in some way, whether tragically or comically, satisfactorily resolves that logic? How does all this work? Brooks believes that he can understand it, as we'll try to explain, in psychoanalytic terms.

So this he gets from Freud, and he also gets, as I've already suggested, the methodological idea that one can think of the machinations of a text in terms of the distinction that Freud makes--not in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,but in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in the passages that you read for today's assignment taken from that book, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* about the dream work. It's there that Freud argues that really the central two mechanisms of the dream work are condensation and displacement. Condensation takes the essential symbols of the dream and distills them into a kind of over-determined unity so that if one studies the dream work one can see the underlying wish or desire expressed in the dream manifest in a particular symbolic unity.

That's the way in which the dream condenses, but at the same time the dream is doing something very, very different, and it's called displacement. There the essential symbols of the dream--that is to say, the way in which the dream is attempting to manifest that which it desires, are not expressed in themselves, but are rather displaced on to sometimes obscurely related ideas or symbols, images, or activities that the interpreter, that the person trying to decode the dream, needs to arrive at and to understand. So displacement is a kind of delay or detour of understanding, and condensation, on the other hand, is a kind of distillation of understanding. The extraordinary thing that Freud remarks on as he studies dreams in this book--published in 1905, by the way--the extraordinary thing about the way in which dreams work is that there seems to be a kind of coexistence or simultaneity of these effects. The dream work simultaneously condenses and displaces that which it is somehow or another struggling to make manifest as its object of desire.

Now the first person to notice that there might be--there are a variety of people who noticed that there might be a connection between condensation and displacement and metaphor and metonymy, most notably Jacques Lacan whom Brooks quotes to this effect: that the work in everyday discourse, in what we say but also in our dreams and in what we tell our analyst, can be understood as operating through the medium of these two tropes. Condensation, in other words, is metaphorical in its nature, and displacement is metonymic in its nature. Metonymy is the delay or perpetual, as we gathered also from Derrida, *différance* of signification. Metaphor is the bringing together in a statement of identity of the discourse that's attempting to articulate itself. Again we see in fiction, as Brooks argues in his essay, that these two rhetorical tendencies, the metaphorical and metonymic, coexist--and of course you can hear the implicit critique of de Man in the background--and may or may not work in harmony, may or may not conduce to an ultimate unity, but nevertheless do coexist in such a way that we can understand the unraveling of a fictional narrative as being like the processes we see at work in the unraveling of dreams. So it's these two elements that Brooks is interested in in Freud and that he primarily does take from Freud.

Now this means, among other things, that Brooks is not anything like what we may spontaneously caricature perhaps as a traditional psychoanalytic critic. Brooks is not going around looking for Oedipus complexes and phallic symbols. Brooks is, as I hope you can see, interested in very different aspects of the Freudian text, and he says as much at the end of essay on page 1171 in the right-hand column where he says:

… [T]here can be psychoanalytic criticism of the text itself that does not become ["This is what I'm doing," he says]--as has usually been the case--a study of the psychogenesis of the text (the author's unconscious), the dynamics of literary response (the reader's unconscious), or the occult motivations of the characters (postulating an "unconscious" for them).

In other words, Brooks is not interested in developing a theory of the author or a theory of character.

Now I don't think he really means to be dismissive of Freudian criticism. I think he's really just telling us that he's doing something different from that. I would remind you in passing that although we don't pause over traditional Freudian criticism in this course, it can indeed be extremely interesting: just for example, Freud's disciple, Ernest Jones, wrote an influential study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which he showed famously that Hamlet has an Oedipus complex. Think about the play. You'll see that there's a good deal in what Jones is saying; and in fact, famously in the history of the staging and filming of Shakespeare--as you probably know, Sir Laurence Olivier took the role of Hamlet under the influence of Ernest Jones. In the Olivier production of *Hamlet*, let's just say made it painfully clear in his relations with Gertrude that he had an Oedipus complex. Again, there were actual sort of literary texts written directly under the influence of Freud. One thinks of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*,for example, in which the central character, Paul Morel, is crippled by an Oedipus complex that he can't master and the difficulties and complications of the plot are of this kind.

Moving closer to the present, an important figure in literary theory whom we'll be studying in this course, Harold Bloom, can be understood to be developing in his theories of theoretical text, beginning with *The Anxiety of Influence*,a theory of the author--that is to say, a theory that is based on the relationship between belated poets and their precursors, which is to say a relationship between sons and fathers. So there is a certain pattern in--and of course, I invoke this pattern in arguing that Levi-Strauss' version of the Oedipus myth betrays his Oedipus complex in relation to Freud. Plainly, Freudian criticism with these sorts of preoccupations is widespread, continues sometimes to appear, and cannot simply be discounted or ignored as an influence in the development of thinking about literature or of the possibilities of thinking about literature.

But the odd thing, or maybe not so odd--the interesting thing, that is, in Brooks' work is that although the text is not there to tell us something about its author or to tell us something about its characters, even though character is important in fiction and that's what Brooks is primarily talking about--although it's not there to do those things it is nevertheless, like an author or a character, in many ways alive. That is to say, the text is there to express desire, to put in motion, and to make manifest desire or a desire. That is a rather odd thing to think about, especially when Brooks goes so far as to say that he has a particular desire in mind. The text, in other words, the structure of the text, or the way in which the text functions is to fulfill in some way or another a desire for reduced excitation: that is to say, the desire which can be associated with the pleasure principle in sexual terms and can be associated with the idea of the death wish that Freud develops in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that I'll be coming back to as the reduction of excitation that would consist in being dead. In these ways--and it remains to see whether, or to what extent, these ways are cooperative--Brooks understands the structure, the delay, the arabesque, or postponement of the end one finds in the text to involve a kind of coexistence of the sort that I have been talking about between relations to the possibility through desire of reducing excitation, being excited, and reducing excitation.

Now obviously both dreams and stories don't just express this desire; they also delay it. I'm sure we have all had the experience of waking up--it's an experience, by the way, which is an illusion; it hasn't really been the case--and thinking that we have been dreaming the same damn thing all night long: in other words, that we have just been interminably stuck in a dream predicament which repeats itself again and again and again to the point of absolute total tedium. Many of the dreams we have are neither exciting nor the reverse but simply tedious. Whatever excitement they may have entailed in the long run, we feel as we wake up that they go on too long. Perhaps fiction does have this superiority over the dream work: that its art, that its structure, is precisely the protraction of delay to a desired degree but not unduly beyond that degree.

But it's not just that the middles of fiction involve these processes of delay. It's that they seem also--and this is one of the reasons Brooks does have recourse to this particular text of Freud--they also have the curious tendency to revisit unpleasurable things. That is to say, it's not that--the middles of fiction are exciting. We love to read and everything we read is a page turner, all to the good; but the fact is our fascination with reading isn't simply a fascination that takes the form of having fun. In fact, so much of what we read in fiction is distinctly unpleasurable. We wince away from it even as we turn the page. One way to put it, especially in nineteenth-century realism which particularly interests Brooks, is all these characters are just madly making bad object choices. They're falling in love with the wrong person. They're getting stuck in sticky situations that they can't extract themselves from because they're not mature enough, because they haven't thought things through, and because fate looms over the possibility of making a better choice--however the case may be, the experiences that constitute the middles even of the greatest and the most exciting fiction do have a tendency, if one thinks about them from a certain remove, to be unpleasurable. Why, in other words, return to what isn't fun, to where it isn't pleasure, and what can this possibly have to do with the pleasure principle?

Now that's precisely the question that Freud asked himself in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* a text which begins with a consideration of trauma victims. It's written at the end of the First World War, and you should understand this text as not isolated in the preoccupation of writers in Europe. Almost contemporary with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* are novels written in England partly as a result of the making public of findings of psychologists about traumatic war victims as the war came to its conclusion. Most of you have read Virginia's Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*,and you should recognize that her treatment of Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* is a treatment of a traumatized war victim. Rebecca West, a contemporary and an acquaintance of hers who wrote a good many novels, wrote one in particular called *The Return of the Soldier,* the protagonist of which is also a traumatized war victim. So it was a theme of the period and Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* contributes to this theme. Brooks himself likes to refer to the text of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as itself a master plot--in other words as having a certain fictive character. It would be, I think, extremely instructive to read it alongside *The Return of the Soldier* or *Mrs. Dalloway* for the reasons I've mentioned.

Okay. So anyway, Freud begins by saying, "The weird thing about these trauma victims whom I have had in my office is that in describing their dreams and even in their various forms of neurotic repetitive behavior, they seem compulsively to repeat the traumatic experience that has put them in the very predicament that brought them to me. In other words, they don't shy away from it. They don't in any strict sense repress it. They keep compulsively going back to it. Why is that? How can that possibly be a manifestation of the only kind of drives I had ever thought existed up until the year 1919, namely drives that we can associate in one way or another with pleasure--with the pleasure principle, obviously; with a sort of implicit sociobiological understanding that the protraction of life is all about sexual reproduction and that the displacement or inhibition of the direct drives associated with that take the form of the desire to succeed, the desire to improve oneself, and the desire to become more complex emotionally and all the rest of it? All of this we can associate with the pleasure principle. How does this compulsion to return to the traumatic event in any way correspond to or submit itself to explanation in terms of the pleasure principle?"

So then he turns to an example in his own home life, his little grandson, little Hans, standing in his crib throwing a spool tied to a string out of the crib saying, "*Fort!*" meaning "away, not there," and then reeling it back in and saying, "*Da!*" meaning "there it is again": "*Fort! Da!*" Why on earth is little Hans doing this? Well, Freud pretty quickly figures out that what little Hans is doing is finding a way of expressing his frustration about the way in which his mother leaves the room; in other words, his mother is not always there for him. So what is this play accomplishing? He's got her on a string, right? Sure, she goes away--we have to understand this: we know our mother goes away, but guess what? I can haul her back in, and there she is again. This is the achievement of mastery, as Freud puts it and as Brooks follows him, that we can acquire through the repetition of a traumatic event. So maybe that's the way to think about it, but it can't just be the achievement of mastery alone, because nothing can do away with or undermine the fact that part of the drive involved seems to be to return to the trauma--that is to say, to keep putting before us the unhappy and traumatic nature of what's involved.

So the compulsion to repeat, which of course manifests itself in adults in various forms of neurotic behavior--by the way, we're all neurotic and all of us have our little compulsions, but it can get serious in some cases--the compulsion to repeat takes the form, Freud argues, especially if we think of it in terms of an effort at mastery, of mastering in advance through rehearsal, as it were, the inevitability of death, the trauma of death which awaits and which has been heralded by traumatic events in one's life, a near escape: for example, in a train accident or whatever the case may be. So Freud in developing his argument eventually comes to think that the compulsion to repeat has something to do with a kind of repeating forward of an event which is in itself unnarratable: the event of death, which is of course that which ultimately looms.

Now it's in this context that Freud begins to think about how it could be that the organism engages itself with thoughts of this kind. What is this almost eager anticipation of death? He notices that in certain biological organisms, it can be observed--this by the way has been wildly disputed by people actually engaged in biology, but it was a useful metaphor for the development of Freud's argument: he noticed that there is in certain organisms a wish to return to a simpler and earlier state of organic existence, which is to say to return to that which isn't just what we all look forward to but was, after all, that which existed prior to our emergence into life. The relationship between the beginning and the end that I have been intimating, in other words, is a relation of death. I begin inanimate and I end inanimate, and Freud's argument is that there is somehow in us a compulsion or a desire, a drive, to return--like going home again or going back to the womb to return to that inanimate state. "The aim of all life," he then says, "is death."

Well, now maybe the important thing is to allow Brooks to comment on that so that you can see how he makes use of Freud's idea and move us a little bit closer to the application of these ideas to the structure of a literary plot or of a fictional plot. So on page 1166 in the right-hand margin, the beginning of the second paragraph, Brooks says:

We need at present to follow Freud into his closer inquiry concerning the relation between the compulsion to repeat and the instinctual. The answer lies in "a universal attribute of instinct and perhaps of organic life in general," that "*an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things.*"

Building on this idea, page 1169, the left-hand column, about halfway down:

This function [of the drives] is concerned "with the most universal endeavor of all living substance--namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world."

Kind of pleasant, I guess, right? "The desire to return to the quiescence of the organic world." The aim in this context, in this sense--the aim of all life is death.

But there's more, and this is why novels are long: not too long, not too short, but of a certain length--of a certain magnitude, as Aristotle puts it. There is more because the organism doesn't just want to die. The organism is not suicidal. That's a crucial mistake that we make when we first try to come to terms with what Freud means by "the death wish." The organism wants to die on its own terms, which is why it has an elaborate mechanism of defenses--"the outer cortex," as Freud is always calling it--attempting to withstand, to process, and to keep at arm's length the possibility of trauma. You blame yourself as a victim of trauma for not having the sufficient vigilance in your outer cortex to ward it off. Part of the compulsion to repeat is, in a certain sense--part of the hope of mastery in the compulsion to repeat is to keep up the kind of vigilance which you failed to have in the past and therefore fail to ward it off.

So the organism only wishes to die on its own terms. If you are reminded here by the passage of Tynjanov that I gave you where he makes the distinction between literary history as evolving and literary history as modified by outside circumstances, I think it would be a legitimate parallel. What the organism, according to Freud, wants to do is evolve toward its dissolution, not to be modified--not, in other words, to be interfered with by everything from external trauma to internal disease. It doesn't want that. It wants to live a rich and full life. It wants to live a life of a certain magnitude, but with a view to achieving the ultimate desired end, which is to return to an inorganic state on its own terms. So there is this tension in the organism between evolving to its end and being modified prematurely toward an end, a modification which in terms of fiction would mean you wouldn't have a plot, right? You might have a beginning, but you would have a sudden cutting off that prevented the arabesque of the plot from developing and arising.

Now what Brooks argues following Freud is that to this end, the creating of an atmosphere in which with dignity and integrity, as it were, [laughs] the organism can progress toward its own end without interference, as it were--what Brooks following Freud argues is that in this process, the pleasure principle and the death wish cooperate. This is on page 1166, bottom of the right-hand column, and then over to 1167, a relatively long passage:

Hence Freud is able to proffer, with a certain bravado, the formulation: "*the aim of all life is death.*" We are given an evolutionary image of the organism in which the tension created by external influences has forced living substance to "diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death." In this view, the self-preservative instincts function to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, to ward off any ways of returning to the inorganic which are not imminent to the organism itself. In other words, "the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion." It must struggle against events (dangers) which would help to achieve its goal too rapidly--by a kind of short-circuit.

Again on page 1169, left-hand column, a little bit farther down from the passage we quoted before, Brooks says:

… [W]e could say that the repetition compulsion and the death instinct serve the pleasure principle; in a larger sense [though], the pleasure principle, keeping watch on the invasion of stimuli from without and especially from within, seeking their discharge, serves the death instinct, making sure that the organism is permitted to return to quiescence.

It's in this way that these two differing drives coexist and in some measure cooperate in the developing and enriching of the good life, and in the developing and enriching of the good plot.

An obvious problem with this theory, and Freud acknowledges this problem in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* is that it's awfully hard to keep death and sex separate. In other words, the reduction of excitation is obviously something that the pleasure principle is all about. The purpose of sex is to reduce excitation, to annul desire. The purpose of death, Freud argues, is to do the same thing. Well, how can you tell the one from the other? There's a rich vein of literary history which insists on their interchangeability. We all know what "to die" means in early modern poems. We all know about "Liebestod" in "Tristan and Isolde," the moments of death in literature which obviously are sexually charged. There is a kind of manifest and knowing confusion of the two in literature--and Freud always says that the poets preceded him in everything that he thought--which suggests that it is rather hard to keep these things separate.

For example, by the way, the compulsion to repeat nasty episodes, to revisit trauma, and to repeat the unpleasurable--well, that could just be called masochism, couldn't it? It could be called something which is a kind of pleasure and which therefore could be subsumed under the pleasure principle and would obviate the need for a theory of the death drive as Freud develops it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Now Freud acknowledges this. He says that it is difficult to make the distinction. He feels that a variety of sorts of clinical evidence at his disposal warrant the distinction, but it is not an easy one. It's one that I suppose we could continue to entertain as a kind of skepticism about this way of understanding the compulsion to repeat as somehow necessarily entailing a theory of the death wish.

All right. Now quickly, as to the plot: desire emerges or begins as the narratable. What is the unnarratable? The unnarratable is that immersion in our lives such that there is no sense of form or order or structure. Anything is unnarratable if we don't have a sense of a beginning, a middle, and an end to bring to bear on it. The narratable, in other words, must enter into a structure. So the beginning, which is meditated on by Sartre's Roquentin in *La Nausee* and quoted to that effect by Brooks on the left-hand column of page 1163--the narratable begins in this moment of entry into that pattern of desire that launches a fiction. We have speculated on what that desire consists in, and so the narratable becomes a plot and the plot operates through metaphor, which unifies the plot, which shows the remarkable coherence of all of its parts.

A narrative theory is always talking with some satisfaction about how there's no such thing in fiction as irrelevant detail. In other words, nothing is there by accident. That is the metaphoric pressure brought to bear on plotting, sort of, in the course of composition. Everything is there for a reason, and the reason is arguably the nature of the underlying desire that's driving the plot forward; but on the other hand, metonymy functions as the principle of delay, the detour, the arabesque, the refusal of closure; the settling upon bad object choice and other unfortunate outcomes, the return of the unpleasurable--all the things that happen in the structure of "middles" in literary plots. The plot finally binds material together, and both metaphor and metonymy are arguably forms of binding. Look at page 1166, the right-hand column, bottom of the first paragraph. Brooks says:

To speak of "binding" in a literary text is thus to speak of any of the formalizations (which, like binding, may be painful, retarding) that force us to recognize sameness within difference, or the very emergence of a *sjužet* from the material of *fabula*.

Okay. Now I want to turn to *Tony* as an instance of the way in which reading for the plot can take place. I also want to mention that the choice of these materials for today's assignment is not just a way into questions of psychoanalysis as they bear on literature and literary theory, but also a gesture toward something that those of you whose favorite form of reading is novels may wish we had a little more of in a course of this kind--namely narrative theory: narratology. I commend to you the opening pages of Brooks' essay where he passes in review some of the most important work in narrative theory, work that I mentioned in passing when I talked about structuralism a couple of weeks back and work which, for those of you who are interested in narrative and narrative theory, you may well wish to revisit. Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Gerard Genette are the figures to whom Brooks is primarily expressing indebtedness within that tradition.

Anyway: *Tony the Tow Truck.* I would suggest that in the context of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* we could re-title *Tony the Tow Truck* as *The Bumpy Road to Maturity.* It certainly has the qualities of a picaresque fiction. It's on the road, as it were, and the linearity of its plot--the way in which the plot is like beads on a string, which tends to be the case with picaresque fiction, and which by the way is also a metonymic aspect of the fiction--lends the feeling of picturesque to the narrative. Quickly to reread it--I know that you all have it glued to your wrists, but in case you don't, I'll reread it:

I am Tony the Tow Truck. I live in a little yellow garage. I help cars that are stuck. I tow them to my garage. I like my job. One day I am stuck. Who will help Tony the Tow Truck? "I cannot help you," says Neato the Car. "I don't want to get dirty." "I cannot help you [see, these are bad object choices, right?]," says Speedy the Car. "I am too busy." I am very sad. Then a little car pulls up. It is my friend, Bumpy. Bumpy gives me a push. He pushes and pushes [by the way, this text, I think, is very close to its surface a kind of anal-phase parable. In that parable, the hero is not Tony in fact but a character with whom you are familiar if you're familiar with *South Park*, and that character is of course the one who says, "He pushes and pushes…"] and I am on my way." [In any case that is part of the narrative, and then:] "Thank you, Bumpy," I call back. "You're welcome," says Bumpy. Now that's what I call a friend.

So that's the text of *Tony the Tow Truck.* Now we've said that it's picaresque. We can think in terms of repetition, obviously, as the delay that sets in between an origin and an end. We've spoken of this in this case as--well, it's the triadic form of the folk tale that Brooks actually mentions in his essay; but it is, in its dilation of the relationship of beginning and end, a way of reminding us precisely of that relation. He comes from a little yellow garage. The question is, and a question which is perhaps part of the unnarratable, is he going back there? We know he's on his way, but we don't know, if we read it in terms of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, whether he's on his way back to the little yellow garage or whether--and there's a premonition of this in being stuck, in other words in having broken down--whether he's on his way to the junkyard.

In either case, the only point is that he will go to either place because the little yellow garage is that from which he came; in either case--little yellow garage or junkyard--he's going to get there on his own terms, but not as a narcissist and not as the person who begins every sentence in the first part of the story with the word "I," because you can't just be an autonomous hero. On your journey, and this is also true of the study of folklore, you need a helper. That's part of fiction. You need another hero. You need a hero to help you, and having that hero, encountering the other mind as helper, is what obviates the tendency, even in a nice guy like Tony, toward narcissism which is manifest in the "I," "I," "I" at the beginning of the story. Notice that then the "I" disappears, not completely but wherever it reappears it's embedded rather than initial. It is no longer, in other words, that which drives the line in the story. So the arabesque of the plot, as I say, is a matter of encountering bad object choices and overcoming them: neatness, busyness--choices which, by the way, are on the surface temptations. We all want to be neat and busy, don't we? But somehow or another it's not enough because the otherness, the mutuality of regard that this story wants to enforce as life--as life properly lived--is not entailed in and of itself in neatness and busyness. Resolution and closure, then, is mature object choice and in a certain sense there, too, it's a push forward, but we don't quite know toward what. We have to assume, though, in the context of a reading of this kind that it's a push toward a state in which the little yellow garage and the unnarratable junkyard are manifest as one and the same thing.

Now as metonymy, the delays we have been talking about, the paratactic structure of the way in which the story is told--all of those, and the elements of repetition, are forms that we recognize as metonymic, but there's something beyond that at the level of theme. This is a story about cars. This is a story about mechanical objects, some of which move--remember those smiling houses in the background--and some of which are stationary, but they're all mechanical objects. They're all structures. In other words, they're not organic. This is a world understood from a metonymic point of view as that which lacks organicity, and yet at the same time the whole point of the story is thematically metaphoric. It is to assert the common humanity of us all: "That's what I call a friend." The whole point of so many children's stories, animal stories, other stories like this, *The Little Engine that Could*, and soonis to humanize the world: to render friendly and warm and inviting to the child the entire world, so that Tony is not a tow truck--Tony's a human being, and he realizes humanity in recognizing the existence of a friend. The unity of the story, in other words, as opposed to its metonymic displacements through the mechanistic, is the triumphant humanization of the mechanistic and the fact that as we read the story, we feel that we are, after all, not in mechanical company but in human company.

That's the effect of the story and the way it works. In terms of the pleasure principle then, life is best in a human universe and in terms of--well, in terms of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,the whole point of returning to an earlier state, the little yellow garage or junkyard, is to avert the threat that one being stuck will return to that junkyard prematurely or along the wrong path.

Okay. So next time we will turn to the somewhat formidable task of understanding Lacan.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 13 Transcript**

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| February 24, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Well, I'd really better start. I can infer, I think, from looking around the room that there is either post-paper depression at work or that having written the paper, you scarcely had time to read a fifteen-page labyrinthine essay by Lacan. That's unfortunate, and I hope you're able to make up for it soon. Those of you who are here today can take such notes as you can figure out how to take and then go back to the text of Lacan and try to make use of them. It is a pity that not everyone's here, but we'll fare forward nevertheless.

Now there is an obvious link between the work of Peter Brooks that you had last time and this particular essay of Lacan which, of course, I'd like to begin by underlining. It has to do with the part of the argument of Lacan which probably is most accessible to you after your tour through structuralism and related "-isms" and which, in a way, I think really can be used to anchor a certain understanding of Lacan. It's something I am going to want to spend a lot of time with in the long run today.

In any case, Brooks understood the fictional text and the completed fictional narrative as a sustaining of desire through a series of *détours*, detours, inadequate and improper endpoints overcome, resulting in a continuation of desire, resulting in a proper ending--that is to say, something corresponding to what Freud understood as the desire of the organism to die in its own way and not according to the modification or pressure of something from without. This sequence of *détour* in the elaboration of a narrative plot Brooks called metonymy, in a way that by this time we ought to recognize as what happens in the putting together of signs along the axis of combination as it's described by Jakobson. But Brooks remarks also that at the same time, there is a *binding* of this sequence of signs--of events in the case of a plot--there is an effect of unity, a feeling that the experience one has in reading a fictional plot is an experience of unity. This effect he calls "metaphor": that is to say, our sense of the unity of a fictional plot we understand as metaphoric. Some kind of identity, self-identity, or close correspondence in the meaning of the variety of events that we have encountered results in a unity that can be understood in metaphorical terms. In other words, something like what Jakobson calls the "poetic function" has been superimposed on the metonymic axis of combination in such a way that the feeling of unity, the sense of the recurrence of identity in the signs used, is something that we can come away with. This, Brooks argues, accounts for our sense of the unity of the plot even as we understand it to be a perpetual form of the delay of desire. I speak of the delay of desire: That's most obvious, of course, in a marriage plot, the marriage plot being the heart of fiction, perhaps, and most immediately intelligible--but of course desire takes many forms. There are many sorts of plot, and they always do in one form or another have to do, in Brooks' sense, with desire.

Now I pause in this way over Brooks because I think you can see--whatever frustration you may also be feeling in encountering Lacan--I think you can see that the same basic movement is at work in Lacan's understanding of the unconscious. The discourse of desire for Lacan, the perpetual deferral of bringing into consciousness, into being, into presence, the object of desire--Lacan, too, harkens back to Freud as Brooks does, harkens back to the connection made in Freudian thought and picked up by Jakobson between condensation in the dream work and metaphor in the dream work, and displacement in the dream work and metonymy in the dream work--this is central as well to Lacan's argument. The deferral of desire, and for Lacan the impossibility of ever realizing one's desire for a certain kind of "other" that I'm going to be trying to identify during the course of the lecture, is understood as metonymy, just as Brooks understands the movement of metonymy as not a perpetual but as a plot-sustaining *détour* or deferral of the end.

So this, too, one finds in desire in Lacan. Metaphor, on the other hand, he understands to be what he calls at one interesting point "the quilting" of the metonymic chain, the *point de capiton* or "quilting button" that suddenly holds together a sequence of disparate signifiers in such a way that a kind of substitution of signs, as opposed to a displacement of signs, can be accomplished. We'll come back to this later on in attempting to understand what Lacan has to say about that line from Victor Hugo's poem, "Boaz Asleep," the line: "His sheaves were not miserly nor spiteful." We'll come back to that.

In the meantime, the point of Lacan and what makes Lacan's reading of desire different from Brooks's, and indeed what makes his reading of desire different from that of anyone who thinks of these structuralist issues in psychoanalytic terms, is that Lacan really doesn't believe that we can ever have what we desire. He has no doubt that we can have what we *need*. He makes the fundamental distinction between having what we desire and having what we need. The distinction is often put--and when you read Slavoj Žižek next week--who makes a much more central point of this, it's often put as the distinction between the "big other"-- [laughs] and later on we'll talk about why it's big--the "big other," which one can never appropriate as an object of desire because it is perpetually and always elusive, and the "*objet petit à*," the little object of desire, which is not really an object of desire at all but is available to satisfy need. Sociobiologically, you can get what you need. Psychoanalytically, you cannot get what you desire.

Now the obvious gloss here, I think, is the Rolling Stones. If Lacan were the Rolling Stones, he'd have slightly rewritten the famous refrain by saying, "You can't ever 'git' what you want," right: "but sometimes if you try"--and you got to try. Even for what you need, you got to-- [laughter] right? [laughter] You can't just sit there--"Sometimes if you try you 'git' what you need." I'm sure that Mick Jagger had many sticky fingers in the pages of Lacan in order to be able to make that important distinction, but I think it's one that perhaps you might want to salt away the next time you feel confused about the distinction between desire and need.

Now obviously, it'd be great if we could just stop there, but we do have to get a little closer to the text and try to figure out why in these terms given to us by Lacan, terms both structuralist and psychoanalytic--we have to figure out why this distinction prevails and what it amounts to, so we soldier on. First of all, let me just say a couple of things in passing. There is for humanistic studies more than one Jacques Lacan. There is the Lacan for literary studies who, I think, is very well represented by the text we have before us, even though some of his most important ideas are only hinted at in this text. For example, we hear nothing in this text about his famous triadic distinction among the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. This is something we can't really explore with only this text before us. There is only the slightest hint at the very end of the essay on the last page of the distinction I have just made between the "big other" and the "*objet petit à*." We'll have lots of time to think about that because it's central to the essay of Žižek that you'll read next week, but for literary studies focusing on the structuralist legacy for Lacan, this is an exemplary selection.

But there's also the Lacan, perhaps a more current Lacan--one better known, perhaps, even to some of you in film studies: the Lacan of "the gaze," the complicated dialectic of "the gaze" which does very much involve negotiating the distinctions among the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. As I say, this Lacan we're obliged largely to leave aside if only because of the selectivity of what I've given you to read, but as I say these are Lacans with quite different emphases overlapping only to a certain degree.

Now the other thing I want to say in passing explains some of the rather strange tone of this essay. You notice that Lacan is just sort of bristling with hostility [laughs] and, of course, as well, condescension. Of all the big egos in our syllabus, this is by far the biggest. It's just something we have to live with and come to terms with, but the condescension isn't just toward the natural stupidity of all the rest of us. It's toward, in particular, what he takes to be the distortion of the legacy of Freud by most of his psychoanalytic contemporaries, particularly the International Psychoanalytic Association, many members of whom were the so-called American "ego psychologists."

Now what is an ego psychologist? It's somebody who begins as Lacan does--and this is something we'll want to come back to--somebody who begins with Freud's famous proposition, "Wo es war soll ich sein": "Where it was, there I should be." In other words, out of the raw materials of the id--it, *es*--in the unconscious, the ego--that is to say, the capacity of the human organism to develop into its maturity--should arise. In other words, the relationship between instinctual drives and the proper inhibitions of human or adult consciousness should be a progressive one, and the purpose of psychoanalysis, the purpose of bringing people beyond their entrapment in the various infantile stages or beyond their entrapment in some form or another of neurosis, the idea of progress or development in psychoanalysis--it has to do with the emergence and reinforcement of the ego. Lacan hates this idea, and the reason he hates it is because that idea of the emergence of a stable and mature ego is presupposed by the idea that there is such a thing as stable human subjectivity: in other words, that there is such a thing as consciousness from which our communicative and linguistic and other sorts of systems derive.

Lacan takes a completely different view of consciousness. This, of course, is something to which we will turn in a moment, but the basic disagreement and the source of his most intense hostility throughout this essay concerns the question whether or not there is for each of us a stable and by implication unique subjectivity. We are not each other. We suppose ourselves--indeed, we complain when we think about ethics, about our isolation from each other--we suppose ourselves to be altogether [laughs] individual whereas for Lacan, there is a kind of continuousness in consciousness, the reason for which I'll explain, which is not absolute. In the long run, in this essay you will find--and I hope to be able to understand this as a kind of turn in his argument--you will find that Lacan does actually hold out a limited sense of individual subjectivity, not really as autonomous subjectivity, not something that can authorize a sense of free will or power of agency, but a way in which, owing simply to the complexity of the unconscious, each of us, as it were, inhabits a slightly different form of that complexity. Lacan goes that far in the direction of the subject, or of subjectivity, but refuses the idea that the subject is something that can emerge from analysis or--in the case of, I suppose, most of us--simply through maturation as a stable, coherent, well-organized sense of self and identity.

All right. Let's start, then, with the one piece of really solid clinical work that Lacan ever did. Lacan's psychoanalytic philosophy is, as he would be the first to admit and even sort of cheerfully to endorse, largely speculative. That is to say, he works in depth with philosophical and literary materials. He is not glued to the analyst's chair. He is notoriously impatient with his analysands and is very interested in matters of analysis either in, on the one hand, shortcuts or, on the other hand--championing Freud's late essay, "Analysis Terminable or Interminable"--taking the side that analysis is, just obviously, such is the complexity of the thing, interminable. But the one really solid piece of clinical research that Lacan did and that is accepted as part of the psychoanalytic lore is the work that he did in the 1930s on the mirror stage. That work actually does generate the system of ideas that Lacan has to offer.

So what is the mirror stage? A baby in the anal phase--that is to say, no longer identifying with the breast of the mother, but aware of a sense of difference between whatever it might be and that otherness which is out there--a baby views itself in the mirror, and maybe it views itself like this [turns towards board with hands up]. Right? It can only crawl. It can barely touch its nose. It can't feed itself, and the actual nature of its body is still fragmented and disorganized. It lacks coordination. In fact, it lacks, in any ordinary sense of the term, "uprightness."

But let's say it's looking at itself in the mirror like this [turns towards board with hands up], and so what it sees is something like this [gestures towards diagram on board]. In other words, it sees something which is coherent, coordinated, and really rather handsome. "Oh," [laughs] it says, "Wow, you know, I'm [laughs] okay." [laughter] It acknowledges itself to be, it recognizes itself to be--it's the object of the mother's desire. Right? That is the moment in which it no longer identifies with the breast but thinks of itself as the object of the desire of another because it's so pleased with itself. "Somebody's got to desire me. It's probably Mom." So [laughs] there it is, and this is the moment of the mirror stage.

Now what happens after that--and by the way, the rather wonderful epigraph from Leonardo da Vinci which begins your essay is all about this--what happens after that is rather tragic. The baby *falls into language*, and in the moment--and I'm going to come back in a minute to the whole question of why it is language that does this--in the moment at which it falls into language, it no longer sees itself as the ideal *I*--"*das Ideal-Ich*" in Freud's language. It comes into the recognition that it doesn't even have its own name, let alone an identity. It has "the name of the father," but it doesn't have the phallus of the father, and it begins to recognize competition in desire. It begins to recognize that what it itself desires is not accessible in a kind of mutuality of desire and that it has no choice but to admire--while at the same time envying and indeed forming as an object of desire because that's what it lacks--the father. That's the sense in which--but it's the father only in a phantasmagoric sense. In Lacan the object of desire can be just absolutely *anything* depending on the course of the unraveling of the metonymic sequence that desire follows; but this is what Lacan associates with the Oedipal phase; that's why I say, in passing, "the father."

It does have something to do with Lacan's revision of Freud in saying that the object of lack that perpetually motivates desire, the desire for what one lacks, is not at all physical. If you make that mistake, you're right back in sort of mindless Freudianism. You know, it's *not* the penis! It is, on the contrary, something which is by nature symbolic, something which is an ego ideal but no longer *oneself*--that is to say, no longer what one *has* but what, through the gap opened up by language, one recognizes that one *lacks*. So it takes a variety of, let's just say, phallogocentric forms. In film criticism, some of you may know the essay, the Lacanian essay of Laura Mulvey in which the female object of the spectator's desire or gaze, dressed in a sheath dress, is actually just like the baby, just like anything else that's upright, it is *this* [points to the vertical axis on the board]. In other words, it is, despite being obviously an incredibly different kind of thing, nevertheless. in symbolic terms, the phallus.

All right. Now the question then is: why is it that it's *language* that does this? Lacan speaks of the impossibility of realizing an object of desire, because the metonymic structure of desire follows what he calls "an asymptotic course," "asymptotic" meaning the line which curves toward the line it wants to meet but never reaches it. There's a kind of an underlying punning sense in that word of the metonymic course of desire not revealing the symptom. It's asymptotic in that sense as well. The only thing that can reveal the symptom is those moments of quilting, the moments at the *point de capiton* when metaphor, as Lacan says on two different occasions in the essay, reveals the symptom. So this is what happens when you can't "git" ever--when you can't ever "git" what you want. But don't worry, because you can always have what you need as long as you try.

So the question is: why does language do this? What is it about language that introduces this problematic beyond repair? Lacan begins the essay with a claim about the Freudian unconscious, a claim which he takes, he says, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* where Freud speaks of the relationship between condensation and displacement in the dream work. Lacan says, "The unconscious is structured like a language." That's perhaps the single expression that people take away from Lacan, and rightly so, because it is, again, foundational for what we need to understand if we're to get along with him: "the unconscious is structured like a language." Now what does this mean? He doesn't say, "The unconscious *is* a language," by the way, and he doesn't say that he means the unconscious is structured exclusively like human language. He means that the unconscious is structured like a semiotic system. In fact, he draws from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* the idea that the way the dream work works and the way everyday life, in Freud's sense of the psychopathology of everyday life, works is like a *rebus*--in other words, one of those puzzles in which you can find an underlying sentence if you figure out how to put together drawings, numbers, and syllables: in other words, a sequence of signs taken from different semiotic systems that can put themselves together into a meaning. That's how Lacan understands the dream work and the movements of consciousness to unfold. The unconscious then is structured like a language, which is not the same thing as to say it *is* a language.

Okay. Structured like a language. This means--and this is where there is this enormous gulf between Lacan and most other practitioners of psychoanalysis--the unconscious is not, in that case, to be understood as the seat of the instincts. It's not to be understood as something prior, in other words, to those forms of derivative articulation, those forms of articulation emerging through maturity that we're accustomed to call "language." If the unconscious is structured like a language, then it--the id, *es*--itself is precisely the signifier, the signifier that emerges as language: not that it is foundational to language, because Lacan's point, like the point of many other people in our syllabus, is not that language expresses thought. It's not at all that language expresses thought, but that language constitutes thought, that language brings thought, consciousness, or a sense of things into being, and that this is articulated through language.

Now this, of course, brings us immediately to certain issues of conflict that Lacan has not just with other forms of psychoanalysis but with a whole philosophical tradition. If you are a materialist--in other words, if you believe that things come first and consciousness comes second: that is to say, if you're a Marxist, if you believe that consciousness, ideology, or call it what you will, is determined by existing material circumstances--as one says--you can't very well think that existing material circumstances are produced by language. Whoa. If by the same token you're a positivist, if you believe that the meaning of things is something that is expressed by language, something that language is brought into being to express: then also you are giving priority to things, to that which is behind language, to that which gives rise to language--rather than, as Lacan does, giving priority to language. He actually attacks both the Marxist tradition and the positivist tradition at various points in your text. The sideways blow at Marxism is on page 1130, the right-hand column. The sideways blow at positivism is on page 1132, the right-hand column. I don't want to pause to quote them but you can go to them in your text.

So what is *it*, id, or *es*? What is that which is normally called "the instinctual drives," the id, the unmediated wish for something? Well, Lacan says it is nothing other than the signifier. He says, "What do I mean by literalism? How else can I mean it except literally? It is the letter." That is to say, consciousness begins with the letter. Remember Levi-Strauss saying in the text quoted by Derrida that language doesn't come into being just a little bit at a time. One day there is no language, and the next day there is language: which is to say, suddenly there is a way of conferring meaning on things, and that way of conferring meaning on things is differential. That is to say, it introduces the arbitrary nature of the sign and the differential relations among signs which are featured in the work of Saussure. So it is for Lacan. The letter is not that which is brought into being to express things, not that which is brought into being in the service of the ego to discipline and civilize the id, but rather is "it" itself. That is to say, it is the beginning. "In the beginning was the word." In the beginning was the letter, which disseminates consciousness through the signifying system that it makes available.

Now actually I'm hoping that in saying these things you find me merely and rather dully repeating myself, saying things that I've said before, because it seems to me that this is the part of Lacan which is accessible and which is central to the sorts of things that we've been talking about, which I rather imagine you must be getting used to by this time. Lacan shares a structuralist understanding of how the unconscious discourses. He accepts Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy and he sees the cooperative building-up relationship of metaphor and metonymy in the discourse of the unconscious and of the psychopathology of everyday life in much the same way that Jakobson does. Remember Jakobson associates metaphor and metonymy not just with poetry and prose, not just with certain kinds of style, but actually with pathologies. In its extreme forms, metaphor and metonymy as manifest in linguistic practice take the form of aphasias, as Lacan points out; and so Jakobson, too, is concerned with something sort of built-in, hard-wired in the way in which language works in and as the unconscious that, in its extreme forms, is aphasic and always expresses itself in tendencies either metonymic or metaphoric.

Now, of course, he also draws on Saussure but--as your editor rightly points out in a footnote--the way in which he reads Saussure [draws on chalkboard], the signifier, the *big* signifier over the little, rather insignificant signified--because after all, what does the signified matter? You can never cross the bar--right?--to get to it. You are barred from it. The signified is that from which you are forever excluded, and we'll go into Lacan's examples of this in a minute. This is actually quite different from Saussure's [draws on chalkboard] "signified over the signifier," anchored by a kind of mutuality whereby it's never a question what generates what, but rather a question which has in common, I think, with Lacan's so-called algorithm *only* in fact the bar itself; the fact that the relationship between signifier and signified, or signified and signifier, is an arbitrary one that can't be crossed by evoking anything natural in the nature of the signified that calls forth the signifier. There they agree, but as to what produces what: Saussure is agnostic about it and Lacan insists that the big *S* is that which generates the signified--that from which any possibility of grasping a signified arises and derives. So Lacan's algorithm is, in fact, rather different from Saussure's diagram.

Okay. Let's exemplify this by going back to what I said about the red light [gestures to the board repeatedly throughout this paragraph]--right?--because here, too, I think we'll have continuity. The red light over a door is a signifier which has a great deal to do with desire, right? This we take for granted. The red light in other contexts has nothing to do with desire, but the signifier, "red light over a door," suggests desire--but desire for what? Well, we think we know "desire for what," but look at the signifier. "Desire for the door," right? What is the relationship between the signifier and what would seem to be the signified? That's not what you desire. You don't desire the door, and it's the same with *hommes et femmes*, right? What is this *hommes et femmes*? Well, okay. The little girl says, "We've arrived at Gentlemen," and the little boy says, "We've arrived at Ladies." Well, that seems to be quite healthy, right? We're on our way to something like hetero-normative desire--great, terrific.

But wait a minute. This *hommes* here: what is *hommes*? What does that have to do with the price of--the only thing you can do even behind this door is restore your personal comfort. It has nothing to do with *hommes*, right, or anything else for that matter. If the visible signified is in question, well, in what sense can we call this door *hommes*? Right? It's the same with *femmes*. There is, in any case, in Lacan's anecdote the wonderful existence of the railroad tracks, which for him constitutes the bar: that is to say, that owing to the nature of language, owing to the arbitrary relation of the signifier to the signified, the little boy and little girl--who are wonderful characters right out of Nabokov's *Ada*--I don't know if any of you know that novel, but the little boy is sort of a little genius, obviously Lacan, but his sister is even smarter than he is. "Idiot," she says, just like a character in Nabokov, but both this little boy and little girl are barred from desire--from their desire--because they are already putting up with a substitute precisely insofar as they seem to be on track toward something like the hetero-normative expression of desire. It's not an expression of desire at all. It's an expression of need because they are not able to bring into being, consciousness, or before themselves the object of desire indicated by the signifier. The signifier is always displaced from the object of desire in precisely the ways that are borne out diagrammatically in these formulas.

All right. So what then is desire? Well, perhaps we've covered it: it is the endless deferral of that which cannot be signified in the metonymic movement of discourse, of dreaming, or of the way in which the unconscious functions. Lacan is very ingenious in, I think, convincingly showing us how it is that we get from one signifier to another: in other words, how what he calls the chain of the signifier works. You have a series of concentric rings [gestures to the board], but each concentric ring is made up of a lot of little concentric rings which hook on to associated surrounding signifiers in ways that could be variable. This, I think, very nicely re-diagrams Saussure's sense of the associative structure of the vertical axis: that is to say, of the synchronic moment of language, the way in which some signifiers naturally cluster with other signifiers, and not just with one group of signifiers but a variety of groups of signifiers. But they don't at all naturally cluster with just any or all signifiers, so that you get associative clusters in the axis of selection, and they are indicated by this [gestures to board]. As the chain of signifiers unfolds, the one or another of these possible associations links on--and remember all of these signifiers are made up, in turn, of a chain of concentric circles. So I think this is a rather good way of understanding the unfolding of metonymy.

Now every once in a while you get *metaphor*--whoa!--and it's a moment to be celebrated in Lacan because it's, as he says, "poetic" and it is also, as he says, in a number of places the manifestation, the only possible manifestation, of the symptom. What is the symptom? It is the awareness of the lack of an object of desire expressed in a displaced manner--that is to say, expressed in a manner which is not, however, completely obfuscatory of the lack of the object of desire, just sort of caught up in my endless babbling; but rather is that moment of pause in which there is a gathering together of signifiers and, ultimately, a substitution of one signifier for another in such a way that one says, "Aha. I see it. I can't grasp it, I can't have it, but I see it. I see the object of desire. I see what has been displaced by the very act of signification." That's what he calls "metaphor," and he sees metaphor as appearing at these *points de capiton*. Think of this as a quilt. You know what I'm talking about: quilting knots, pins--no, not needles. That's what you make a quilt with. [laughs> Those little buttons, quilting buttons, right? That's what a quilt is like. It's filled with something and then the stuffing is held in place by buttons. Right? So the stuffing of metonymic signification is held in place usefully for the analyst, for the reader, and for the interpreter by these quilting buttons or *points de capiton*.

So the example that Lacan gives is--as I say, he gives several examples. There are wonderful, dazzling readings, both with four lines from Valéry and of the one line from Victor Hugo. I focus on the Hugo because it's a little easier, just the one line. He says, "There is something that happens in this line which is metaphoric," and I'm delighted that he uses the word "sparks." In other words, the metaphoric, the presence of the metaphor, is a spark. Remember I was talking about, in Wolfgang Iser, the need to gap a sparkplug: in other words, the need to have a certain distance between two points in order for the spark to happen. If it's too close, it doesn't happen; you just short out. If it's too distant, it doesn't happen because the distance is too great. So the spark that Lacan is talking about is the relationship--"his sheaves were neither miserly nor spiteful"--between Boaz and his sheaves; because the sheaves themselves which give of themselves--just as certain other things we could mention give of themselves--the sheaves themselves which give of themselves, and certainly are not miserly or spiteful for that reason--they're generous, they're open, they give, they feed us, etc., etc., etc.--are supposed, in metonymy, to indicate that Boaz is like that.

Look at the munificence of Boaz's crop. It's neither miserly nor spiteful, but as Lacan points out, the miserliness and spitefulness comes back in an unfortunate way precisely in that word "his": [laughs] because if he is a possessor of the sheaf, he is--this involves the whole, as it were, structure of capitalist or Darwinian competition and involves, at least in an underlying way, all the elements of thrift, if you will, and competitive envy or spite, if you will, that seem to have been banished from the sentence. In other words, metaphorically speaking, Boaz returns in his absence. He substitutes. He is substituted for by the expression "his sheaves." The possessive means that he is not the things that he's said to be, metonymically speaking, and the sheaves themselves are precisely what he is in the Oedipal phase: that is to say, precisely what he is if he is objectified by a baby looking at him; but at the same time, not at all what or where we expected him to be. In other words, the *point de capiton* of the sentence, of the line, is the substitution of Boaz for his sheaves and his sheaves for Boaz. So the line has both a metonymic reading and a metaphoric reading.

Here I think you can see Lacan's sense of the relation between metaphor or metonymy hovering between that of Jakobson or Brooks and that of de Man, because there seems to be an underlying irreducible tension between reading the line as though it says that Boaz was generous and free of spite, and reading the line as though it said that Boaz just necessarily--because he's one who possesses something--is a person who has the characteristics of miserliness and spitefulness. The tension, in other words, seems to me to be in Lacan an irreducible one so that, at least in that regard, we can place him closer to de Man than we have to, say, Brooks or Jakobson; which isn't to say that Jakobson is not the primary and central influence on Lacan's way of thinking about the axis of combination. The appearance of metaphor on the axis of combination, the way in which we can identify these quilting buttons on the axis of combination, is nothing other than what Jakobson said and meant when he said that the poetic function is the transference of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination, right? I'm not saying--in speaking in passing of the sort of irreducible conflict one senses between metonymy and metaphor here--I'm not saying that Jakobson is not the primary influence behind Lacan's thinking in this regard.

All right. Now Lacan says language is a rebus, as I've said, and he says the movement of the signifier, which is the movement of desire, is the articulation of a lack. That is to say, it is in the impossibility, as certain kinds of language philosophers would say, of making the signifier hook on to the signified or, as we might say, hook up with the signified--in the impossibility of doing that is precisely the impossibility of realizing an object of desire. So all of this should I hope now be clear.

So some of the consequences are that language--the most obvious consequence is, and this isn't the first time or last time that we will have encountered this in various vocabularies and contexts--that "language thinks me." On page 1142, the right-hand column, for example: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think." That is to say, that which brings my thinking into being is not present to me. It is *it*. It is the letter. It is the signified which perpetually evades us and which cannot possibly be present to us. I am not present to myself. I cannot be present to myself because what is present is the way in which my self comes into being in discourse which cannot identify me. It cannot identify me either as subject, or, in a phase of narcissism, supposing I can somehow or another re-imagine myself in the mirror phase, as an object of desire.

All right. So I actually think that without quite having meant to, I have pretty much exhausted what I have to say in outline about Lacan. I haven't said nearly enough about the relationship between desire and need as it plots itself in our actual lives and in fiction, because the extraordinary thing about it is it's not just a slogan from the Rolling Stones or from Lacan. As we think about it, it's not that we're not happy with our relationship with the things that we need: obviously we are, but the extraordinary thing about it is that we recognize in our lives, in the magical world of film--that is to say, the world of illusion deliberately promoted by film and in fiction--we recognize the absolutely central significance of this distinction.

That's what's so wonderful and amazing about the essay by Žižek you'll be reading for next week called "Courtly Love," which I love and which headlines, which features readings of a series of films in which the Lacanian distinction between the impossibility ever of achieving the Big Other--by the way, there are times in various kinds of fictional plots in which you can actually have the object of desire, but what always happens in plots like that is that the unconscious, the psyche, finds ways of rejecting it. I can't have that--it's my brother; or I can't have that--it is in one form or another forbidden. In other words, in actuality, in the way in which the psyche works according to the structure of the films Žižek undertakes to analyze--and he's so profuse in examples that he really does leave us feeling that there's a kind of universality in what he's saying--yeah, there are all kinds of object choices that can happen and do happen and may even seem satisfactory, but those are all objects, *objets petit à*; whereas the Big Other, that which is the true object of desire, is something that will perpetually evade possession.

Okay. So next time we're actually talking about the anxiety of influence in Harold Bloom, and then in the ensuing lecture we'll return in a way to Lacan when we take up Deleuze, Guattari and Slavoj Žižek. Thank you.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 14 Transcript**

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| February 26, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So I'll tell you a little bit about Harold Bloom's career later in the lecture. Those of you who know *How to Read a Poem*, the books on religion, *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human*, and perhaps only know those books, may feel a little surprised at finding him on a literary theory syllabus, but the great outpouring of work beginning with *The Anxiety of Influence, A Map of Misreading, Poetry and Repression*, and a great many other books in the seventies put Bloom in the very midst of the theoretical controversies then swirling. He was associated with the so-called Yale School. In fact, he was willing to put his name as editor and also a contributor on a volume that was called *Deconstruction and Criticism.*

I think though that, even in reading what you have before you, you can see how relatively little Bloom has to do with deconstruction. Certainly in his more recent career he's distanced himself from theory. He hasn't really changed his views of anything, although he doesn't any longer read poems through the machinery of the six revisionary ratios. Perhaps I should stop there and say the six revisionary ratios won't be on the test. [laughter] Now I think that nothing could be more exciting than to understand clinamen, tessera, sort of kenosis, askesis, demonization, apophrades--whoa!--and to wander in the realms of these ideas, and actually to use them as the machinery for practical criticism: to take a poem and to see what you can actually do with these ideas really is, and I'm serious, an exciting process. You may very much resent not having these six ratios on the exam, and you may wish to hear more about them. You'll hear something about a few of them in passing today, but if you do wish to hear more about them, perhaps your sections will [laughs] provide some guidance.

In any case, the contributions of Bloom to theory in my opinion, and I hope to bring this out in the long run, have primarily to do with the fact that I think he can legitimately and authentically be called an important literary historiographer. That is to say, together with people like Tynjanov and Jakobson earlier in the course and Hans Robert Jauss later in the course, Bloom does seriously deserve to be considered a literary historian--that is to say, a person with a theory about literary history on a par with those other figures. This hasn't always often been remarked. As a matter of fact, the general critical attitude toward Bloom is that he's hopelessly ahistoricist, cares nothing about history, and cares nothing about the way in which the real world impinges on literature. In a certain measure, as we'll also see, there is some truth in this, but he has a powerful argument about the relationship among texts as they succeed each other in history. It's an argument which I think really we ignore in our peril. It's an important one and it is a psychoanalytic one, which is one of the things that places him at this point in the course.

You'll remember the sort of tripartition of the subject matter of our course which--it's all headed up in the syllabus and all clearly to be understood. First we have logo genesis, the production of literature by language. Then we have psychogenesis, the production of literature by the human psyche. Then we have sociogenesis, the production of literature by social, economic, and political and historical factors. Okay, fine, well and good, but you may have noticed how much trouble we have had getting into psychogenesis. We keep saying we've arrived [laughs] at psychogenesis, but we actually continue to be working obviously with linguistic models. Here is Lacan telling us the unconscious resembles a language, that it's structured like a language; Brooks telling us that it's the verbal structure arising out of the relationship between metaphor and metonymy that constitutes the narrative text. We keep sitting around twiddling our thumbs, waiting for somebody to say something about the psychogenesis of the text.

Well, Bloom brings us closer, and he himself, when he speaks of the poet in the poet, is concerned to describe what he calls an "agon," a psychological agon or struggle between the belated poet and the precursor taking place at that level in the psyche; but even Bloom, of course, is talking about the relation of text to text. He is talking about relations which are arguably verbal. Verbal influence, by the way, he always professes contempt for. He calls it moldy fig philology, but I think that as you study the examples of literary influence in Bloom's text, *Anxiety of Influence, A Map of Misreading* and so on, you will see that there is a kind of dependence on verbal echo and verbal continuity, and that his theory, the strong version of his theory, struggles against but, I think, nevertheless does link itself to. I want to move into a general exploration of the topic of influence by talking, in fact, about how unstable the relationship between an idea of influence which is, let's say, psychological or world-based and an idea of influence which is word-based can be. It's not as simple and straightforward a distinction as one might imagine.

So we linger in these linguistic models and there's a long tradition in which the confusion between the psychic and the linguistic is manifest, and it has to do with the very traditional subject of imitation. Plato and Aristotle agree that art, poetry, is an imitation. It is, both of them say, an imitation of nature. Plato thinks it's done badly, Aristotle thinks it's done well, but both agree that poetry is an imitation of nature. Then as time passes, this idea of mimesis, the imitation of nature, gradually becomes transformed so that by the time you get to the Silver Age of Roman literature, a high-water mark of elegance in the Latin language, you have rhetorical theorists like Quintilian and Cicero and others talking not about mimesis but about--in Latin, of course--*imitatio*, seemingly the same idea. They are still talking about imitation, but the strange thing that's happened is now they're not talking about the imitation of nature anymore. They're talking about the imitation of literary models: in other words, the imitation of language, the way in which we can establish canons by thinking about the relationship of particular poets and other writers with a tradition of literary expression from which they emerge. So this then, *imitatio*, becomes a language-based theory of influence arising seemingly spontaneously out of a nature-based theory of influence.

Now take a look at the first passage on your sheet from Alexander's Pope's "Essay on Criticism." He's talking about Virgil here. Homer, the argument is, has to have imitated nature. After all, there were no literary models to imitate, so if Homer imitated anything it must have been nature. Well, fine. Homer imitated nature, but then along comes Virgil--in this same period, by the way, when rhetorical theories were redefining imitation as the imitation of verbal models--along comes Virgil and he says, "I'm going to write my own national epic and you know what, I'll just sit down and write it." But then he starts looking at Homer; this is all what Pope is thinking as he prepares to write the couplet that's on your sheet. Then he starts to write, but then he rereads Homer. At first he feels terrible because he realized that Homer has said it all. There are two poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. There's nothing left to say. Homer has covered the entire waterfront, and so Virgil is sort of stuck. What is he going to do?

Well, what he can do, if he can't imitate nature anymore because Homer has done that, is he can imitate Homer. The result is that he comes to a sort of realization that Pope epitomizes in this couplet:

But when t' examine ev'ry part he came [that is to say, every part of Homer's compositions, every part of his own composition as he undertook to write his own epic]

Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.

So here you have emerging the idea that to imitate nature and to imitate art--to imitate the things of the world, the people of the world, and to imitate language--is part and parcel of the same process. To do one you necessarily and perforce do the other. That's what I mean by saying that we're still struggling to get away from the logogenetic [laughs] model to the psychogenetic model. Even in the most traditional expressions of how influence works, like Pope's, we are still concerned to distinguish, and find it very difficult to distinguish, between nature and art. When Samuel Johnson, fifty years after Pope, is still saying, "Nothing can please many, or please long, but just representations of general nature," he is in this idea of representations and in the idea of general nature teetering between a sense that it's things in the world that art imitates and it is existing literary models that art imitates and from which art takes its cue. So there's a kind of collapse then in the idea of imitation. There's a kind of a collapse, a surprising collapse perhaps when you think about it, between the notion of the imitation of nature and the notion of the imitation of art.

Now if we turn then to the two texts that you've read for today, both of which are theories of influence, you can see that T. S. Eliot, too, is a little bit unclear as to the relationship of these two sorts of imitation. For Eliot the individual talent that inserts itself into, that engages with, tradition has to cope with what Eliot calls "the mind of Europe," page 539, left-hand column. I'll read a fairly extensive passage because this is one of the most accessible summaries of what Eliot has to say:

[The poet] must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe--the mind of his own country--a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind…

Let me just stop there and say this seems as much unlike Bloom as it can possibly be because Bloom, the Romantic, is all about one's own private mind, the struggle of the individual mind to define itself over against all of those minds jostling for attention that precede it to over them to the point where they are, in effect, effaced, and the belated ego can finally establish itself as prior to all preceding egos. This sort of struggle seems--and I say "seems" because I'm going to be lingering over this for a while--seems to be absent from Eliot. Eliot seems to be all about self-effacement, about the recognition that the mind of Europe is more important than one's own mind, and that if one is to contribute anything as an individual talent to tradition, that contribution has to be a matter of the most acutely sensitive awareness of everything, not that one is struggling to be but that one is not. It seems, in other words, like a very different perspective.

To continue the passage:

… [The mind of Europe is] a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route which does not superannuate either Shakespeare or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draftsman. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist any improvement.

In other words, the relationship between tradition and the individual talent is a relationship of entering into a vast matrix of literary, philosophical, and other sorts of expression that changes and yet never really transforms itself and certainly can't be understood as a grand march or progress toward some great goal, because nothing is ever lost and nothing radically innovative can ever really be introduced.

I hope you are thinking and reflecting on a passage of this kind about a good deal that we've passed through already: Gadamer's sense of tradition as something which depends absolutely on the awareness of continuity, on the willingness to meet the past halfway, to enter into a merger of horizons in which the past and the present can speak in an authentic way to each other; and that in other ways this idea, or possibly also the Russian formalist idea in its Darwinian sense, that the dominant and the recessive elements of any literary text are always present at any time. It's just that they tend perpetually in a kind of oscillation to be changing places with each other. So the whole gamut of literary possibility, of expressive possibility, is, according to theories of history of this kind, is always already there, and one's own entry into this vast sea of expressive possibility is always a subtle thing that certainly can't in any way be seen to showcase or to manifest any sort of original genius as the Romantic tradition might want to insist on it. So this is basically the perspective of Eliot and one from which certainly you know Bloom would obviously seem to be diverging.

Now I want to argue that actually there is a tremendous amount of continuity between Eliot and Bloom, and that Bloom's [laughs] *Anxiety of Influence--*I've never discussed this with Harold, by the way. Those of you who may be taking his seminars, I leave it up to you whether you want to take this up with him. As I say, I leave that up to you, but I think a strong argument can be made, and I have made it in print so Harold has seen it, that Bloom misreads and is a strong misreader of T. S. Eliot: which is to say--such is the logic of strong misreading--that T. S. Eliot said everything Bloom has to say already. I do believe this, [laughs] despite this extraordinary appearance of total difference in perspective, the traditional versus the Romantic and so on. I don't want to go into detail in this argument for fear of being considered obsessive, but I'd like to make a few points about it in passing, because I think it's such a perfect exemplification of how *The Anxiety of Influence* works. Bloom has always denied the influence of "Tradition in the Individual Talent." He acknowledges influences, but they are Emerson, Nietzsche, the great Romantic poets, and so on. He has, as I say, vehemently denied the influence of Eliot, yet as one reads Eliot--and I'm going to spend some time with Eliot now--it seems to me that at least in skeletal form, in suggestion, Bloom is all there already, which is, after all, all Bloom ever says about the relationship between a precursor and a belated writer: so it can't be surprising, can it?

All right. Now first of all, it's very important to Bloom to show the way in which the new reconstitutes the old: that is to say, the appropriation of the precursor text, which is not a notional text although it--and that's one of the things that's sort of counterintuitive about Bloom's writing in this period. He insists that there is a particular precursor text. The precursor text for "Tintern Abbey" is "Lycidas." Don't tell me about other [laughs] precursor texts. It's "Lycidas," and he shows how this is the case, but the relationship between the belated text and the precursor text is such that we can never read the precursor text the same way again. The strong misreading of the precursor text is so powerful, in other words, that it becomes our strong misreading. We just can't think about "Lycidas" in the same way on this view after we've read "Tintern Abbey."

If this seems counterintuitive, just think about certain examples that might come to mind. The most obvious example is the famous text by Borges called "Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*." I imagine a number of you know that text, but what it consists in basically is--it's a kind of an anecdote about a Frenchman writing, as I recall, in the end of the nineteenth century in Spanish a text, and his text is as it turns out verbatim, word for word, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, only it's not Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; it's Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*. Think how different it is. This is a Frenchman at the end of the nineteenth century writing in Spanish. That's pretty impressive, much more impressive than Cervantes merely writing in his own language, and it's a completely different historical perspective. Whereas Cervantes thinks he's being a little bit ironic about his own historical moment--the death of chivalry and all that--think about how ironic you can be about that historical moment writing several centuries later with everything that you know now. What a tour de force to be able to write *Don Quixote* at the end of the nineteenth century in another language, a whole new ball game! How can you ever read Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in the same way? It seems naïve, right?

Now that's not the point of the story. The point of the story is actually to belittle Pierre Menard, but you can see this as a theory of strong misreading. Pierre Menard thinks he's doing something new, right? The fact is, he's not doing anything new at all. His belief that he's doing something new is precisely his misreading of the precursor text--and by the way, you don't have to have read the precursor text--but that misreading, after all, is something in its very power which, as it were, infiltrates our own understanding of the precursor text, making it impossible for us to read it the same way again.

Think of Joyce's *Ulysses*. We all know that *Ulysses*, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, is based on *The Odyssey* and that it, as it were, recycles *The Odyssey*; but it seems to be looking at *The Odyssey* through the wrong end of a telescope. It's dragging all the sort of heroic dimension of the poem down into a kind of nitty-gritty account of everyday life in recent society. In other words, it implicitly, precisely in following *The Odyssey* debunks the heroic myth of *The Odyssey*. How can we read, in other words, *The Odyssey* in the same way again after we've read *Ulysses*?

Now it has to be said, and Bloom would say this, *Ulysses* is not a strong misreading of *The Odyssey* because it's perfectly conscious of what it's doing. It knows exactly what it's doing with respect to the text of *The Odyssey*,so it's a deliberate misreading which has other virtues. It's not quite the same thing, but what it does have in common with Bloom's theory and what it has in common also with Eliot's idea about the relationship between the individual talent and tradition is that it reconstitutes tradition. It doesn't just provide something novel. It makes us see tradition itself in a different way. Turn to page 538, the right-hand column about halfway down:

The existing monuments [says Eliot] form an ideal order among themselves which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered.

We can't quite see it the same way again, so it's a dynamic, mutual relationship between tradition and the individual talent: the strong precursor and the belated poet, in each case, which is mutually transforming. The basis, the principle of transformation, is the belated poet's strong misreading of the precursor which simultaneously asserts the egoistic priority of the belated poet: I'm doing something new; I'm going where no one has ever gone before. I'm doing so so powerfully that it's a question of whether there actually was anybody before, on the one hand, and the strong precursor who turns out, as one reflects more and more and more about the relationship, to have said everything the belated poet says already, right? So simultaneously, Bloom's theory of literary history, his literary historiography, places a premium on innovation and on conservatism, or tradition, simultaneously. Unlike Gadamer, leaning toward the conservative or traditional, and Iser or the Russian formalists, who lean toward the innovative, the Bloomian idea simultaneously countenances the idea of tradition as something absolutely continuous and also of tradition as something which is constantly being remade or at least rethought. That, I have to tell you, is very similar to T. S. Eliot's position.

So now again the famous aphorism of Eliot on page 539, the left-hand column at the bottom:

Someone said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.

Rather good, I think. The famous aphorism of T.S. Eliot can also be understood as something that Bloom, in his own way, might very well say. The past is what we know, but we're not aware of knowing it. In other words, I write the past when I write my belated poem, but I don't think I'm doing it. I think instead that I'm doing something new. In the first provisionary ratio, clinamen, I am swerving from the past: I swerve out and down, I find my own space like a Lucretian atom. If it weren't for swerving--and Lucretius says all the atoms would fall in the same place--that wouldn't be good, so they all swerve so they can all fall in their own place. Well, that is the belated poet's sense of what he's doing in relation to the precursor. He's swerving out and down from the precursor poet, but of course he's not. [laughs] Again--and we'll come back to this--he's not. He's actually falling in the same place, but the strength of that swerve, the rhetorical gesture of the swerve, is so powerful that we do feel transported. Once again we feel both at once, the innovation and the necessary conservatism, or preservational aspect, of the new poet's composition.

All right. So I think, as I say, that Eliot's aphorism, too, very much anticipates Bloom's view of the agonistic struggle among poets. Then finally Eliot's famous emphasis--and of course, nothing could seem to be less gloomy than this--Eliot's famous emphasis on the poet's impersonality, on the wish to escape personality: he says, in the right-hand column, page 541, end of section two, "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things"--in other words, to enter a world of art, in effect, to abandon the sense that what's important is my personal psychological agony; to enter, by contrast, the mind of Europe; to recognize the complete insignificance of any individual mind, certainly my own; and to immerse oneself as a poet, as an artist, and as a creator, if one can still retain this term, in that which is infinitely more vast than one is oneself.

Well, that doesn't sound very Bloomian, but look on page 1160, the right-hand column, at Bloom's fifth revisionary ratio, askesis. [laughs] He's talking about what the later poet, the belated poet, does in order to find space for himself. What can I do in order to make myself different from other people? Well, you'd think the answer would be make yourself bigger than anybody. Wallace Stevens has a wonderful poem called "Rabbit as King of the Ghosts," and the rabbit swells up to become so big that it just kind of overwhelms everything. I always think of this as Bloom's belated poet, but if you have askesis as one of the authentic revisionary ratios, something very different is happening to this same end.

About halfway through the definition, definition five--and by the way, the masculine pronoun is something that Harold has never apologized for. What he means is that a poet is gendered masculine but that, of course, any woman can be a poet. We'll come back to distinctions of that sort later. He does think of Emily Dickinson, for example, as a strong poet. Obviously, that's a controversial aspect of Bloom's work, but he uses the masculine prologue unapologetically. Of course, his theory is very much caught up in the idea of Oedipal conflict which, as Freud is always being criticized for, is, unless you project it into the realm of the symbolic as Lacan and feminist Lacanians do, undoubtedly a masculist idea. If the essential generational conflict of human beings is between father and son, well, obviously [laughs] problems can be seen to arise from that, and in Bloom's rhetoric, in his vocabulary, the masculist Oedipal conflict is still central.

In any case, returning to this point about the effacement of the self, in the very act of trying to find a place for oneself as an innovator--an effacement which, however, once again seems to me to catapult Bloom back into the position of Eliot that he is trying to misread strongly. He says, "[The poet] yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment." In other words, he curtails himself; he shrinks himself; he makes himself less than he might have been, of course, in order to be more than he has been. He yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment so as to separate himself from others including the precursor. So in askesis--and also in kenosis, by the way--there is a self-shrinking or self-effacement on the part of these particular moves of strong misreading with respect to the precursor. It's not, in other words, just a question of the rabbit as king of the ghosts. It's not a question of a massive ego swelling to the point where it fills all space. It is more complicated than that, and in being more complicated it is frankly more Eliot-like.

All right. So turning then more directly to Bloom, his career begins--it has always involved a sense of struggle in the relationship among poets. In his earliest work--*Shelley's Mythmaking*, *Blake's Apocalypse*, and *The Visionary Company--*the idea of struggle was embodied plainly as what he called Protestantism. In other words, he saw the tradition he was talking about arising in relation to the Reformation, that time when, as I said in my thumbnail history of hermeneutics, everybody suddenly realized he had his own Bible and his own relationship with God: in other words, that time when human individuality emerges, which is also, of course, called by many others the emergence of the bourgeoisie. In that moment, the idea of Protestantism--purely in the sense, as a character in Durrell says, "that I protest"--emerges so that each poet takes, in some sense, an adversary stance toward previous literary models. This is present in Bloom's work from the beginning of his career. The word "Protestant" gradually gives way to the word "revisionary," and then that's the word that he uses primarily in *The Visionary Company*,for example, and then finally becomes the notion of misreading. The protest of the belated figure is the protest which takes the form of transfiguring the precursor text in such a way that one can find oneself to be original. It is an Oedipal struggle.

Now this idea of Oedipal struggle, which is largely unconscious, is not new to Bloom, just quickly to review the next three passages on your sheet. Longinus, the author whose actual identity we cannot quite determine but whose *On the Sublime*, an extraordinarily interesting text, is available to us to read--I've got two passages from him. The first is:

As if instinctively [this is in the moment of the sublime] our soul is uplifted by the true sublime. [Fine. That's what you would expect anybody to say.] It takes a proud flight and is filled with joy and vaunting [and this is where the surprise comes] as though it had itself produced what it has heard.

In other words, there's a kind of possession by the other that takes place which is simultaneously experienced psychologically as possession of the other, right? It is speaking through me. It's making me very excited like a little kid. They're watching TV, somebody hits a home run, and the little kid goes like this [gestures] and thinks he thought he hit the home run. He's completely into the fantasy of being that hero, right? It's the same thing with the response to something that we haven't said, such that in a certain moment we think we have said it. It's a mutual possession. It possesses us, causing the psychological reaction that we think of ourselves as possessing it. It seems to me that there is real insight in what Longinus is saying and that it has an important influence on Bloom's position.

Another passage from Longinus--and by the way, I think what Longinus says here is absolutely true: Plato is constantly abusing Homer, and yet nothing can be easier than to show the ways in which the great Homeric actions and even tropes help shape Platonic thought. It's a fascinating topic and Longinus, it seems to me, again is exactly right about it: "There would not have been so fine a bloom of perfection on Plato's philosophical doctrines unless he had with all his heart and mind struggled with Homer for primacy." He even thinks in Bloomian terms of that of wanting to be first even though in some part of your mind you know you're second--he even struggles for primacy, showing perhaps too much love of contention and breaking a lance with him, as it were, but deriving some profit from the contest nonetheless; for as he says, "This strife is good for mortals."

Quickly, a more commonplace example taking from Sainte-Beuve, a famous essay of his called "What is a Classic?"--which is all about influence. There's a tradition of essays called "What is a Classic?" Eliot wrote a great one in 1944, and these are very much a contribution to the history of the theory of influence. So Sainte-Beuve writes:

Goethe spoke the truth when he remarked that Byron, great by the flow and source of poetry, feared that Shakespeare was more powerful than himself [it's true, Byron was always abusing Shakespeare] in the creation and realization of his characters. He would have liked to deny it. The elevation so free from [this is Goethe talking] egoism irritated him. He felt when near it that he could never display himself at ease. He never denied Pope because he did not fear him. He knew that Pope was [and you know how short Pope was] only a low wall by his side.

So in other words, he chose as his literary model somebody he knew he was better than-- not true, by the way, but he thought he was better than Alexander Pope, and he perpetually denied a very, very powerful influence on his writing, quarreling constantly with Shakespeare and bardolatry and excessive love of *Hamlet* and all the rest of it. He's constantly sort of denying any influence or power over himself on the part of Shakespeare. He chooses, in other words, for his precursor a weak precursor instead of a strong precursor. All of this is a continuous theme in the psychodynamic of Bloom's theory as he elaborates it.

So what complicates Bloom's argument, apart from the vocabulary and the philosophical range of thought, is what I began with: the traditional idea of influence as an art-nature problem, trying to figure out, in fact, whether the crisis of influence is the sense of one's orientation to nature, one's ability to imitate nature and have nature available to one, or whether it's word oriented, which it seems to be more in Bloom: the sense of one's relationship with text. But notice on page 1157 that Bloom really doesn't want to say it's just about text. He doesn't really want to say that it has exclusively to do with the strong precursor understood, as it were, as an author. There is in some sense a text of nature as well, so that Bloom says, bottom of 1157, right-hand column:

… Freud's disciple, Otto Rank, show[s] a greater awareness of the artist's fight against art, and of the relation of this struggle to the artist's antithetical battle against nature.

In other words, nature is death. Nature is that into which--should he not sustain himself in the triumph of his assertion of priority nature--the author will fall back in the form of death. Wait until they try to transcribe that sentence.

Okay. Well, but you [laughter] got what I mean. This is an interesting problem, and Bloom wants to insist that part of the struggle of the belated poet is a struggle for immortality. Part of what it means to come first and to know nothing ever having been there before you is also to suppose that you are going to be last, that you're going to be immortal, that you really do not belong in an unfolding, inexorable sequence of the sort that we call history; but that you are rather something, a force, a genius, or a power that transcends history. This entails as much the "lie against time," as Bloom calls it, holding off death as it does, insisting on there having been no beginning, no priority, and no genesis in what you do; you were there first.

All right. To illustrate this very quickly, let's look at passages five and six on your sheet. Wordsworth, the particularly important strong misreader and belated poet with respect to Milton, in Bloom's view: Wordsworth writes in a kind of programmatic or promissory poem--written actually in 1800 and not published until 1814 as part of the preface to a poem of his called "The Excursion"--he wrote a prospectus to "The Recluse," that's what at one time "The Excursion" was supposed to be part of, and he says: "I am not interested in writing *Paradise Lost. Paradise Lost* for me is a thing of the past. It's just archaic. Who would care about the things Milton cares about: 'all strength, all terror, single or in bands that ever was put forth in personal form, Jehovah with his thunder and the choir of shouting angels and the imperial thrones, I pass them unalarmed.' *Paradise Lost,* that's just playing with toy soldiers. That's nothing compared with what I myself am going to do: 'not chaos, not the darkest pit of lowest Erebus nor aught of blinder vacancy scooped out by help of dreams can breed such fear and awe as fall upon us often when we look into our minds, into the mind of man, my haunt and the main region of my song.' I'm not talking about God. I'm not talking about heaven. I'm not talking about hell. I'm not talking about war in heaven. I'm not talking about anything mythological or archaically heroic.

"I'm talking about this. I'm talking about the mind of man. I'm talking primarily about my mind, but my mind is your mind. Mind is universal, and in talking about mind I'm not falling back into the pit of nature. I'm keeping my focus not on the sky gods, not on the "transcendent, starry junk," as Wallace Stevens called it, of my precursors, all those people with their outworn superstitions. I'm not interested in any of that, but I'm not interested in any of this either. I'm not interested in nature. I'm not interested in that in which I would be buried if I reduced myself to that. I am interested in consciousness, the psyche. In other words, my focus is," Wordsworth says, "altogether psychological."

All right. No interest in *Paradise Lost.* That's just archaic. Well, look at passage five: three statements by Satan which Bloom insists--it's not so much Milton, because Bloom follows Blake and Shelley in this. It's not so much Milton who is the strong precursor of Wordsworth. It's actually Satan, right? [laughs] It's Milton's Satan who says, "The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." Okay. Gee whiz. [laughs] I guess Satan is writing the prospectus to "The Recluse," isn't he, because that's what Wordsworth is saying in the prospectus to "The Recluse." "I know no time," says Satan, "when I was not as now." That's what the belated poet always says, "I came first." Elsewhere in the poem Satan tells his troops, "You know what. God keeps saying he created you. Do you remember being created? I don't remember being created. I've always been there." Right? That is, in effect, what he says again, what he repeats in this passage, "Finally, myself am hell." Well, that's, of course, rather an uncomfortable thing to say, but at the same time it's the rabbit as king of the ghosts, isn't it? It is whatever you can throw at me, I'm it already. Right? Because "the main haunt and sole region of my song is the mind," is my own mind.

All right. So Satan has already said in *Paradise Lost* everything Wordsworth can possibly say in the prospectus to "The Recluse." He has strongly misread *Paradise Lost* such that he thinks he's doing something completely new, while revealing precisely that the strong precursor poet has always already written what the successor poet can write. The tension, the dynamic in other words, between conservation and innovation is intact in all such moments, in all the moments, that involve the anxiety of influence.

I'm sorry I have so little time for this. Give me a minute or two because we have to honor *Tony the Tow Truck*,and it's rather obvious that for Lacan, *Tony the Tow Truck* is a text in which Tony settles for the *objet petit a*, right: little Bumpy the Car, an imperfect being but a helpful one and a friend--"that's what I call a friend"; whereas the objects of desire, Neato, Speedy--whoa, those are cars. The objects of desire are improper object choices on the face of it. That's what an American ego psychologist would say, but they are, in a more Bunuelesque way of putting it, obscure objects of desire as they motor on down the road which are simply unavailable to Tony as object relations at all. So Neato and Speedy are the big other--right?--and Bumpy is the *object petit a*.

All right. Now it's just perfectly obvious that for Harold Bloom, *Tony the Tow Truck* is a strong misreading of *The Little Engine that Could.* It's perfectly clear because Bumpy is the hero of *The Little Engine that Could.* The misreading involves making Tony the hero who needs the help of Bumpy. In other words, Bumpy, in the folkloric sense of the story, becomes the helper and not the hero, but we can see, after all, that the essential narrative model--the model of the small turning out through perseverance and energy to necessarily reinforce the strength of the strong--is about the strong and the weak. Both *The Little Engine that Could* and *Tony the Tow Truck* are about the strong and the weak, that the strong must in some sense or another be supplemented or supplanted by the weak if the strong is fully to self-realize. We can't ever read *Tony the Tow Truck,* the character, Tony, quite the same way again after the appearance of Bumpy, and yet Bumpy is nothing other than the hero of *The Little Engine that Could*, a subject position that has been appropriated by Tony in this text. So the relationship is again an agonistic one involving the transposition of heroism from one character-focus to another while at the same time--as anybody can recognize who has read both stories to their kids--simply rewriting the story in a way that *The Little Engine that Could* completely anticipates.

All right. So much then for that. We'll be returning to more Lacanian pastures on Tuesday when we study Deleuze and Guattari and Slavoj Žižek.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 15 Transcript**

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| March 3, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So today we're still focused on individual consciousness. "Why?" you might ask. Well, we can speak of the psychogenesis of the text or film as the site or model for symbolic patterning of one sort or another, perhaps in the case certainly of Žižek, to some extent also of Deleuze. Therefore we can still understand today's readings, unlike Thursday's readings, as belonging to the psychological emphasis in our syllabus. This is actually our farewell to the psychological emphasis, and it is so arranged because there are intimations in today's authors that there are political stakes. That is to say, in one way or another we are to understand their argument about the way in which the psyche functions as having political implications.

Žižek is fascinating, it seems to me, in his brilliant reading of *The Crying Game* at the very end of your essay, in the moment when he says in effect, "Look. This isn't just a kind of abdication from responsibility for the Irish Republican Revolution. The soldier has not merely walked away from his role in revolutionary activity; he has discovered in his private life--that is to say, in the erotic dimension of his consciousness--the need for revolution from within. He has necessarily disrupted his own thinking in ways equally radical to and closely parallel to the disruption of thinking that's required to understand one's relationship with the emerging Republican status of Ireland. And so," says Žižek in effect, "there are political implications for the upheaval in consciousness that an ultimately tragic encounter with the Big Other entails.

I should say in passing also about Žižek that --and your editor, I think, goes into this a little bit in the italicized preface--that there are temptations, political temptations, entailed in this fascination with an obscure or even perhaps transcendent object of desire for the individual, but also for the social psyche. In religious terms, there is a perhaps surprising or counterintuitive friendliness toward religion in Žižek's work on the grounds that faith or the struggle for faith, after, all does constitute an effort to enter into some kind of meaningful relationship with that which one desires yet at the same time can't have. By the same token--and this is where, in certain moments, he confesses to a kind of instability in his political thinking, even though he is by and large on the left and partly needs to be understood as a disciple of Marx--nevertheless, he recognizes that in politics there is a kind of excitement but also, perhaps, potential danger in fascination with a big idea. It could be, of course, some form of progressive collectivity. It could, on the other hand, be the kind of big idea that countenances the rise of fascism. Žižek acknowledges this-- that public identification with a kind of almost, or completely, inaccessible otherness, either as a political idea or as a charismatic political leader, can, after all, open up a vertigo of dangerous possibilities.

I use the word "vertigo" advisedly because I'm going to be coming back to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* in just a minute, but in the meantime there are also obviously political stakes in Deleuze. Deleuze, of course, presents to us in this first chapter of his book, *A Thousand Plateaus,* he presents to us a kind of thought experiment, both as something recommended to the reader--see if you can think in this new, radically innovative way--but also providing a model for thinking of this kind in the style and organization and composition of the chapter itself. So in making a thought experiment, once again, Deleuze has to perform in thought what you might call a revolution from within, but the implications once again in politics, as indeed also for Žižek, are somewhat ambiguous. That is to say, the rhizomatic mode of thinking--and we'll come back to the rhizomatic mode of thinking as we go along--which is radically de-centering and which lends itself to identification with, as it were, the mass movement of collectivity, can plainly be progressively democratic: that is to say, democratic beyond even what our social and cultural hierarchies accommodate. But at the same time it can once again be fascistic, because the organization of fascistic culture, while nevertheless a kind of top-down arrangement with a fervor involved as the mass is mobilized, nevertheless is, in this mobilization, rhizomatic.

Deleuze is careful to point out that rhizomes are, and rhizomatic thinking is, as he says repeatedly, both for the *best* and *wors*t. [laughs] Rats are rhizomes. Crabgrass is a rhizome. In other words, everything which organizes itself in this fashion is rhizomatic; much of it, though, as I'll be coming back to try to explain with a little more care, is for the good in Deleuze's view. By the way, I say "Deleuze" in the same way I said "Wimsatt." Guattari is an important colleague and ally. They wrote many books together including one that I'll mention later. They also wrote things separately, but "Deleuze," simply because his *oeuvre* is more ample and people feel somehow or another that he's more central to this work, is a synecdoche for "Deleuze and Guattari." So I'll be saying "Deleuze," but I don't mean to slight Guattari. In any case, so we'll be examining the Deleuzian rhizome a little bit more closely, but in the meantime, as to its political implications--and we are moving closer to the political as we begin to think about figures of this kind--they're really on the admission of both of them somewhat ambiguous. In other words, they're introducing new possibilities of thought and they're very different from each other, as we'll see. They're introducing new possibilities of thought, but they are candid enough to admit that they don't quite know where these possibilities are going--that is, what the implications or consequences of successfully entering the thought world of either one of them might be.

All right. So yes, they certainly have very different ideas. I wouldn't blame you for saying, "Why on earth are we reading these two texts together?" The overlap isn't altogether clear. I'm going to suggest what it is in a minute, but in the meantime they are certainly on about very different things. Deleuze is concerned with, as I say, introducing a kind of thought experiment which has to do with the de-centering of thought, getting away from the tree or arboresque model of thought--we'll have more to say about that; and Žižek, on the other hand, following Lacan's distinction between the object, ready to hand, that you can have if you want, and the object of desire which--such is the chain of signification--is perpetually something that exceeds or outdistances our grasp--in developing this idea, and thinking about what the object of desire, in all of its manifold forms, might be, he develops this curious idea, which is at the center of his thinking, of the *blot*--the element in narrative form, the element in the way in which our storytelling capacities are organized, which really can't be narrated, which really can't lend itself to meaning. That sort of meaning is, of course, concrete, specific meaning, that which can be tied down to an accessible object. So the central idea that Žižek is attempting to develop in his essay has to do with this notion of the relationship between the Big Other and the blot, as we'll see.

So these strike one as being extremely different ideas, and as I say I wouldn't blame you for wondering just what overlap there can be. Well, at the same time I would think that as you read the somewhat bouncy and frantic prose of both of these texts, you did see that they had a kind of mood, stance, or orientation toward the critical and theoretical project in common. They seem, in other words, to be of the same moment. Even though their ideas seem to be so very different--that is, the basic ideas they're trying to get across seem to be so very different--you could perhaps imagine these two texts as being written, if it was just a question of considering their style, by the same person. Actually, I think that's not quite true, but at the same time the kind of high-energy, too-caffeinated feeling that you get from the prose of both is something that might give you pause and make you wonder: well, just what moment does this belong to?

The answer is important and, in a way, obvious. I'm sure all of you are ready to tell me what moment it belongs to. It belongs to Postmodernism. These are two exemplars of what is by far the most slippery--if one likes it, one wants to say versatile, [laughs] and if one doesn't like it, one wants to say murky--concepts to which we have been exposed in the last twenty or thirty years. I think that, in a way, we can bring both essays into focus as a pair a little bit if we pause somewhat, simply over the concept "Postmodernism." Maybe that's one of the things you wanted to learn in taking a course like this, so I'm just providing a service. [laughter]

So Postmodernism. What is Postmodernism? I think we know what it is in artistic expression. We have encountered enough examples of it. We have, perhaps, even taken courses in which, in the context of artistic form and expression, it has come up. Postmodernism in artistic expression--particularly in the visual arts, but I think this is true of certain movements in both narrative and poetry as well--postmodernism is an eclectic orientation to the past. In a certain sense, it's a return to the past; it's an opening up of textual possibility to traditions and historical moments of expression which Modernism had tended to suppose obsolete and to have set aside; so that in artistic expression, as I say, Postmodernism is an eclectic return to possibilities thrown up by the history of art and literature; in architecture, many examples are quite extraordinary and many, unfortunately, are also hideous. You know that there was a certain point fifteen or twenty years ago when every strip mall, every shopping mall, was redecorated or--what's the word I want?--renovated. Every shopping mall was renovated, and how did they renovate it? They'd been flat. They'd been sort of Mies van der Rohe, sort of sixties-modern before then. They just sat there flat, and so the renovators came along and put little gables on the shopping mall so that each little shop in the mall now has a gable, and this is postmodern. The most awful things were done with suburban houses, also in the name of a kind of blind, completely tasteless return to the neoclassical and certain other aspects of tradition.

So the postmodern in what you might call suburban culture has been pretty awful, but at the same time it has entailed a great deal of interesting work in painting. All of a sudden, the New York scene isn't just one school, and that's the sign of it. It's not just a certain kind of abstraction. It's not just a wholesale return, agreed on by everyone, to Realism. It's a mixture of everything. Artists are always just completely obsessed with their place in art history, but it's not just groups of artists together wanting to identify a certain place for themselves in art history. It's every artist in a kind of anarchic independence from the thinking of other artists coming to terms with art history in his or her own way so that the scene--the art scenes of New York and Berlin and Los Angeles and so on--the scene isn't something that you can identify as having a certain character anymore. It's postmodern precisely in that it's gone global, it has a million influences and sources, and there is very little agreement among artists about how to amalgamate and put these sources together; so that in terms of artistic expression, the postmodern moment--after Modernism, in other words--the postmodern moment presents itself, and I put it deliberately, as a medical symptom, the bipolar way the postmodern moment presents itself in artistic expression.

Now philosophically, Postmodernism can be understood as doubt not just about the grounds of knowledge or the widespread sorts of doubt which we have been talking about more or less continuously in this course, but as doubt in particular about the relationship between or among parts and wholes. In other words, can I be sure that my leg is part of my body when plainly it is at the same time a whole with respect to my foot? How is it that I know in any stable way what a part or a whole is? To take a more interesting example--this is in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations--*there is the flag, the French flag, which is called the tricolor, right? Now the tricolor is made up of three strips of color: white, blue, and red. I'm sorry if I've gotten the order wrong. In fact, I am almost positive that I have, [laughter] but there are those three strips of color existing in relation to each other, and plainly those three strips of color are parts of the flag, and they have a certain symbolic value. That is to say, each color represents something and enters into the symbolic understanding of what the flag is. But at the same time red, white, and blue--sorry--yes, red, white, and blue aren't confined to this piece of cloth. The little strip of white is obviously part of whiteness. It can't be understood simply in and of itelf. These strips of color are parts of other things as well; and what's more, if you look at the tricolor without knowing what you're looking at, how can you say that it's the part of a whole? You say, "Well, they're just parts," or "They're wholes unto themselves which somebody happens to have laid side by side." By the same token, if you look at the part of the tricolor which is white and you say, "White," well, obviously with respect to the vast universalizing concept "white," a little flag is simply a kind of metonymic relationship with that sense of white. But, in short, to concretize this idea of the problematic relationship between part and whole in a different way, why are we so confident about what we see?

As most of you know, I'm sure, philosophical thinking tends to be tyrannized by metaphors of vision. We assume that we understand reality because--not altogether as consciously metaphorically in speaking about this as perhaps we might be--we say that we can see it; but how do you see it? You see it because of the lensing or focusing capacities of the eye, which exercise a certain tyranny over the nature of what you see. If you look too closely at something, all you can see is dots. If you look at something and close your eyes, that, too, becomes a kind of vast retinal Mark Tobey painting. It has a relation to what you see but is at the same time something very different. And if you get too far away from objects, they dissolve. What you thought was an object dissolves into a much vaster, greater space which seems to have another objective nature. If you're in a jet and you're looking down, what you're seeing certainly looks like it has form and structure, but the form and structure is not at all what you're seeing if you're standing on the ground looking at exactly the same, shall we say, square footage insofar as you can. You're simply seeing different things, and if you recognize what might be called the tyranny of focus in the way in which we orient ourselves to the world, you can see this perpetual dissolve and refocus constituting objects perpetually in new ways.

This happens, too, in the history of science. The relationship between subatomic particles sometimes turns itself inside out, and the particle that you thought was the fundamental unit turns out, in fact, to have within it a fundamental unit of which it is a part. I'm just referring to what happened during the golden age of the linear accelerator when all sorts of remarkable sorts of inversions of what's taken to be fundamental seemed to be made available by the experimental data; so that in all of these ways, ranging from scientific to the most subjectively visual ways of understanding the world, there are possibilities of doubt that can be raised about part-whole relations. What is a whole? How do we define a unity? Should we be preoccupied with the nature of reality as a set of unities? Obviously, Deleuze is extremely upset about this. He doesn't want anything to do with unity. The whole function of his thought experiment is the de-centering of things such that one can no longer talk about units or wholes or isolated entities. It's the being together, merging together, flying apart, reuniting, and kinesis or movement of entities, if they can even be called entities, that Deleuze is concerned with.

Now another aspect of the postmodern is what the postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, in particular, has called "the inhuman" or the process of the dehumanization of the human. Now this is a weird term to choose because it's not at all anti-humanistic. It's really a new way of thinking about the human. Deleuze, you'll notice, talks--not just here in this excerpt, but repeatedly throughout his work, which is why he has so little to say about it here that's explanatory--about "bodies without organs." That might have brought you up short, but what it suggests is that we are, as Deleuze would put it, machinic rather than organic. If the problem with centered thought is that it thinks of everything as arboreal, as a tree, that problem has to do with the fact that a tree is understood in its symbolic extensions to have organs. The roots are muscles and circulation; the blossoms are genital in nature; the crown or canopy of leaves is the mind of the tree reaching up to the sky, the mentality of the tree. By the same token, if we think of our own bodies as arboreal, we think of certain parts of those bodies as cognitive, other parts of those bodies as having agency, as doing things. If that's the case, then we think of a centered and ultimately genital or genetic understanding of the body as being *productive*.

Deleuze wants to understand the body as being interactive, as being polymorphous perverse, among other things. He wants to understand it as being everywhere and nowhere, an un-situated body among other bodies. In order for this to happen, its interface with other things has to be without agency and also without cognitive intention on the model of "I think, therefore I am; the world comes into being because I think," without any of this in play. In other words, the dehumanization of the postmodern has to do not at all with denying the importance of the human but with this radical way of rethinking the human among other bodies and things.

Plainly, this emphasis involves a kind of dissolving into otherness, a continuity between subject and object in which the difference, ultimately, between what is inside me, what is authentic or integral to my being me, and what's outside me become completely permeable and interchangeable. The late nineteenth-century author and aesthetic philosopher Walter Pater, in the conclusion to a famous book of his called *The Renaissance*,had a wonderful way of putting this: he said in effect, "We are too used to thinking that we're in here and everything else is out there and that, somehow or another, our perspective on everything out there is a kind of saving isolation enabling our power of objectivity." Then Pater says, paraphrased, "How can this be, because we're made up of the same things that are out there? We, too, are molecular, in other words. What is in us ‘rusts iron and ripens corn' [his words]. There is a continuousness between the inside feeling we have about ourselves and the exteriority with which we are constantly coming in contact."

Deleuze and Guattari, of course, have their own excited, jumpy way of putting these things, but it's not really a new idea that we exaggerate the isolation of consciousness from its surroundings. There is a permeability of inside and outside that this kind of rhizomic, or de-centered, thinking is meant to focus on. Now you could say that what Deleuze is interested in--if you go back to our coordinates that we kept when we were talking about the formalists, Saussure through structuralism, through deconstruction--if you go back to those coordinates, you could say that what Deleuze is interested in, like so many others we've read, is a rendering virtual, or possibly even eliminating, of the vertical axis: in other words, of that center or head or crown of the tree which constitutes everything that unfolds on the horizontal axis--be it language, be it the unconscious structured like a language, be it whatever it might be. You could say that the project of Deleuze, too, is the undoing or rendering virtual of this vertical axis.

Well, in a way, I think that's true, but then what is the horizontal axis? That is where the relation of Deleuze to, let's say, deconstruction becomes a little problematic and where we can actually see a difference. I'm going to compare him in this one respect with Lacan, but I want to hasten to point out, as I will in a minute, a divergence from Lacan as well. You remember that in Lacan's "Agency of the Letter" essay, he doesn't *just* talk about the axis of combination as a series of concentric circles, each one of which is made up of little concentric circles. He doesn't just talk about that. He also talks about the way in which the combinatory powers of the imaginary in language, or desire in language, take place is like a musical staff, so that the organization of signs, in their contiguity with each other, can be either melodic or harmonic; but in any case, you can't just think of the axis of combination as a complete linearity. It has dimensionality of different kinds.

That's why Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of plateau. The book in which your excerpt appears is called *A Thousand Plateaus*. Ultimately, the concept of plateau is even more important to them than the concept of rhizome, but when they introduce the concept of plateau they're doing exactly the same thing. They are saying, "We jump from sign cluster to sign cluster and not all sign clusters are linear and uniform." This is where there is perhaps a difference from deconstruction. Deleuze and Guattari are interested in "multiplicity of coding," as they put it. They're interested in the way in which when I think, I'm not just thinking in language, I'm not just thinking pictorially, and I'm not just thinking musically, but I am leaping around among codes so that the actual thought process is eclectic in this way.

Now you could say that this is something actually anticipated also by Lacan. You remember also in the "Agency"essay that Lacan reminds us, true inheritor of Freud which he takes himself to be, that at the beginning of *The Interpretation of Dreams*,Freud said that the decoding of the dream work is like figuring out the puzzle of a rebus--a rebus being one of those trick sentences which are made up not exclusively of words but of the odd syllable or of pictures: for example, "I 'heart' New York." "I 'heart' New York" is a rebus. The dream work functions constantly, in Freud's view, as a rebus. So you could say that Lacan already introduces for Deleuze the possibility of thinking of a multiple coding that needs to be decoded on a variety of plateaus if it's going to make any sense.

Now Deleuze's relationship with all the figures we have been reading is rather problematic, really. The book preceding *A Thousand Plateaus* was called *Anti-Oedipus,* and it is a continuous systematic attack on--he always calls Freud "the General"--the idea that Freud feels that the whole of our psychic lives is completely saturated and dominated by the Oedipus complex. Deleuze with his idea of de-centered thinking, of the rhizome, sets out to show in a variety of ways how limiting and how unfortunate for the legacy of psychoanalysis this kind of focus on a particular issue turns out to be--this is Deleuze's critique of Freud, not mine. You would think that Deleuze, then, would be a lot closer to Lacan just for the reasons that I have just described, but Lacan, too--at the very bottom of page 034 in your copy center reader, on the right-hand column--he says: "…[I]t is not surprising that psychoanalysis tied its fate to that of linguistics…" Now it's impossible to say-- I think quite by design--it's impossible to say whether Deleuze is referring to Freud or Lacan in saying that, because it's Lacan who claims that Freud said it: in other words, that *The Interpretation of Dreams* is the text in which we discover that the unconscious is structured like a language; but at the same time, posterity has taken Lacan's focus on linguistics to be a massive, perhaps inappropriate revision of Freud and to be a very different matter. So it's interesting that Deleuze quite ambiguously seems to suppose that Freud and Lacan are part and parcel of each other. The reason he can do that is that he is interested in a form of thinking about language which no linguistics has successfully accommodated, as far as he's concerned. In other words, he keeps talking about Chomsky. Chomsky seems to be, in a way, the villain of your essay. But I think, in a way, that's just a way of evading talking about Saussure, because you wouldn't want to get in trouble with all those structuralists; because the problem with Saussure, too, is that there is a certain tyranny or arboresque tendency in Saussurean thinking to be focused on the binary--that is, the relationship between the signified and signifier as fixed, as inflexible, and as lacking in what Derrida would call "free play" and therefore, too ,a kind of tyranny.

So, very quickly, on the rhizome. How do we know a rhizome when we see it? Whatever frustrations Deleuze's essay puts in your path, I think probably in the long run you're pretty clear on what a rhizome is, but if there is any lingering doubt just think about the flu. There is what Deleuze calls "rhizomatic flu." That's something we get from other people, the circulation of disease. As we all come down with it around midterm period, the circulation of disease is rhizomatic. It's a perfect example of--to use another instance from Deleuze--the relationship between the wasp and the orchid. The wasp, like the virus, sort of flits about from blossom to blossom, descends, and then constitutes the flu. By contrast there is hereditary disease--that is, that which is lurking in us because we're programmed for it, we're hard-wired for it, and it is genetically in our nature. This Deleuze associates with the arboresque. It comes from an origin. It is something that is a cause within us or a cause standing behind us, as opposed to something coming out of left field in an arbitrary and unpredictable fashion and descending on us--perhaps this is also not unlike Tynjanov's distinction between modification and evolution. The arboresque evolves; the rhizomatic is modification. The give and take of tensions among entities--the rats tumbling over each other, the maze of the burrow, the spreading of crabgrass--all of this has a kind of randomness and unpredictability. The power of linkage at all conceivable points without any predictability--all of this is entailed in the rhizomatic.

Now as to what's being attacked--and again, the value system surrounding these things is not absolute, Deleuze is not going so far as to say "arboresque bad, rhizomatic good." He's coming pretty close to it, but he acknowledges the perils, as I say, of the rhizomatic--but in the meantime just one point in passing--because I'm running out of time to talk about Žižek--just one point in passing about the arboresque. There are actually, in the first pages of your essay, two forms of it. One is what he calls the "root book," the traditional classical book which presents to you a theme: "I am going to write about so-and-so, and I'm going to do so systematically, one thing at a time in a series of chapters." That's the root book. Then there is what he calls the "fascicle book," a book which consists of complicated offshoots of roots but nevertheless entailing a tap root. This is what he associates with Modernism, precisely, in your text. He says in effect: "The fascicle book is like Joyce's *Ulysses.* Everything including the kitchen sink is in it. It looks as though it were totally rhizomatic, but it is, of course, controlled by, unified by, and brought into coherence by a single focusing authorial consciousness so that it is not truly rhizomatic; it's a fascicle book." And here, now, *A Thousand Plateaus* is going to be a rhizomatic book. So you have not just two kinds of books in this idea but three.

All right then, very quickly about Žižek. I think he can help us understand Lacan. I hope you agree with this in having read it, but I think in a way, it also takes us back to, or allows us to revisit, Peter Brooks. The best example, it seems to me, of the way in which the tension of desire in narrative works for Žižek is--although these are splendid examples and I think largely self-explanatory--the best example is actually in another book by Žižek called *Everything You Wanted to Know About Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*. In that book, of course, you get a lot of attention paid to *Vertigo*. Just think about *Vertigo* as an instance of the kind of plot Žižek is talking about. There is that--I've forgotten her name--really nice woman. You remember, the painter, and Jimmy Stewart just pays absolutely no attention to her. She's right there. She's available. She's in love with him. He doesn't even see her except as a confidante: "Oh yes, you; I'm so glad you're here." But he is, on the other hand, obsessed with a woman whose identity he can't even be sure of. It's not just that she's inaccessible for some reason or that she's a distant object of desire. Her identity and the question of whether or not she's being play-acted by somebody else remains completely unclear--unclear for many spectators even as they watch the ending of the film, completely unclear. That is an obscure, not just a distant but an *obscure* object of desire. Of course, the premise of her inaccessibility is what drives the plot.

Now I think that it's interesting to think about the relationship between the element of detour and delay, as Žižek implies it, in understanding narrative and what Peter Brooks is talking about. Peter Brooks is talking about the way in which middles in plots protract themselves through episodes, all of which manifest some sort of imbalance or need for further repetition in a new key. Much of this--because the characteristic plot of the kind of fiction Brooks is mainly thinking about is the marriage plot--much of this has to do with inappropriate object choice. That indeed can also in many cases, *à la* what I began by mentioning in Žižek, lead to inappropriate political object choice. Think, for example, about the plot of Henry James' *Princess Casamassima* in that regard. Poor Hyacinth Robinson strikes out on both counts in rather completely parallel ways. He ends up on the wrong side of politics, and he ends up on the wrong side of love. In a way, the *Princess Casamassima* is an exploration of these two sides of the issue. So in any case, for Brooks the resolution of the plot is a way in which closure can be achieved. It is a final moment of equilibrium, as one might say, or quiet or reduction of excitation, such that the Freudian death wish can be realized, as we know, in the way we want it to be realized, as opposed to our being afflicted by something from the outside. So in Brooks, whose closest ties are to structuralism, there is an achieved sense of closure which is an important aspect of what's admirable in fiction.

Žižek is more postmodern. Žižek sees, following Lacan, the object of desire as asymptotic, as being ultimately and always inaccessible; or if it *becomes* accessible--as, for example, on page 1193 in the right-hand column--or one might say, almost accessible, this gives rise to as many problems as it seems to eliminate. At the bottom right-hand column, page 1193, Žižek says:

… [P]erhaps, in courtly love itself, the long-awaited moment of highest fulfillment, when the Lady renders *Gnada*, mercy, to her servant is not the Lady's surrender, her consent to the sexual act, nor some mysterious rite of initiation, but simply a sign of love on the part of the Lady, the "miracle" that the Object answered, stretching its hand out towards the supplicant.

The object, in other words, has become subject. In this moment of exchange, mutuality of recognition, or becoming human on the part of the lady--whom of course Žižek has associated with the dominatrix in a sadistic relationship--in this moment of becoming human and of offering love, the object becomes more accessible. That is to say, there is now the possibility of some form of mutuality, but in her becoming more accessible, the energy of desire is threatened with dissolution. In other words, closure in Žižek is a threat to the energy of desire. Desire is something which inheres in our very language, according to Žižek, and which, were it to be understood as brought to closure, the lady--Žižek gives lots of examples of the lady, after all of this sort of seeming inaccessibility--the lady says, "Sure, why not? Of course." The person is completely upset and then refuses the act because there's nothing more to desire. All of a sudden, the whole structure of that energy that drives language and consciousness comes tumbling to the ground, and desire has become need. It's become merely a matter of gratification through what's ready-to-hand and no longer a question of sustaining a dream. This, generally speaking, is what Žižek wants to focus on in talking about these plots. The object of desire must be not just distant but also obscure.

I'm going to make two more points. First of all, as you can no doubt tell, this is a perfect replica of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors.* I'd be amazed if anyone in the room hadn't recognized it, [laughter] but there it is. [Gestures to drawing on the board.] There's two guys. There's a table between them. They are negotiating probably over one of Henry the Eighth's marriages, and this I think is not insignificant. They are there in the service of Henry the Eighth negotiating one of those extremely complicated marriages, possibly even the one that led to the abdication of the Anglican Church from the Roman Catholic Church--who knows? But the lore about the painting is that it has to do with the negotiation for an object of desire, and that object is absent. In other words, it's something really only implied by the painting.

In the foreground of the painting, notorious to art historians, there is this thing. [Gestures to drawing on the board.] Now this is pretty much what's in the painting. This is not a replica of the two guys standing there, granted but *this* is pretty much what you see when you look at the foreground of the painting. If you look sort of from the side, it turns into something very much like a skull. Generally speaking, there's a kind of consensus among scholars that it may be a weirdly distorted shadow or representation of a skull, although what a skull is doing in the foreground, of course, causes us to wonder as well. Obviously, you can have some ideas on the subject, but it's still not exactly realist painting we're talking about if he sticks a skull in the foreground. Well, it also has a certain resemblance to other things we could mention, but the main point about it is that we don't really know what it is. It is, in other words, something we've already become familiar with in thinking about Lacan. It is that signifier, that ultimate signifier, which is the obscure object of desire called sometimes by Lacan "the phallus," and it seems simply to be there before us in this painting.

Now both in the book on Hitchcock, where he finds something like this in just about every film Hitchcock ever made, and also in Holbein's painting, Žižek calls this "the blot." We have nothing else to call it. It's a blot. What's it doing there? In fiction, we would call it irrelevant detail. We can find a way of placing formally absolutely everything in fiction. The weather, the flowers on the table, whatever it might be: we can place these formally, but there may be something in fiction which is simply unaccountable. We cannot account for it, and that's the blot for Žižek.

All right. Now finally, on desire on language: there's a part of Žižek's essay which you may have thought of as a digression. He's suddenly talking about J. L. Austin's ordinary language philosophy. He's suddenly talking about the linguist Ducrot's idea of predication. What's important about, in the one case, the element of performance in any utterance and, in the other case, the dominance of an entire sentence by predication--what's important in both of those elements is that they take over an aspect of language of which they were only supposed to be a part. In other words, in Austin there are both performatives and constatives; but in the long run, the argument of *How to Do Things with Words* suggests that there are only performatives: I thought this was a constative, he says in effect, I thought this was just straightforward language, but I can now see an element of performance in it. That's the way that there's a gradual changing of his own mind in Austin's book to which Žižek is sensitive. By the same token, Ducrot talks about the way in which the predicate element of a subject, the predicate relation, has a kind of energy of agency that simply takes over the grammatical subject and constitutes a kind of performance in the sentence--performance in both cases meaning "desire." When I promise to do something, I also desire to fulfill the promise. When I predicate something, I'm also evoking a desire that that something be the case possibly through my own instrumentality. This is the argument. That's what Žižek means by "desire in language," by the inescapability of desire in language, and the way in which it permeates everything we can say to each other--most particularly, the way in which it permeates the plot or, as they say in film studies, the "diegesis" of the kinds of film examples that Žižek gives us.

I'd better stop there. I hope that this somewhat rapid-fire survey of some key ideas in these texts are helpful. I think in the long run perhaps, I hope, mainly that you see these two energetic authors as exemplars of what we call Postmodernism and see the relevance of the concept of the postmodern to the study of literary theory. Thanks.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 16 Transcript**

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| --- | --- |
| March 5, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So we arrive at our turn to sociogenesis. Genesis is, of course, here obviously--even as we read both Jauss and Bakhtin for today--a misleading term in a certain sense; because obviously, the most egregious difference between Jauss and Bakhtin--and once again you're probably saying to yourself, "Well, my goodness. Why have these two texts been put together?"--the most egregious difference is that Bakhtin's primary concern is with the "life world" that produces a text and Jauss' primary concern is with the "life world," or perhaps better "succession of life worlds," in which a text is received. I think you can tell, however, from reading both texts, and will be conscious as you go through the materials that remain on the syllabus, that the relationship between the production and reception of literature, or of discourse of any kind, once you factor in the social setting of such a text, becomes much more permeable, much more fluid. There's a certain sense in which the producer is the receiver; in which the author is the reader and stands in relation to a tradition, to a past, as a reader; and the reader in turn, in continuing to circulate texts through history--that is to say, in playing a role as someone who keeps texts current--is perhaps even in concrete terms a writer. That is to say, he or she is someone who expresses opinions, circulates values, and keeps texts, as I say, in circulation.

I've always felt this about Jauss's sense of what a reader is. What kind of reader would it be who was responsible for the continued presence, or influence, of a text through literary history who wasn't in some sense communicating an opinion? This is obviously truer today than ever before when we have blogs and discussion groups and when everybody is circulating opinions on the internet. Plainly the reader, plainly the taste-maker, the reader as taste-maker, is at the same time a writer. Just in passing--this has become a digression but I hope a useful one--in this context, one can think about a really strange pairing, Jauss in relation to Bloom. If Bloom's theory of strong misreading as a principle of literary historiography can be understood as a relationship between writers as readers and readers as writers, so by the same token if we see Jauss's analysis of reception in these terms, and if we think of reception as a necessary circulation of opinion, there is, after all, a sense in which for Jauss, too, the reader is a writer and the writer is a reader. That is undoubtedly a remote connection, but it is a way of seeing how both Bloom and Jauss are figures who have strong and interesting and plausible theories about literary history.

All right. To go, however, back to the beginning--back to the sense in which we're at a watershed, or a moment of transition in this course, leaving for the moment out of the picture the intermediate step of psychogenesis--to go back to this sense of our being in a moment of transition--as always, such is the calendar, just at the wrong time: we finally accomplish our transition, then we go off to spring break, forget everything we ever knew and come back and start off once again as a *tabula rasa*. We'll do our best to bridge that gap. In any case, if we now find ourselves understanding in reading these two texts for the first time, really--although it's not that we haven't been talking about "life" before. Obviously, we have been, as it's not as though the Russian formalists culminating in the structuralism of Jakobson don't talk about a referential function. It's unfair even to the New Critics to say that somehow the world is excluded from the interpretative or reading process--even though all along we've been saying things like this, we still sense a difference. The difference is in the perceived relationship between the text, the object of study, and the life world--the sense, in fact, in which a text is a life world. This has, after all, something to do with our understanding of what language is.

So far we have been thinking of language as a semiotic code and also with the strong suspicion that this semiotic code is a virtual one. We have been emphasizing the degree to which we are passive in relation to, or even, as it were, "spoken by" this language. In other words, it's been a constant in our thinking about these matters that language speaks through us, but we have exercised so far a curious reticence about the sense in which this language is not *just* a code, not just something that exists virtually at a given historical moment, but is in fact a code made up of other people's language: in other words, that it is language in circulation, not just language as somehow abstractly outside of networks of circulation available for use.

So we begin now to think of language still, and the relationship between language and speech, but now it's not a language abstracted from reality; it's a language which, precisely, *circulates* within reality and as a matter of social exchange and social interaction. Language is now and henceforth on our syllabus a social institution. In literary theory it has the same determinative relationship with my individual speech, but we now begin to understand the claim that I don't speak my own language in a different register. Hitherto it's been, well, "Language is there before me, what I speak is just sort of that which I borrow from it," but now this takes on a new valency altogether. What I don't speak is *my* language; it's other people's language. My voice--and the word "voice" is obviously under heavy pressure here, even though nobody says it goes away--my voice is a voice permeated by all the sedimentations, registers, levels, and orientations of language in the world that surrounds me. I take my language, in other words, from other people. I stand here--for my sins--lecturing in kind of an ad-lib way, and that makes it even more pronounced in what I say. You're hearing the internet. You're hearing newspaper headlines. You're hearing slang. You're hearing all sorts of locutions and rhetorical devices that I'd be ashamed to call mine, [laughs] at least in many cases, because they are in the world; they are out there, as we say.

What's out there gets to the point where it's in here, and the next thing you know, it becomes part of the ongoing patter or blather of an individual. It is, in other words, the speech of others that you're hearing when you hear an individual. The extent or the degree to which this might be the case is, I suppose, always subject to debate. We're going to take up a couple of examples, but in any case, you can see that without the structure of the relationship between language and speech having really changed--and in fact it won't really change as we continue along--without the structure of the relationship between language and speech having changed, the nature of this relationship and the way in which we think of it in social terms is changed, and the social aspect of it now comes into prominence and will remain there.

Now in order to see how this works in the case of today's two authors a little more concretely, I wanted to turn to a couple of passages on your sheet. You got my grim warning last night that if you didn't bring it, I wouldn't have any to circulate. We'll see how well that worked, and if it didn't work, well, perhaps it'll work better in the future. In any case, first of all turning to the first passage on the sheet by Bakhtin--by the way, if you don't have the sheet, maybe somebody near you does, or maybe somebody near you has a computer which is being used for the correct purposes that can be [laughs] held somehow between the two of you. These are all possibilities.

The first passage on the sheet by Bakhtin is about the relationship between what he takes to be a formalist understanding of double-voicedness--for example, the new critical understanding which he's not directly talking about but which we could use as an example of irony--the ways of talking about not meaning what you say. He's talking about those sorts of double-voicedness in relationship to, in contradistinction to, what he means by "genuine heteroglossia," and he says, first passage on the sheet:

Rhetoric is often limited to purely verbal victories over the word, over ideological authority. [In other words, I am sort of getting under your ribs if you're somehow or another voicing an authoritative, widespread, or tyrannical opinion by some form or another of subverting it--in other words, a kind of a binary relationship between what I'm saying and what's commonly being said out there.] When this happens [says Bakhtin] rhetoric degenerates into formalistic verbal play but, we repeat, when discourse is torn from reality it is fatal for the word itself as well. Words grow sickly, lose semantic depth and flexibility, the capacity to expand and renew their meanings in new living contexts. They essentially die as discourse, for the signifying word lives beyond itself; that is, it lives by directing its purposiveness outward. Double-voicedness, which is merely verbal, is not structured on authentic heteroglossia but on a mere diversity of voices.

In other words, it doesn't take into account the way in which there are seepages or permeabilities among the possibilities and registers of meaning, depending on extraordinarily complex speaking communities coming together in any aspect of discourse, ways in which we have to think about the life world of a discourse in order to understand the play of voice. Heteroglossia is the language of others. That's what it means if we are to to understand the way in which the language of others is playing through and permeating the text.

A comparable response to formalism on the part of Hans Robert Jauss--I should say in passing that both Bakhtin and Jauss have authentic and close relations with the Russian formalists. Bakhtin begins, in a way, at the very end of the formalist tradition, as a kind of second generation formalist, but quickly moves away--it is breaking up in the late 1920s--from that and begins to rewrite formalism in a certain sense as a sociogenesis of discourse in language; and by the same token, Jauss in his theory of literary history--which is not enunciated in these terms in the text that you have, but rather in the long text from which I wish your editor had taken an excerpt, called "Literary History as a Provocation to Literary Theory." You have excerpts from that on your sheet. In any case, in Jauss' understanding of the relationship between the text and the life world, Jauss cobbles together, as it were, aspects of Russian formalist historiography, particularly that of Jakobson and Tynjanov, and a Marxist understanding of, as it were, the marketing, reception, and consumption of literary production. These pairs of ideas go together in his developing of his thesis about literary reception, to which we'll return at the end of the lecture.

The second passage on the sheet, which distances him, in which he wants to distance himself somewhat from both of these influences, goes as follows:

Early Marxist and formalist methods in common conceive the literary fact within the closed circle of an aesthetics of production and representation. In doing so, they deprive literature of a dimension that inalienably belongs to its aesthetic character as well as to its social function, the dimension of its reception and influence.

In other words, the way in which a text, once it exists, moves in the world, the way in which it persists, changes as we understand it and grows or diminishes as time passes in the world: this is the medium, the social medium, in which Jauss wants to understand literary--precisely literary--interpretation, as we'll see.

Coming a little closer to this issue of the relationship between thinking of this kind and the formalist tradition, Bakhtin on page 592, the left-hand column toward the bottom--I'm not going to quote this, I'm just going to say that it's there--Bakhtin begins a sentence about, as he puts it, literary "parody" understood in the narrow sense. Now what he's implying here is that the theory of parody belongs primarily to Russian formalist literary historiography. In other words, the relationship between a new text and an old text is one of, broadly conceived within this discourse, parody. Bakhtin picks up the word "parody" in order to say also on page 592, the left-hand column about halfway down:

… [A] mere concern for language is [and it's an odd thing to say, "a mere concern for language" [laughs]] but the abstract side of the concrete and active [i.e., dialogically engaged] understanding of the living heteroglossia that has been introduced into the novel and artistically organized within it.

To pause over this, "parody": if we linger merely on the literariness of parody, we simply don't have any grasp of the complexity of the ways in which the dialogic or the heteroglossal modulates, ripples, and makes complicated the surface of literary discourse. Parody once again leaves us with a sense of the binary: the previous text was this, the secondary text or the next text riffs off that previous text in a way that we can call parodic--but that's binary. It's one text against another and leaves out the whole question of that flood or multiplicity of voices which pervades the text.

Okay. So then Jauss has an interesting moment again, in the fourth passage on your sheet, in which he is obviously directly responding to that passage at the end of Tynjanov's essay on literary evolution which we've had on the board and which we've discussed before. You remember Tynjanov makes the distinction between evolution--the way in which a sequence of texts mutates, as one might say, and the way in which, in other words, successive texts (again) parody or alter what was in the previous text--and modification, which is the influence on texts from the outside by other sorts of historical factors which may lead to textual change. Tynjanov says that it's important, actually for both studies--for the study of history and also for the study of literary history--that the two be always kept clearly distinct in the mind of the person looking at them.

Well, Jauss's response to that is perhaps chiefly rhetorical, but it nevertheless once again does mark this shift in the direction of the understanding of language as social that I've been wanting to begin by emphasizing. Jauss says:

The connection between literary evolution and social change [that is to say, those features in society that would and do modify texts] does not vanish from the face of the earth through its mere negation. What is he saying? He's saying "does not vanish from the face of the earth" because Tynjanov said it *did*. [laughs] There is no doubt that that's the passage Jauss is talking about.] The new literary work [he goes on] is received and judged against the background of the everyday experience of life.

In other words, the work exists in a life world. There is no easy or even possible way of distinguishing between its formal innovations and those sorts of innovations which are produced by continuous and ongoing factors of social change. They interact. They seep into one another in exactly the same way that all the registers and sedimentations of human voices interact and seep into one another in Bakhtin's heteroglossia.

All right. So these then are the emphases of both of these writers with respect to formalist ideas which have played a prominent part in most, if not all, of the literary theory that we have studied up until now. I'd like to linger a little while with Bakhtin before turning back to Jauss. Now heteroglossia or diversity of speech, as he calls it sometimes--he says at one point again on page 592 toward the top of the left-hand column--heteroglossia is what he calls "the ground of style." I want to pause to ask a little bit what he might mean by this expression, "the ground of style," the italicized passage. It is precisely the diversity of speech and not the unity of a normative shared language that is the ground of style. In other words, I've already said, of course, when I speak I'm not speaking to you in an official voice. I am not speaking the King's English. In fact, on this view there's really no such thing as the King's English. Nobody speaks the King's English because there is no such isolated distilled entity that one can point to. Language, at least the language of most of us--that is to say, of everyone except people in hermetically sealed environments like, for example, a peculiarly privileged, inward-looking aristocracy--the language of virtually all of us is the language of the people, the language of others.

It is that which we have to continue to think about as we consider how a style is generated. We speak of a style as though it were purely a question of an authorial signature. Sometimes we think of style and signature as synonymous. "Oh, I would recognize that style anywhere." Coleridge said of a few lines of Wordsworth, "If I had come across these lines in the desert, I'd have said 'Wordsworth.'" Well, obviously there is a certain sense in which we do recognize a style: for example, the style of Jane Austen. [Points to quotation on board.] I suppose arguably you could think that this is the style of Dr. Johnson, but most people would recognize it as the style of Jane Austen; and yet at the same time, as we'll see in a minute, it is a style made up, in ways that are very difficult finally to factor out and analyze, of many voices.

Okay. So this would suggest, I think--this idea of a style as a composite of speech sedimentations--this idea would suggest that possibly there isn't a voice, that to speak of an authorial voice would be a very difficult matter and might lead us to ask, "Does this move the idea that the sociolect speaks through the idiolect, the idea that the language of everyone is, in fact, the language that speaks my speech, my peculiar individual speech--does this once again bring us face to face with that dreary topic, the death of the author?" I don't think so, not quite, and certainly not in Bakhtin, who gives us a rather bracing sense of the importance of the author in a passage on page 593, the right-hand column. He says:

It is as if the author [this is, of course, sort of coming face-to-face with the problem of whether there still is an author] has no language of his own, but does possess his own style, his own organic and unitary law governing the way he plays with languages [so style is perhaps one's particular way of mediating and allocating the diversity of voice that impinges on what one's saying] and the way his own real semantic and expressive intentions are refracted within them. [And here Bakhtin saves or preserves the author by invoking the principle of unifying intention and the way in which we can recognize it in the discourse of any given novel.] Of course this play with languages (and frequently the complete absence of a direct discourse of his own) in no sense degrades the general, deep-seated intentionality, the overarching ideological conceptualization of the work as a whole.

So this is not, though it may seem to be in certain respects, a question of the death of the author as provoked by, let's say, Foucault or Roland Barthes at the beginning of the semester. It's not that exactly. Everything that we've been saying so far can be seen to work in a variety of novels. The novel is the privileged genre for Bakhtin. He, I think perhaps somewhat oversimplifying in this, reads the novel, the emergence of the novel, and the flowering and richness of the novel against the backdrop of genres he considers to be monoglossal: the epic, which simply speaks the unitary voice of an aristocratic tradition; the lyric, which simply speaks the unitary voice of the isolated romantic solipsist. Over against that, you get the polyglossal, the rich multiplicity of voice in the novel. As I say, I think that the generic contrast is somewhat oversimplified because nothing is easier and more profitable than to read both epic and lyric as manifestations of heteroglossia. Just think of *The Iliad*. What are you going to do, if you really believe that it's monoglossal, with the speeches of Thersites?

Okay. In any case, the basic idea, however, is I think extraordinarily rich and important, and I thought we could try it out by taking a look for a moment at the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice,* which I'm sure most of you know [gestures to board, on which is written, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"]. It is plainly an example of the relationship between what Bakhtin calls "common language"--"It is a truth universally acknowledged," or in other [laughs] words, it's in everybody's mouth--and something like authorial reflection, or what he elsewhere calls "internally persuasive discourse."

Now in traditional parlance, this would be a speech which manifests irony, the rhetoric of irony against which Bakhtin sets himself in the first passage on your sheet. "How ridiculous!" we say. Jane Austen doesn't believe this. This is drawing-room wisdom, and everything in her sentence points to the ways in which it's obviously wrong, even while it's being called a truth: "universally" meaning the thousand people or so who matter; in other words, [laughs] there are a great many people who neither acknowledge nor care about any such thing. Then, of course, the idea that "a single man in possession of a good fortune," or indeed otherwise, has nothing to do but be "in want of a wife." Obviously, this is what is being said not by the man in the street but by drawing-room culture.

Now even before we turn to the complication of the ways in which the sentence is being undermined, bear in mind that the plot of the novel *confirms* the "truth." In other words, Darcy and Bingley, both of them "in possession of a good fortune," do turn out very plainly to have been in want of a wife and, in fact, procure one by the end of the novel. That is precisely what the plot is about, so that the conventions governing the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* altogether confirm the truth that is announced in this sentence, *even though* it is a truth that is plainly to be viewed ironically. That in itself is quite extraordinary and, I think, reinforces our sense that this is one of the great first sentences in the history of fiction.

Let's turn now to the way in which we can think of it as something other than a simple irony. Of course, there is this word "want." We've been thinking a lot about want lately because we have just gone through our psychoanalytic phase. What exactly does this [laughter] [laughs] single man really want? In a way, the subtle pun in the word "want," which means both "to desire" and "to lack"--well, if I lack something, I don't necessarily desire it. I just don't happen to have it, right? On the other hand, if I want something, I can also be said to desire it. Well, which is it? Is it a kind of lack that social pressure of some sort is calculated to fill, or is it desire? If it's desire, what on earth does it have to do with a good fortune? There are elements of the romance plot which raise precisely that question. Desire has nothing to do with fortune. Convenience, social acceptability, comfort: all of those things have to do with fortune, but desire, we suppose--having passed through our psychoanalytic phase--to be of a somewhat different nature. The complication of the sentence has to do actually with the question of the way in which the meanings of these words can be thought to be circulating and to create ripples of irony of their own far more complicated than "Oh, the author's much smarter than that, she doesn't mean that," which is already a complication introduced by the fact that her plot bears it out. How can her plot bear it out if she's being so ironic?

Of course, there is obviously a good deal more to say. A single man in possession of a good fortune obviously may not at all want a *wife*, for a variety of reasons that one could mention, and that can't be possibly completely absent from Jane Austen's mind. So that has to be taken into account in itself and certainly does [lights go off in lecture hall]--I think you see it's the sort of sentence that bears reflection beyond a kind of simple binary of the sentence as spoken by the man in the drawing room, or the woman in the drawing room. "It's idiotic, it's obviously wrong--we simply can't say that": the style of the author is a style that is sedimented by and through complexities of circulated meaning that really can't be limited by any sense of one-to-one relation of that kind. [crew talk]

All right. What else about Bakhtin? One more thing: His idea of common language. This is not a concept that is supposed to have any one particular value attached to it. It's a little bit like the rhizome. It could be good; it could be bad. Common language could be a kind of Rabelaisan, carnivalesque, subversive, energetic body of voices from below overturning the apple carts of authority and the fixed ways of a moribund social order. It could be that, but at the same time it could itself be the authoritative, the reactionary, the mindless. Common language could be that universality of acknowledgement which seems to go along with unreflected, knee-jerk responses to what one observes and thinks about. Common language has that whole range.

The important thing about it is that it's out there and that it circulates and it exists in relationship with what Bakhtin calls "internally persuasive discourse"--in other words, the way in which the filtering together of these various sorts of language result in something like what we feel to be *authentic*: a power of reflection, a posing of relations among the various strata of language, such that they can speak authentically, not necessarily in a way that we agree with but in a way that we recognize to constitute that distilled consciousness that we still do call "the author," and to which we ascribe, in some sense, authority. Precisely in the peculiar self-mocking relationship between this sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* and the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* as a whole, we feel something like the internal persuasiveness, the coherence of the discourse.

I think, maybe just to sum up Bakhtin, I want to quote you from the other long excerpt that you have in your anthology, which I would encourage you to read. Sometimes I have asked people to read it but I decided to drop it this year--but it's still a very strong and interesting argument. It's called "Discourse in the Novel," and I just want to read in the left-hand column, near the bottom of the column: "The ideological becoming of a human being in this view is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others." In other words, the coherence of my mind, of what I say insofar as coherence exists, is the result of selecting out, of selecting among, in my assimilation of the words of others, such that there is a pattern of, again, coherence.

All right. So finally, the novel is the social text *par excellence* for Bakhtin for these reasons, and it confirms again what we have been saying about a new way of thinking of language. Language, as that which speaks through us, is not just language; it's other people's language, and we need to understand the experience of the process of reading and of texts as they exist and the nature of authorial composition as an assimilative, selective way of putting together other people's language.

All right. Now quickly Jauss. He takes us back, obviously by way of Iser--I think you can see that Jauss's talk about horizons of expectation and the disruption of expectation has a great deal to do with Iser's understanding of the role of the reader in filling imaginative gaps that are left in the text, which are based on a complex relationship with a set of conventional expectations--by way of Iser to Gadamer; because after all, what Jauss has to say is a way of talking about Gadamer's "merger of horizons." But for Jauss it's not just my horizon and the horizon of the text. It's not just those two horizons that need to meet halfway on common ground as mutually illuminative. It is, in fact, a succession of horizons changing as modes of aesthetic and interpretive response to texts are mediated historically--as I say--in a sequence.

It's not just that the text was once a certain thing and now we feel it to be somehow different, hence in order to understand it we need to meet it halfway. It's rather a matter of self-consciously studying what has happened in between that other time and this, here and now. The text has had a life. It has passed through life changes, and these life changes have to be understood at each successive stage in terms of the three moments of hermeneutic grasp, as described by Gadamer in the historical section of *Truth and Method.* The distinction between *intelligere*, *explicare*, and *applicare*--understanding, interpretation, and application--that Jauss talks about at the beginning of his essay actually goes back to the eighteenth century. What Jauss has to say about it is, yes: these three moments of hermeneutic understanding exist for any reader or reading public at any moment in the history of the reception of a text.

He makes a considerable to-do about distinguishing between the aesthetic response to the text and a subsequent or leisured, reflectively interpretive response to the text. This may seem a little confusing because he admits with Heidegger and others, as we've indicated ourselves in the past, that you can't just have a spontaneous response to anything without reflection. There's always a sense in which you already know what it is, which is to say a sense in which you've already interpreted it; but at the same time, Jauss makes a considerable point of distinguishing between these two moments--the aesthetic, which he associates with understanding, and the interpretive, which he associates with what is in the hermeneutic tradition called interpretation. Now why does he do this? It's a question of what he means by "the aesthetic." A text enters historical circulation and remains before the gaze of successive audiences in history because it has been received aesthetically. Aesthetics is the glue that keeps the text alive through history. In other words, people continue to say, to one degree or another, "I like it." If they don't say, "I like it," there will never be a question of interpreting it [laughs] or transmitting it historically, because it's going to disappear. As Dr. Johnson said, "That book is good in vain which the reader throws away." In other words, from the standpoint of interpretation or from the standpoint of philosophical reflection or whatever you might wish to call it, a book may be good, just incontestably good--but if it didn't please, if it didn't give pleasure, if it didn't attach itself to a reading public aesthetically by means of pleasing, none of what would follow in the hermeneutic process could ever take place.

So that's why Jauss makes such a point of distinguishing between the aesthetic and the interpretive. Then of course the historical study of reception is what shows us the degree to which any set of moments of aesthetic and interpretive reception is mediated by what has gone before it. In other words, a text gradually changes as a result of its reception, and if we don't study reception, we are left naively supposing that time has passed and that the past has become sort of remote from us so we have certain problems interpreting; but these problems as far as we know haven't arisen from anything that could properly be called change. There has been an unfolding process of successive interpretations whereby a text has gone through sea changes: it's become less popular, more popular, more richly interpreted and less richly interpreted, but tends to keep eddying out from what it was sensed to be originally, to the point where all sorts of accretive implications and sources of pleasure may arrive as we understand it. In a certain sense, once again it's like "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," but now it's not just Pierre Menard and Miguel de Cervantes. It's as though a succession of people, perhaps whose native language was not French necessarily but who knows--German, Russian, whatever--continued to write in Spanish a text which turns out to be word-for-word *Don Quixote* as the centuries pass, each one acquiring a whole new world of associations and implications and giving pleasure in successively new ways. When we finally get to the point in the late nineteenth century, when we encounter this Frenchman, Pierre Menard, writing *Don Quixote*,the important thing would be to understand that lots of people have done it between him and Cervantes. This is a kind of skeletal model of how a reception history according to Jauss might work.

Now the history of reception studies two things. It studies changing horizons of expectation, and that's something you're familiar with from Iser--that is to say, the way in which a reader has to come to terms with conventions surrounding expectation in any given text, in order to be able to negotiate what's new and what's nearly merely culinary in the text--it involves changing horizons of expectations which don't just change once in the here and now, but have changed successively through time. It also involves changing semantic possibilities or, if you will, changing possibilities for and of significance--what does the text mean for me now?--but understood again not just as something that matters for me, but has successively mattered for successive generations of readers in between.

Just to take examples of how this might work in the here and now, there is just now on Broadway a revival of *Damn Yankees*, which is about a baseball player who sells his soul in order to beat the Yankees. One can't help but think that the revival of interest in *Damn Yankees* has something to do with the steroid scandals and the way in which so many baseball players do sell their souls in order to win and in order to have good careers. It occurs to one that it is in this sort of atmosphere of social and cultural censure that we're suddenly interested in *Damn Yankees* again. Perhaps there will be a revival of *Tony the Tow Truck* because in the economic downturn, obviously to be rich or to be glamorous like Neato or to be busy like Speedy--all of this becomes obsolete, more or less irrelevant and beside the point, and what really matters is little guys helping each other. So *Tony the Tow Truck* could be revived today as a parable of the good life in the downturn, and so it will probably be read by everyone, it will give pleasure, it will therefore be interpreted, and it will survive to live another day historically, fulfilling the three moments of the study of the history of reception required by Jauss.

All right. So with that said, it's been a very interesting fifty minutes I think. [laughter] With that said, I hope you all have a good break and we'll see you when you get back.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 17 Transcript**

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| March 24, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** As we get into social perspectives on literature and art, you may ask yourself out of idle curiosity, or perhaps even peevishly, "Why Marx? Why so much Marx? Why is it Marx who seems to stand behind the idea that the social criticism of art is the best and most relevant way to approach this subject matter?" Well, it's because whatever the outcome of Marxist thought may have proven to be historically, it's nevertheless the case to this day that the most devastating critique of existing ideas about things, of states of affairs that, as it were, meander along without too much self-consciousness, remains the Marxist one, together perhaps with the Freudian one. When we turn to Jameson next time, we'll see that in both cases--and we'll be working a little bit with this today, too, when we turn to Benjamin--we'll see that in both cases it has to do with the way in which we are brought up short by the kind of criticism which argues that somehow standing behind our conception of reality and our understanding of our place in the world, there is one form or another of the "unconscious." We have, arguably, in this course in literary theory first taken up notions of a linguistic unconscious, or in any case linguistic preconditioning, then taken up notions of a psychoanalytic unconscious; and now, in the very title of Jameson's book from which we'll be considering an excerpt in the next lecture, we have the notion of the political unconscious.

There *are* other ways of effecting a social criticism of literature and art. From the right, there is an extraordinary book by Leo Strauss on Aristophanes, together with his great readings of the traditional texts of political philosophy. There is, of course, a very strong *liberal* tradition of criticism, particularly in the public sphere, in the journalism of the public sphere. Perhaps the most notable proponent of a liberal criticism of art undertaken from a social point of view is the work collected in Lionel Trilling's *The Literal-The Liberal Imagination.* So there are options, but by far the most pervasive mode of social critique in literary theory and in the modern history of thinking about literature remains the Marxist one. As much as we can be in working through these materials, our concern is of course primarily with Marxist aesthetics. What are the options for a Marxist critic in aesthetic terms? That's, of course, what we're going to be taking up in a moment and also when we turn to Fredric Jameson on Thursday.

In the meantime, what about Marx? I think I can take it for granted in a course of this kind that most of you have some familiarity with the history of ideas and with Western culture. I think I can take it for granted that most of you have some notion, just as you have some notion about Freud, of what Marx is all about. Of particular importance for the kinds of criticism we undertake to read in this moment of the course is, of course, the idea of ideology.

Now ideology in the writings of both Marx and Engels, and in all the complex history of the writings that have succeeded them--they were "founders of discursivity" and there has been great debate within the Marxist tradition!--"ideology" is a term about which there has never been wholehearted agreement. Primarily, the disagreement concerning ideology in this tradition has to do with whether or not ideology ought properly to be ascribed to conscious as well as to unconscious preconceptions about the world. In other words, if I know really to the core perfectly well that the moon is made of green cheese--I can prove it, I have no doubt about it, and it's not something that I'm unaware that I think--but if at the same time, if my opinion, my belief, my expression of fact to the effect that the moon is made of green cheese, can be demystified as ideology, the question is: well, is it still ideology if I'm quite conscious [laughs] of knowing that the moon is made of green cheese and prepared to defend my position?--just as a kind of belated aristocrat, prepared to defend the idea that hierarchy and privilege is appropriate in society, is perfectly conscious that this is an unpopular idea but nevertheless fully committed to it and prepared to defend it?

The question sometimes in Marxism is, "Is this still ideology?" Particularly in the writings of Engels, perhaps more than in the writings of Marx, the answer by and large is, "It is." Ideology is essentially the belief that perspective is truth. That is to say, that the way in which things appear from the material and economically grounded standpoint of my own consciousness is not just the way they appear to me, but the way they actually are. Now this is a mode of belief which in various historical periods, according to Marx, has characterized each dominant class in turn. With the rise of capitalism, the evolution of capitalism into what's called late capitalism, of course this ideology is primarily what's called "the bourgeois ideology." In other words, the idea that the various premises on which bourgeois, middle class, existence is based--the premises that have allowed for the rise and appropriation of power of the middle class; the idea, for example, of the work ethic; the idea of family; the idea of certain forms of moral behavior--all of this is "ideological" insofar as it is supposed to be valid and equally the case for all in all circumstances at all historical times: in other words, the belief that what I see the world to be is just universally the way the world is. That is the general characterization of ideology.

Now we've seen this, of course. We began the course with the quotation from Marx, from Marx's *Kapital*,on commodity fetishism. We've seen this in the way in which it is just spontaneously supposed reflexively, without reflection, that the labor properties of something that's produced--that is to say the value that can accrue to it because of the amount of labor that's gone into it--is actually something that inheres in the product itself of labor. This, of course, applies as well to art, and it's something that Benjamin is fully aware of alluding to when he talks about "the aura." If I forget that art is *produced*--that a certain quantum of labor, in other words, has gone into the emergence of the work of art--and if I simply, in rapt contemplative attention, address myself to the work of art itself as though it had objective value apart from having been produced, in a mode of production, then what I'm doing is "commodifying" the work of art. From Benjamin's point of view, in other words, to be seduced by the aura of the work of art is, in a certain sense, to experience the work of art ideologically as a commodity.

All right. Now returning then to the whole question of the aesthetic objectives of Marxist criticism, there are basically four options. In other words, Marxist criticism has not consistently agreed--particularly in its more sophisticated versions--about what the aesthetic of art ought actually to be. In other words, how should art reflect society? How should it constitute a critique of society? How should it predict an ideal, emergent, utopian society? All of these questions are questions of aesthetics, because the way in which art does express the social is necessarily aesthetic. It's done through form. It's done through genre. It's done as a matter of style. It's done ultimately, as the Marxists would say, in this or that mode of production. All of these mediations of what you might call the expression of society, then, are understood as the aesthetic in Marxist thought and need to be understood in terms of possible options.

The aesthetic of Marx and Engels themselves was realist, but it was a kind of realism that was really rather sophisticated. When aspiring writers, already with the idea that they ought to be writing for the advancement of the proletariat, would write Engels--I'm thinking of Ferdinand Lassalle, Mina Kautsky, other people--would send Engels manuscripts of their sort of "socialist realist" novels, Engels hated them. He [laughs] just couldn't stand that kind of literature, and he said in effect, No, no, no, no. You don't have to glorify the proletariat. You don't have to project a future in this way. What you want to do is see, in a way that exposes it, the social dynamic as it exists. What you want to do is understand the world realistically but not tendentiously--that is to say, not from an open point of view. Engels' literary hero was Balzac, who was a royalist reactionary but who nevertheless, in Engels' view, was so brilliant in evoking society in all of its manifold complexities, particularly in the complexity of its class structure, that this was the appropriate model for people hoping to engage in the business of realist writing.

Now this was a mode of thought that prevailed largely in Marxism through its early energetic years, including the early energetic years of the Revolution itself. In 1927, the literary philosopher Georg Lukacs, L-u-k-a-c-s, who had been a kind of Hegelian theorist of literature--he'd written a very brilliant book called *The Theory of the Novel* before he turned to Marxist thought--in 1927 still, and notice that this is the same year in which Eichenbaum is writing his "Theory of the Formal Method"and the same year in which Benjamin visits Moscow--in other words, a period of real continued social and intellectual ferment within the framework of Marxist government--in 1927 he wrote a book called *The Historical Novel.* This book reads as though it were taken from Engels' letters. It's partly an attack on what Lukacs took to be the sort of narcissistic inwardness of High Modernism, particularly Joyce and Proust. It's a tendentious attack and certainly subject to criticism on all sorts of grounds. It's partly that, but it's also argued just in the way that Engels championed Balzac in his letters. It's a book that champions the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Scott, too, was a political reactionary, a Tory, but one whose great dialectical balances in his novels between highland and lowland, feudal and mercantile, Scotland and England--whose balances of an old social order with an emerging social order Lukacs took to be perfect exemplifications of what realism, of seeing class relations as they really are, can do.

So this is the tradition of realist aesthetics in Marxist criticism, but then as--really dating from 1927, precisely with the rise of Stalin--things began to change, at least in the Soviet sphere, the original ideas of all these people who used to write to Engels--Mina Kautsky, Ferdinand Lassalle, writers of that kind--began to prevail in Soviet thought. There was a literary critic named Zhnadov who articulated a doctrine of socialist realism. Even Marxist critics themselves in those days devised a sort of joke about the sort of novel that Zhnadov had in mind. You probably know the joke: Boy meets tractor, boy loses tractor, boy goes to the city to find tractor, finds tractor, continues to be in love, takes tractor back to the countryside and lives happily ever after. This fundamental plot, obviously a variant on the marriage plot that very much engaged also in what [laughs] Benjamin would call "the mechanical aspect of reproduction"-- [laughter] [laughs] this sort of plot as the characteristic plot of socialist realism began to take hold officially, so that in 1934 the Soviet culture minister, Bukharin, convened an International Soviet Writers Conference in which it was simply decreed from on high that henceforth literary practice would consist in the promotion, of an exemplification of, socialist realism. This continued really right up until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, since until then there really was a form of censorship abroad in Soviet and Soviet sphere societies to the effect that literature was subject to challenge, possibly to suppression, if it didn't adhere to socialist realist tenets.

So those are the forms of realism that I think are most often identified with Marxist criticism and its possibilities; but as a matter of fact, probably the most dynamic criticism since Lukacs of the twentieth century has recognized that realism is something that, after all, from a Marxist perspective can easily be shown to have been commandeered by the bourgeoisie. Who else "tells it like it is"? Who else insists that reality is just one drink below par? Who else insists that he or she is a realist?--other than the characteristic sort of middle class person who tells you that they've been there, done that and know everything that there is to know? The middle class in other words, from the standpoint of much Marxist thought since Lukacs, has commandeered for itself--just as it commandeers everything else for itself--has commandeered for itself the idea of realism which has therefore become, in these views, outmoded aesthetically.

Now Benjamin is himself acutely conscious of this problem, and he insists that realism in a variety of ways is a kind of late capitalist form of commodifying the aura. It is the last gasp of bourgeois art in a variety of ways, he says hopefully. It needs to be counteracted with what he takes to be a *participatory* aesthetic: an aesthetic of the fragment, an aesthetic of intermittent attention of participation, which does not, nevertheless, in any way involve a sense of persistently contemplating that which is real, but emphasizes rather the idea that one is oneself in a communal spirit engaged with the very mode of production of the work of art and somehow or another involved in that. That's what we'll come back to when we turn to Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay.

Perhaps the most unusual aesthetic move for a Marxist critic is the one that you will find in Adorno. Adorno was devoted to precisely what Lukacs had attacked in *The Historical Novel*, namely the High Modernist aesthetic. He admired Beckett in literature. He admired Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in music. Adorno was by training a musicologist, and he devoted much of his writing career to producing essays and treatises on music and the history of music. These were heroes in Adorno's pantheon, and of course, the question arises: how can these people who have nothing to say about society, who are totally preoccupied with form, and who seem to be indifferent to the whole course of history--how can these people be the aesthetic heroes of a Marxist critic? This is something you see much more clearly in the "Fetish Character" essay, from which I've given you the two excerpts which I hope you have. I want to pause over them because I think Adorno's essay--while perhaps a little quixotic, because after all, who ever could profit from a concept of this kind?--Adorno's essay is nevertheless rather brilliant in its distinction between the totality, or wholeness, that's offered to you by artistic form and the mere totalization or totalitarianism that's offered to you by modern hegemonic forms of government--whether truly totalitarian or insidiously totalitarian like, for example, the "culture industry" to which he devotes the essay that you've read.

So this is what Adorno says in these two passages. He's talking about the way in which people in the culture industry who appreciate music are completely victimized by the coloratura local effect, what you might call--this is a conductor whom Adorno hated--the Toscanini effect: that flourishing of a particular moment in a concerto, the riding it into the ground at the expense of the whole, and everything that has what Adorno elsewhere calls "lip-smacking euphony"; in other words, a kind of cultivation of perfection of local sound, as opposed to an awareness of the total composition. So he says in the first passage:

The delight in the moment and the gay façade become an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted along his line of least resistance [because after all, it's so beautiful to listen to] into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of the whole as they sometimes do in Modernism. [Dissonance, in other words, is in and of itself a critique of that overarching harmony with which we associate wholeness, right? So there's a real sense in which the parts can be understood as a critique of the whole without challenging or breaking down the whole.] No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of the whole. Instead they suspend the critique which the successful aesthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society.

In other words, nothing can criticize the inauthenticity of the bad totalities of society except the authenticity of a genuine achieved wholeness in a work of art. The difference between these senses of the whole is precisely the zone of critique which in Adorno's view might--just might--awaken the victim of the culture industry from the slumbers of happy conformism and acquiescence.

Now in the second passage, just to reinforce this:

Great Modernist composers like Berg, Schoenberg and Webern are called individualists by other Marxist critics [in other words, by people like Lukacs who don't like what Lukacs would call "fetishization of form," reification of form at the expense of social reference and expression], and yet their work is nothing but a single dialogue with the powers that destroy individuality, powers whose formless shadows fall gigantically on their music. In music, too, collective powers are liquidating an individuality past saving, but against them only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of collectivity.

In other words, the totality--the achieved, successful, authentic totality--of the work of art models the totality of a collective state in ways that none of the false totalities of current hegemonies can possibly do or even approximate. In other words, there is an implicit politics--in Adorno's argument--in pure form. The achievement of pure form, which is after all a collection of parts, is an implicit politics modeling the achievement of a collective society.

So that is the argument of Adorno. It's a fascinating one. As I say, it's perhaps somewhat quixotic because it's kind of hard to imagine anyone actually listening to Schoenberg and saying, "Gee. Maybe I should be a communist." [laughter] [laughs] Actually putting this to work, in other words, entails a certain amount of difficulty, but at the same time, intellectually, it seems to me to be a fascinating turn of thought and one that certainly does give one pause, if only because Marxist criticism is so often engaged in a critique of what it takes to be the mainstream aesthetic of Western civilization, which is a kind of fetishization of wholeness. Think of the New Criticism, the unity of the poem, the discrete ontological object as a unified whole. This is, of course, commonplace in being attacked by Marxist criticism, and it's very interesting to see a figure like Adorno, a champion of this very wholeness, who sees it as a model not of narcissistic individuality, but rather of collectivity.

All right. Finally--and I won't pause much over this because it's going to be the subject of Thursday's lecture--the last aesthetic option for Marxism is a surprising one. It actually goes back to a book by Ernst Bloch called *The Principle of Hope*,in which Bloch essentially argues that in the world as we have it--in other words, the grinding down of hope, the grinding down of possibility for all in late capitalism--there is no longer any hope available. This is a kind of gloomy prognosis with which Bloch counters the idea that especially in folk art, folkways, oral culture and in popular culture--in other words, in the expressions of longing one finds in the work of the dispossessed and the oppressed--there is a kind of utopianism, a *romance*, and a sense not so much of wishing for something past, even though it seems to take the form of nostalgia, but rather a projection of a possibility on the future which is simply unavailable in the real world.

Of course, the best example I can think of is "The Big Rock Candy Mountain." This is a song sung by people on chain gangs about liquor running down the sides of mountains in rivulets and everything just as it should be. "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," in other words, is a perfect example of the "principle of hope" as Ernst Bloch understands it. This is something that's picked up and taken very seriously by Fredric Jameson, not so much in the excerpt from *The Political Unconscious* that you'll be reading for the lecture but in an earlier part of that introductory chapter in which he talks about the importance of romance replacing the bankrupt aesthetic of realism--the aesthetic of realism that has been appropriated by the bourgeoisie--and as expressing in a seemingly hopeless world the hopes of the oppressed and the dispossessed. So this too, the idea of romance, the idea of utopian evocation, is a last, viable aesthetic for a certain turn of Marxist thought which has been interesting and productive in the twentieth century.

All right. So today we take our numbers two and three, the participatory aesthetic of Benjamin and the Modernist totality of Adorno. We see the way in which they conflict with each other.

Now in some ways I wish we were still reading the "Fetish Character" essay because it has more to do with aesthetics than the excerpt you have in your book by Adorno and Horkheimer called "The Culture Industry"; but "The Culture Industry," too, is a response, as was the "Fetish Character in Music" which was published 1938, to Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Adorno was a close friend of Benjamin's and exchanged letters about Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay with him--letters, by the way, which were republished in *The New Left Review* of 1973, for those of you who are interested in looking at them, because this is another source of ways of seeing how Benjamin and Adorno were in conflict over this matter.

Adorno and Benjamin, as I say, were very close friends. Benjamin was only for a relatively brief period in the 1930s a Marxist critic. He had hitherto been much more interested in cabalistic literature and in the Hegelian tradition of philosophy, and even in the 1930s he was famously torn between two possibilities. He had visited Moscow in 1926, '27. He had become interested in what was still, after all, as I've said, a vibrant culture in the Soviet world. At the same time, he had become very close friends with the Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht and had fallen also very much under his influence. But another very close friend, a friend equally influential, was the Jewish theologian Gershom Scholem, who had emigrated to Jerusalem, who was a Zionist, and who wanted Benjamin to join him studying the Torah in Jerusalem and to engage himself in that community, as opposed to the sort of international Marxist community toward which Benjamin was perhaps more leaning, especially owing to his friendship with Brecht.

So even in the 1930s, even in the period when Benjamin wrote his "Work of Art" essay and also a shorter, even more tendentious essay called "The Author as Producer," 1936, an essay in which he actually takes up at length something he mentions in passing in "The Work of Art" essay--that is to say, the way in which in Russia everybody is judged not just for being able to do a job but for being able to talk about doing a job, to be able to write it up, to describe it, to write a brochure about it, to write a letter to the paper about it, and in other words to participate, to be engaged not just in the labor force but also in reflections on the labor force in a way that really does mean that everyone can be an author and also that every author is a producer--that is to say, engaged in *writing*, which is part and parcel of the productions of labor, all of this was a focus of Benjamin's--at the same time, even within this focus, part of him is being torn in another direction. No one can for a minute, in reading the "Work of Art" essay, fail to notice that Benjamin evinces tremendous nostalgia for the "aura." It's not an easy thing for Benjamin to say we have to tear down the aura and replace it with a kind of participatory mode that engages with and is involved in mechanical reproduction.

I don't know: when I was a student I worked on and off--I did this for years--in an art supply and picture framing store on the Berkeley campus, and of course, every student needed a picture to put in his room; so we had huge stacks of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and Matisse's *Dancers* and certain other paintings, all of them eighteen-by-twenty-four, which we called "brushstroke prints." They were mounted on cardboard, and a huge--whhhhoooom!--cookie-cutter of some kind would come down on top of them, actually laminating into the print the appearance of brushstrokes. These things, if you squinted at the beginning of a semester you saw the stack going down like this. [Gestures.] Then before you knew it, the stacks were gone, and so you knew for a fact, because you knew how many prints were in that stack, that 240 students' rooms were festooned with Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and [laughter] [laughs] Matisse's *Dancers*. You said to yourself, This is the fruit of mechanical reproduction? You asked yourself, again, Just what is the value of this as an aesthetic? Yeah, it takes it out of the museum. Yeah, it means that nobody has to pay fifty bucks in order to wait in a long line in order to get a peep at the *Mona Lisa*. Yeah, it really does bring it home to the people, but how and in what way and at the expense of what genuine knowledge of art history, and even of Van Gogh and Matisse, does the fetishization--because it is, after all, [laughs] fetishization--of these little mechanically reproduced brushstroke prints amount to?

Obviously, this introduces complications, and they're complications--the whole point of my anecdote--they're complications of which Benjamin is far from being unaware. He knows extremely well that, after all, the greatest threat to an aesthetic of the kind he propounds is that it can be commandeered by capital. Of course, I'm getting ahead of myself, because that's precisely what Adorno says in opposition to him, but in the meantime that was the situation of Benjamin in the 1930s.

Adorno, in the meantime, had gone to the United States. Benjamin was living in Paris ever since 1933. Adorno had gone to the United States, which he hated. The gloom of Adorno's view of the world is not so much the result of his experience of the weak forms of democracy in the Weimar Republic, sort of ominous as those experiences were; not even perhaps so much the rise of Nazism, because like Benjamin he was able to flee that. The gloom that he felt and the gloom that pervades his writing, which after all starts in the mid 1940s, is the result of his exposure to American culture.

He simply could not stand us or our culture. He couldn't stand "jazz." Remember this was not yet the age of bebop, and I've always felt that maybe if Adorno had hung around a little longer he could have been reconciled. It was no longer the jazz of the aptly named conductor Paul *Whiteman*. It was jazz that was somewhat more serious. He couldn't stand the movies. I have just been, for purposes I won't go into, watching a film called "Broadway Melody of 1940" with Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell tap dancing. Fred Astaire and his sidekick, George Murphy, are grabbed out of obscurity in order to be the leading gentlemen of Eleanor Powell. It's a perfect sort of Samuel Smiles success story, replete with the necessity of occasional self-sacrifice on the part of both of them. It is made for the wrath of Adorno, this film. [laughter] [laughs] It's nevertheless, in ways that Adorno could not possibly ever come to feel, quite charming.

But Adorno wanted no part of American culture. He was in anticipation of that whole trend of American sociology obsessed with the way in which American society is dominated by conformism. He takes this to be the effect, the result, of the pervasive, oppressive thumb of the culture industry, so that our very eccentricities, our very quirks and little originalities, all of them are assessed carefully by the culture industry. A niche is found for them, and the next thing you know, we're suborned just like everybody else. There is for Adorno no sideways escape from the monolithic, ubiquitous surveillance and dominance of the culture industry.

All right. Now the "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is influenced obviously by the promise of Russian art before 1934: the films of Vertov in particular, and other ways in which it's possible for Benjamin to say that the spectator really can be a participant. It's possible for Benjamin to say that in such contexts it's a good thing that the pedastaled aura of the work of art has been successfully torn down, that we no longer stand in rapturous attention and in contemplative postures before works of art but that we reach out to them and they reach out to us. We meet halfway and we become engaged with them; we become part of them.

Now how does this work in this essay? Primarily through the insertion of the labor function of the apparatus in the represented field. Now this is a complicated idea that Benjamin develops in various ways. What he means by this is that the spectator sees the object, sees whatever the field in question is, from the perspective of the mode of production--that is to say, the spectator participates by joining the *process* of production. Most obviously this means that when I watch a film, I see the film, necessarily of course, from the standpoint of the camera eye; my eye, in other words, joins that of the camera. Very interesting that in Berlin in the 1930s, Christopher Isherwood in his *Berlin Stories* wrote one story called "I Am a Camera" that took place in Berlin. I have often thought there's some sort of symbiosis between the notion of "I Am a Camera" in Christopher Isherwood and the way in which it may be appropriated--or it may simply be a happy coincidence--in the work of Benjamin. But in a certain sense for Benjamin, the spectator, in order to be a participant, *is* the camera, is in other words the camera's eye.

What is the consequence of this? Well, the spectator is, in a certain sense, then, a *critic*. Benjamin keeps comparing the eye of the camera with a "test." He even compares it with the vocational aptitude test. It's as though what in the theater would count as an audition--I appear before the director, I recite certain lines of the script, and I'm either told to come back another day or I'm given the part--it's as though to substitute what counts as an audition with the perpetual audition of the film actor before the camera, because after all, there is the camera recording what the film actor is doing--not this camera up here, by the way--but ordinarily, the camera has the option of later on throwing out what isn't any good. [laughs] Would that they [gestures to film crew] could, but the film camera can edit. The film camera is part of an editing "process, so that the actor in front of the camera is perpetually being tested and auditioned in just the way that you might be tested or auditioned if you took a vocational aptitude test for a job.

That's Benjamin's point, and what he means to say is that if the spectator then takes the camera's eye position the spectator, him- or herself then becomes a critic, like a sports fan. Benjamin doesn't pretend for a moment that to become a critic of this kind is to be a good critic--not at all. Benjamin agrees with people who say, "Well, we go to the movies when we're tired. All we want is to be entertained." In fact, we are *distracted*. We are critics, as Benjamin argues, in a state of distraction. The German word is *Zerstreutheit*. We are *zerstreut*. We are perpetually, in other words, not quite paying attention even while at the same time we are seeing things from the camera-eye point of view. To see things from the camera-- I'll come back to distraction in a minute--from the camera-eye point of view is a position of privilege because it exposes, as Benjamin tells us again and again, things about reality that we wouldn't otherwise notice. The camera is capable of slow motion, and it's capable of angles of incidence that we couldn't otherwise see. It's capable of all kinds of effects.

Let me enumerate them. I think it's on page 1235 at the top of the left-hand column: "…photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape natural vision." Then on page 1245, he gives this process a name. He says, "The camera introduces us to unconscious optics just as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses." In other words, the camera's-eye point of view is a privileged perspective. It does show us things as they are or, perhaps if not as they are, at least it reminds us that things as we see them with the naked eye aren't necessarily "as they are." It's not, perhaps, so much a notion of privileging what the camera sees as real over against what I see. It's a question of the camera reminding us--demystifying our ideology, in short--reminding us that things as we see them aren't necessarily the way things are. The camera, too, may have its bias. Slow motion is an obvious bias, speed-up is an obvious bias; but the speed at which we see things may be a bias, too.

It's not that the psychoanalytic unconscious is telling the truth. Dreams are crazy, right? [laughs] That's the whole point of dreams. It's not that it's reality over against a mystified world seen in consciousness. It's a challenge to consciousness by the world evoked in the unconscious, not a question of what's real and what isn't real. Well, it's the same with the camera's-eye point of view, and it's all of this which, in a certain sense, awakens the spectator from the complacency of supposing his or her own perspective to be the truth. At the same time, admittedly the spectator is distracted--remember *Zerstreutheit*.

Well, what then? The point is this: there is a kind of dialectic between distraction and shock which is crucial, Benjamin thinks, to a genuine aesthetic revelation. Perhaps the best analogy is with Saul on the road to Damascus. You know how the story goes: Saul is trotting along on his horse and not paying a lot of attention. He's distracted, daydreaming, whatever, and whhoooop! All of a sudden he falls off his horse, right? That's a shock, and it's such a shock that he's converted to Christianity, and he stands up and he brushes himself off and his name is Paul, right? He's a completely different person as a result. This couldn't have happened, in other words, if he hadn't been distracted. Right? That's Benjamin's point. Distraction is the atmosphere or medium in which the shock of revelation can take place, and that's the advantage of distraction.

He gives a wonderful example of the way in which we do receive works of art in distraction even if we're the kind of person who does pay a lot of attention when they go to the movies. "Oh, that's not me," we say. Nevertheless, there is one way in which all of us receive works of art in a state of distraction, and that's in our reception of architecture. We pass through architecture. I work in the British Art Center every day. I have long since ceased to pay any attention to the British Art Center as a building. I receive the British Art Center, in other words, in a state of distraction, but that doesn't mean that it's not part of my aesthetic experience. It does, however, show that the aesthetic and the ways in which we process the forms of the world can be assimilated in more than one kind of state of attention. It is in one's bones, in a certain sense, to receive architecture; and yet at the same time, unless we are sort of tourists gaping in front of the Taj Mahal with a camera or something like that--and Benjamin does take that into account--unless we are in that particular mode, we receive the forms of our dwellings in a state of what you might call constructive distraction. All of that goes into Benjamin's aesthetic of participation.

Now I am out of time. Perhaps I have said just about as much about Adorno as I need to say, although admittedly I haven't said much about the "Culture Industry" essay. Maybe I'll come back to that briefly before launching into Jameson on Thursday. On Tuesday of next week, we'll be talking about the New Historicism. Then we'll bring Tony back and we'll go through all of these various perspectives that we will have been rehearsing to see what we can do with them when we read *Tony.*

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 18 Transcript**

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| March 26, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Well, I'd like to begin by pointing out that the first name of Fredric Jameson is spelled F-r-e-d-r-i-c. The reason I point that out is that most scholars don't seem to be able to grasp that simple fact and that references to him, which are rife in the critical literature, perhaps one-third of the time spell his first name wrong. So I thought it would be important for you to be among the cognoscenti and to know that it is spelled in the way that I just mentioned. It's a strange thing. When I started teaching I taught many, many, many sections of English 129, and of course in the first semester, the first text that we read was *The Iliad.* Now "Iliad" is spelled I-l-i-a-d. Why it is that of the student population I taught over all those years, hundreds and hundreds of students, fully a third of them spelled it I-l-l-i-a-d I really couldn't say, but there are words that simply seem to be insusceptible to being spelled correctly, [laughs] and one of those words is the first name of Fredric Jameson, so stand advised.

Okay. Now last time I talked about four possible options of an *aesthetic* nature for a Marxist approach to literature, and passed them in review. I mentioned realism, both realism according to the tastes and theoretical preferences of Engels and Lukacs, and also tendentious realism as it pervaded the Soviet world, especially after 1934; then also the participatory aesthetic of figures like Walter Benjamin, and the high Modernist aesthetic of the "whole" embraced particularly by Adorno--those last are the two aesthetic modes that we passed in review last time--and finally, as a fifth notion, the idea that realism being somehow outworn, having developed hardening of the arteries as a kind of a bourgeois perspective on things, needs somehow or another to be replaced aesthetically in the Marxist view of things by something else.

Perhaps the most eloquent proponent of replacing it with something is Jameson, who earlier in the introductory chapter of *The Political Unconscious*--much of which you've been assigned for today--writes a section which he calls "Magical Narratives" and which promotes, very much in keeping with the thinking of Northrop Frye about the role of romance in society--and particularly the religious role of romance in society--proposes that an aesthetic of the romance which entails folklore, the folk tale, the fairy tale, and various forms of folk expression as a magical resolution of conflicts that can't otherwise be resolved, is the more appropriate aesthetic to take up. The long passage that I sent to you last night, which I'd like quickly to go over, is meant to further the promotion of this aesthetic and also to pose for us a critique of what the consequences would be of lingering with a realist aesthetic. So Jameson says, on the second passage on your sheet:

Let Scott, Balzac and Dreiser serve as the [and remember that Balzac is the favorite author of Engels; Scott is the favorite author, at least in 1927, of Lukacs; and Dreiser is a figure from the so-called naturalist movement, the American novelist who is a very appropriate addition to the list. It's in that context that Jameson is dropping these particular names] non-chronological markers of the emergence of realism in its modern form. These first great realisms are characterized by a fundamental and exhilarating heterogeneity in their raw materials, and by a corresponding versatility in their narrative apparatus. At such moments a generic confinement to the existent [in other words, the only thing you have to do if you're a realist is talk about things the way they really are] has a paradoxically liberating effect on the registers of the text and releases a set of heterogeneous historical perspectives: the past for Scott, the future for Balzac, and the process of commodification for Dreiser--normally felt to be inconsistent with a focus on the historical present.

In other words, in Scott's treatment of history as dialectical, against the foil of the present there is envisioned a kind of romanticized evocation of a feudal past, and so it is in turn--I don't want to linger long over this with the other writers.

Indeed, this multiple temporality tends to be sealed off and re-contained again in high realism and naturalism [in other words, it starts getting too easy, and the formulas of representing and evoking the real begin to become, as I said, sclerotic. They begin to harden. They begin to confine us in ways that had hitherto been liberating] where a perfected narrative apparatus, in particular the threefold imperatives of authorial depersonalization--that is to say, the voice in *style indirect libre*, authorial depersonalization; unity of point of view, and restriction to scenic representation begin to confer on the realistic option the appearance of an asphyxiating self-imposed penance.

In other words, "this is all I can say and this is the only way I can say it. There are no other possibilities of literary expression because I now feel confined to this reification of the real, this insistence that the real, the evocation of the real, is my only literary option, and so it's no longer liberating."

It is in the context of this gradual reification in late capitalism that the romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and freedom from the reality principle.

*That* is, in a way, a jab at Freud, but at the same time an acknowledgement that Freud participates in a sort of growing despair over the necessity of confining oneself to the real, evoking freedom from the reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage.

Okay. So that's the aesthetic of Fredric Jameson, and before we begin an analysis--that is to say, before we begin to consider his three horizons or concentric circles of interpretation--from other points of view, I thought it would be interesting to find this *romance* aesthetic in those three levels. We're talking, of course, about the "political," the "social," and the "historical": the *political*, the kind of chronicle-like--as he puts it--record of successive happenings in a fictive context, constructed as a plot by some individual voice; the *social* as the conflict--or emergence into our awareness of its being a conflict--of what Jameson calls "ideologemes"--that is to say, ways of thinking about the world as expressed by disparate and conflicting classes; and then finally the *historical*, which Jameson calls "necessity." At the end of the essay, he says it's "what hurts," but in terms of literary analysis, as we'll see, it has to do with understanding the overlap of the succession of modes of production as they unfold in historical time. We'll have more to say about modes of production, but our basic three horizons, then--in which I am now going to look for the romance aesthetic--our basic three horizons, then, are what Jameson calls the political, the social and the historical.

It's important that he does sometimes call them *concentric* circles, because you have to understand that as you advance through the three stages, you're not leaving anything behind. The political is contained within the social and the social is contained within the historical. All of that is what is not to be left behind but is rather to be rethought, reconsidered. Jameson sometimes uses the word "rewritten," thinking of the text that is the object of one's study as one advances through these three stages. So that's why he thinks it appropriate to call them concentric circles.

So what is the essential *political* moment of the creative act? Well, it's what Jameson, borrowing from Kenneth Burke, calls "the symbolic act." As an individual writer, I undertake to resolve symbolically a contradiction--and Marxism is always about contradiction: that is to say, the way in which the perspective of any class exists in a contradictory relation both with its own needs and desires and with other classes. In any case, then, the symbolic act at the political level is designed to resolve a contradiction that can't be resolved by other means. In other words, it's a fantasy, it is the fairy tale, it is the princess and the pauper. It is the arbitrary happy ending tacked onto a situation for which in reality there would be no happy ending. In other words, it is a romance perspective about the world, the realistic approach to which would somehow or another leave us feeling much more confined.

"Slumdog Millionaire" is an interesting example. It's an auteur film made by Danny Boyle, an interesting example of an individual act which magically resolves a contradiction through the whole Bollywood apparatus that it brings to bear on it. The contradictions, of course, are rife between Hindu and Muslim, the contradictions entailed in globalization, the contradictions of caste--all of these contradictions, not to be resolved on a realistic plane, nevertheless can be resolved by an individual symbolic act: You hit the Lotto. You win against all odds a prize that makes you a millionaire. Who wants to be a millionaire? Well, we all [laughs] want to be millionaires, but only one of us miraculously, magically, through a series of completely implausible happenstances, is able to do so.

Now notice this: it's not that it doesn't happen. People do hit the Lotto. People do win the $64,000 question or whatever it is. It's not that it's absolute never-never land, but the point is--and I think this is really ultimately the point of that extravagant dance in the railroad station at the end of the film--the point is that even were it to happen in reality, it wouldn't resolve contradictions. That is to say, your life would not have that kind of scripted perfection: You get the girl, everything is going to be perfect, and the whole world falls in line, dancing behind you. This just [laughter] doesn't happen. In other words, it can be sort of tragic to hit the Lotto, as many stories of that kind have made clear to us. That, it seems to me, is finally how the film is somewhat self-conscious about its nature as a symbolic act. Anyway, that's the romance element of the political level of interpretation as understood by Jameson.

Now the second level brings to the surface the element of subversion that has to be entailed in this same fairy tale resolution of a conflict that can't otherwise be resolved. There are all sorts of other aspects at the second level, but remember I'm discovering the romance aesthetic here in all three levels before turning to other matters having to do with them. At the second level, on page 1297, the right-hand column, you have Ernst Bloch's understanding of the fairy tale. This is at the second level, about two thirds of the way down.

Thus, for instance, Bloch's reading of the fairy tale, with its magical wish-fulfillments and its Utopian fantasies of plenty and the *pays de Cocagne*, restores the dialogical ["The Big Rock Candy Mountain" basically *is* the *pays de Cocagne*] and antagonistic content of this "form" by exhibiting it as a systematic deconstruction and undermining of the hegemonic aristocratic form of the epic…

In other words, it's not just a symbolic act, the fairy tale. It is a thumbing of the nose at hegemony. It is, in other words, an act of antagonism which, of course, recognizes the impossibility of resolution or reconciliation precisely in its register of antagonism; so that at the second level, the social level, in which the ideological voices of various classes and perspective are openly in conflict, you don't get resolution. What you get is subversion and reaction. You get, in other words, a tension of voices that is not meant to resolve anything but is rather meant to lay bare the conflicts that are entailed.

Still, however, in doing this you get the kind of carnivalesque uprising from below which Jameson associates with romance: that letting off of steam, that entertaining of the possibility of utopia that you get, for example, in the early modern period on that day in which someone is called the Lord of Misrule, the entire social order for one day is inverted, the low are elevated to positions of authority, and for one day you get the keys to the castle, in effect. This is a day in which conflict is expressed and not resolved because everybody knows that tomorrow it's going to be the same old-same old and back to business as usual; but there is still the romance element, the idea that folk expression is simultaneously the expression of a wish, a wish similar to the wish that's expressed at the first political level but the expression of a wish which is collective--that is to say, in behalf of a class and a perspective, and which is also, with great self-consciousness, not a wish that can in any way expect to be fulfilled, but rather one that is used subversively with respect to the dominant ideology that it expresses its abrasiveness toward.

The third level involves the way in which there is at any given time at the historical level a dominant mode of production. A mode of production is a system of thought or production generated by an overarching social or economic arrangement. Jameson lists them in his text, and we'll come back to them and we'll read that listing and we'll think about those terms; but Jameson gives an excellent example of the way in which, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment began to be the dominant form of expression of an emergent mercantile, successfully capitalist bourgeoisie. That is to say, the values that drove the development of industrialization and capital were those values emerging from feudal and aristocratic ideals that were less realistic, less engaged with actuality and the way in which you can actually get things done in the world. The Enlightenment is understood as an expression of an emerging new mode of production, or capitalism as it succeeds feudalism.

But Jameson points out--and here's where romance comes in, and then after that we'll move on to our next point--that at the same time you get Enlightenment, at the same time that that does seem to become the dominant form of expression, you also get two modes of resistance or contestation. On the one hand you have Romanticism, which can be understood in this context as a kind of atavistic throwback to aristocratic and feudal idealism, codes of conduct, beliefs, visions of utopia within Romanticism--all of them sort of trying to recode in an age of Enlightenment various sorts of idealism that had come to seem outmoded. So that's a kind of, as it were, reactionary mode of production overlapping with or expressing itself through the dominant one. Then at the same time, you get *folk* resistance to the increasing mechanization of the Enlightenment. With Political Economy, with the rise of social engineering and with the various forms of social organization associated with Utilitarianism, you get folk resistance. You get popular resistance in the forms of protest, "frame-breaking," disruption of labor activity, protest against industrialization, all of which also--because it insists on earlier forms of agricultural and industrial cottage industries and so on--is atavistic, also a throwback to the way in which labor is performed or conducted under feudalism. So that, too, in the form of folk expression--of longing for, in this case, a utopian past, more agrarian, more individualized as a mode of labor, and more cottage-oriented--in all of this you get an overlapping mode of production. So the tension among modes of production, which is the focus of analysis at the historical level, the third historical level, can also be understood in terms of the romance of utopian nostalgia.

All right. So *that*, then, just to show how Jameson's aesthetic, his sense of the importance of romance, can be seen to pervade the way in which he understands analysis at all three of these levels. So that's his aesthetic. The question then is: what is the *interpretative* payoff of undertaking literary analysis at these three levels? That is to say, why should we take the trouble to do it? What's so interesting about it? Well, from Jameson's point of view--this, of course, is the title of his book--each of these three modes of analysis is designed to disclose, to uncover, to lay bare an element of the "political unconscious." *As* for deconstruction, *as* for Freud, this sense of a political unconscious exposes or reveals something that is antithetical to ordinary consciousness--that is to say, undermines our conventional understanding of things, shows us that beneath our conventional understanding of things there are laws and causes and dynamics at work that we need to understand.

In this case, however, the unconscious in question is not a linguistic unconscious; it is not a psychological unconscious. It is a political unconscious. Insofar, in other words, as we are political animals, the acts that we perform, the dialogues that we engage in, the modes of production that we participate in--all of them have political ramifications; that is to say, we do what we do, as opposed to doing other things, for political reasons of which we may not be fully aware--hence the emphasis in analysis of this kind on the political unconscious.

So again the three levels. Going back to the idea of the "symbolic" act: what political unconscious, in other words, is revealed by a symbolic act? Well, Jameson gives a wonderful example taken from structuralism, and you can see that he leans very heavily on structuralism for his understanding of the way in which something is going on in a narrative form of which it is not immediately apparent that anybody can be aware. Take for example Caduveo face painting. Levi-Strauss asks both in *The Savage Mind* and again in *Tristes Tropiques*:why the excessive complexity of these paintings? Why the curious tension in the marks on the faces between the vertical and the horizontal? Why, in other words, do you get a feeling of tension, of aesthetic beauty but also of tension and complication, in this cross-hatching, in this sense of the relation between the vertical and the horizontal?

So Jameson's argument, which he brings out more clearly than Levi-Strauss--but Levi-Strauss does say the same thing, contrasting the Caduveo in this respect with neighboring tribes like the Bororo--his explanation is that the Caduveo are a hierarchical society in which there are open and obvious forms of inequality that one must perforce be aware of as a member of the tribe, but that neighboring tribes, (and this is something that probably the tribe itself can observe) work out a way of seeming to *resolve* the contradictions inherent in hierarchy by the exchange of moieties, which is to say, of kinship gifts and wedding gifts and so on--that Levi-Strauss talks about. This exchange of moieties seems to impose on these social orders in real life, in real terms, a way of making society more equal than it might otherwise be. Yes, it's still hierarchical, but at the same time, wealth is distributed, each person has his own form of asserting dignity, and so on.

The Caduveo doesn't have this. Levi-Strauss's and Jameson's point is that the Caduveo never really worked that out, so they're stuck with a simple form of hierarchical organization. Face painting, then, according to Levi-Strauss followed by Jameson, is their way of symbolically resolving the problem by introducing the horizontal--by introducing, in other words, the ways in which other tribes have successfully offset hierarchy with ways of distributing wealth and prestige more equally. The symbolic act which other tribes were able to accomplish in real life, in real terms, the Caduveo accomplish individually, with each individual woman painting her face as a symbolic act, a symbolic act expressing the political unconscious-- because this is not an act, we suppose, of which any individual is aware.

The unawareness, the lack of consciousness of what's going on in a story, is much more readily available to *us* in the Oedipus myth because that's the part of Levi-Strauss's "Structural Study of Myth" that we happen to have read. The *next* part is [laughs] Caduveo face painting, but in "The Structural Study of Myth," Levi-Strauss begins by talking about the Oedipus myth. Well, the whole point of that is, "Gee, there's a terrible contradiction, born from two or born from one." Plainly, no individual version of the story, certainly not Sophocles' version, is saying to itself, "Oh, this is a terrible contradiction. I don't know whether I'm born from two people or born from one person." That is the unconscious, in other words, of the story which is brought out, brought to the surface, by a structuralist analysis of the myth. Jameson doesn't talk about it because it's not in any obvious and immediate way a political problem or a problem susceptible of Marxist analysis. It *is* perhaps ultimately--everything is--but not immediately, and so he turns instead to a discussion of the Caduveo myth, which has as its unconscious an issue that's obviously a political one, but it is nevertheless the case that a structural analysis of a symbolic act is designed to and will inevitably reveal an element of unconscious thought, political or otherwise. That then is the way in which the political unconscious, as Jameson describes it, is brought out at the first political level of understanding, the individual symbolic act.

Now at the second level, the social, in which the text, as Jameson says, rewrites itself not as an individual act but as, very much in the spirit of Bakhtin, a heteroglossal expression of voices, of points of view, writing themselves as it were through the text--there the political unconscious in question is something that has to be understood in terms of ideologemes. In other words, people reflexively express, perhaps unbeknownst to themselves, views and opinions which are intelligible not arising out of their individuality, not because they are who they are, as they themselves might say--but rather because of their economic class and prestige status. In other words, because of their place in the world, it follows that they will hold certain views. They will be the mouthpieces, in other words, for certain ideologemes, and those ideologemes Jameson understands to be at least in part unconscious. One doesn't know, in other words, that the opinions one so fervently expresses and so devoutly believes in are opinions conditioned by the social circumstances in which one finds oneself, so that *literature* then becomes a kind of drama of ideologemes, a representation of unresolved conflict that manifests in the variety of class or status voices brought to bear.

You can see this is the point at which Jameson's work is closest to Bakhtin's and most clearly reflects some of the preoccupations of Bakhtin as we have encountered them already. Jameson gives a very good example of the way in which this conflict works--because part of the mystery of these clashes is that they always present themselves within a shared code. This already begins to look forward to the idea of the mode of production. At the bottom of page 1296, Jameson is talking about the violent religious controversies of the seventeenth century in England between Cavalier and Roundhead, with all the controversies surrounding the interregnum of Cromwell, the restoration of Charles the Second, and the tremendous ferment, largely religious ferment, taking place during that period; but this ferment for any Marxist--and Christopher Hill is the leading historian writing about this period who has made it most clearly intelligible in these terms--for any Marxist this conflict has an underlying political unconscious: that is, its ultimate motives are an assertion of rights and an expression of class views. This is the way Jameson puts it, bottom of page 1296: "…the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one…" He's alluding here to Bakhtin, for whom frequently the dialogical is simply a kind of happy cacophony of voices, a carnivalesque expression of chaos from below, all of which is a kind of yeast-like ferment, and somehow or another in the long run energizing and socially progressive.

But Jameson points out that the ideologeme is very often expressive of conflict as well, an antagonistic one, and that the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code. Thus, for instance, the shared master code of religion becomes in the 1640s in England the place in which the dominant formulations of a hegemonic theology are re-appropriated and polemically modified. In other words, the Church of England stands for--and this is the word that was used--"establishment." Roundhead points of view, various forms of Puritanism and other forms of religious rebellion, are antiestablishment, and yet they are all coded within the discourse of the Christian religion. That is to say, they have to fight it out on a common battlefield, and that's the way it is with conflict of this kind.

Maybe a contemporary example would be not so much in the sphere of religion. Well, *today* one could speak again of religion, but in the sixties and seventies it was maybe more a question of ethics. Think, for example, of the sexual revolution. Again there is a common ground, a sense of the centrality of sexual conduct to human life; but what you get in--not so much, perhaps, the conflict of classes as conflict of generations in this case--what you get in the conflict of generations is an inversion of values, not a new set of values exactly but a simple transvaluation of what exists. Everything that one faction considers bad, another faction transvalues and considers good. The very thing against which one is warned is the thing that one rushes to embrace and so on. So once again you get a clash, an unresolved clash, but a clash that arises from and participates in the semiotic structure of a common code, right? That's the way in which social antagonism expresses itself at the second level, and it usually involves, because there are underlying interests, elements of the political unconscious and brings to the surface elements of the political unconscious.

Finally, at the third level what comes out, what is made manifest, is the tension or clash among modes of production as they jostle each other historically. It's understood that the danger, as Jameson puts it, of thinking in terms of a succession of modes of production is that each one of those modes of production might seem like a synchronic moment. In other words, if you're in capitalism, you might get lulled into thinking that no other mode of production is available. If you're in patriarchy, you might get lulled into thinking that no other mode of production is available; yet as Jameson points out, the tension between corporate hierarchy and patriarchal hierarchy--the tension, in other words, which very often drives a wedge and has driven a wedge in polemic between Marxist and feminist points of view--is a reflection of the coexistence of modes of production from completely different eras: one contemporary, one completely--at least insofar as it was the dominant--a thing of the past, and yet persisting and still overlapping with a mode of production that is contemporary.

All of that is simply a matter of historical fact, but in literary analysis you begin to think of it in more formal terms, and you see, for example, the very choice of verse form--and I'm taking as an example Shelley's famous poem "The Ode to the West Wind"--you see the very choice of verse form as an instance of what Jameson calls "the ideology of form" that can be understood in terms of the conflict of modes of production. The verse form of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" has five strophes, and each strophe is exactly the same in form. It is simultaneously a sonnet and--the first twelve lines of which, concluding in a couplet--a succession of terza rima. Now these two forms brought together, synthesized as a single strophic form in Shelley, are coded in entirely different ways. Each aspect of them has an ideology. Terza rima is coded "prophecy" because it is in the tradition of Dante. It's the verse form in which *The Divine Comedy* is written, and it is a mode that is expressive of hope that resolves all contradiction in the divine, in the revelation of the divine, in the *Paradiso*;so that terza rima expresses for Shelley the hope of the poem, which is that the west wind will be through him the trumpet of a political prophecy. If winter's here, can spring be far behind? Revolution is in the offing, everything's going to be great.

But at the same time, the poem is shot through with a kind of pessimism--a sort of, if you will, realism; an awareness that this notion of prophecy is rather farfetched. Why should the wind do his bidding? The wind is just wind. It's not inspiration. Therefore, the very stanza which is written in terza rima is written at the same time as a sonnet, fourteen lines. The first stanza in particular is coded not just as a sonnet but also as an allusion specifically to one sonnet, Shakespeare's seventy-third sonnet, which begins "That time of year in me thou mayest behold"--in which I'm getting old. I don't have any hair left. I'm just a bare-ruined choir where late sweet birds sang. In other words, I am in a parlous state, I am getting old, and there's nothing to be done about it. At the end of the poem, the embers of my fire are about to be snuffed out. There is just no hope for it. That's the way it is: you get old. In other words, winter's here and spring isn't coming. There is no prophetic possibility. There is only the reality of the trajectory of a life spent. If there is rise, there is also fall. If there is development, there is also decline and decay, and these, as the sonnet form codes it, are simple facts of life that poetic idealism, that Romanticism, cannot override.

So what you get in Shelley's verse form is a tension between ideas, the prophetic idea which you can associate with a feudal and theocentric world in which the contradictions of reality really can be resolved theologically, on the one hand, and a kind of proto-realist tradition in which we just have to come to terms with the way things are, coded through--which is, after all, proto-Enlightenment, and Shakespeare is often sort of thought of as a proto-Enlightenment figure--the sonnet. So formally, both the terza rima and the sonnet participate in what Jameson calls "the ideology of form," and they reflect *modes of production*, feudal and Enlightenment respectively. They reflect attitudes that one can associate with those modes of production. So that's an example of the way in which the political--perhaps one had better call it quasi-conscious because Shelley was an incredibly self-conscious poet--the way in which the political "quasi-conscious" expresses itself at the third or historical level of analysis.

Now in formal terms--and I have already sort of gotten into this, and I'll go through it rather quickly because there isn't much time left--in formal terms we can think of the essential critical task at the first or political level as one of thematization. That is to say, what theme is the plot structure of an individual symbolic act trying to express? What is the contradiction that's being resolved in this symbolic act? At the second level, the formal principle that we do bring to bear is the idea, the Bakhtinian idea, of heteroglossia: the clash of voices, the way in which the voice is no longer individual but rather social, the representative of a social point of view that expresses itself through the individual author's writing. At the third level, you get what Jameson calls "a repertoire of devices," and I have already reflected a little bit on that.

Let me just add another example, also taken from Romanticism, in keeping with Jameson's exemplification of the overlap of modes of production as being particularly interesting in the age of Enlightenment. In Romanticism there is a long tradition leading up to it of the formal Pindaric ode. Wordsworth is still making use of that tradition in writing his ode, "Intimations of Immortality," but in the meantime he and Coleridge have developed a new kind of ode, if you will, which is called the "conversation poem": Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" and "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" are notable examples of the conversation poem.

Now the difference is very clearly intelligible in terms of a conflict of modes of production. The formal ode, derived ultimately from Pindar celebrating Olympic victories of aristocratic patrons in Greece--horse races, foot races, wrestling matches: that's the original purpose to which the formal ode was put--plainly is coded once again as feudal-aristocratic, whereas the conversation poem belongs very much, as the word suggests, in the public sphere. It's the atmosphere of the coffeehouse. It's the atmosphere in which people sit down and talk together, exchange views, and address each other. It is a poem always of address to some individual person that turns to that person at a certain point, evokes the nature of that person, sometimes solicits that person's opinions. In other words, it's a poem that performs dialogism. It's a poem that performs the sense of the give-and-take of a much more open, democratic culture in the public sphere. So you can see that the very transition from the formal ode to the conversation poem is itself intelligible as a transition between--or what Jameson calls "a cultural revolution" brought in by a seismic shift in--modes of production.

All right. So these exemplify, in various ways, what can be done with these three levels. Jameson himself reminds us of the dangers. If we think of a narrative as a symbolic act, we are much too prone either to forget that it's based on reality by emphasizing the structuralist nature of what's going on or to forget that form is involved at all by emphasizing the social contradiction that's being resolved. As Jameson says, these two dangers at the first level are the danger of structuralism and the danger of vulgar materialism. The point in analyzing the symbolic act is to sustain a balance or a synthesis between formal and social elements within the text. At the second level, the problem is that if we start thinking in terms of un-reconcilable class conflict, our analysis can become static, as though class perspectives didn't shift, as though one perspective might not succeed another as the hegemonic: in other words, as though change didn't take place, as though there was always the same old-same old in class conflict. The boss is always going to speak demeaningly of the worker. The worker is always going to laugh at the boss behind his back. This is the way it is; this is the way it will always be. There are static relations in other words among the classes that history can't resolve.

Finally, at the third level, there is the danger of thinking in terms of impasse--late capitalism, for example, as an impasse that simply can't be surmounted. Think of Adorno and his incredible gloom about the culture industry. There isn't much hope in Adorno, [laughs] is there? And by the same token, you could argue that poor old Jameson talking about history as necessity, history as what hurts, history as just what has happened--by the same token, you could argue that Jameson, too, is perhaps a little bit subject to this sense of impasse, which is why I quote for you, as these people themselves often do, the ringing warning of Marx in the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it." That is ultimately the focus of Marx's analysis.

Let's revisit *Tony* in the remaining minute. Now a reified realist approach to *Tony*, the kind that Jameson criticizes on the sheet, would point out that nothing happens to Neato and Speedy. They are manifest villains, and yet at the same time, nothing can happen to them. They simply have their place in the social order: one of them is a fastidious aristocrat who doesn't want to get dirty, the other is completely committed to productivity and the time clock and the work ethic, a bourgeois Speedy. There they are; nothing to be done. They're not nice to Tony but nothing happens to them. There is no recrimination.

But then at the first level, if we understand this as a symbolic act, the resolution of what would otherwise be a hopeless conflict is through friendship--the friendship of Bumpy and Tony; the fact that it's perfectly okay if I'm just a working guy. I've got my buddies. We go out. We drink beer. We have a good time. Life is great. It doesn't matter, in other words, that there's a class structure, that there's a social system. "I'm happy," Tony says in effect. "I like my job." That in itself, of course, is a resolution, [laughs] is a symbolic act and a resolution in advance of the conflicts that the story might otherwise manifest.

At the second level, you get the discourse of ideologemes. "I can't help you," says Neato the car. "I don't want to get dirty." "I can't help you," says Speedy the car. "I am too busy." "I can help you," says Bumpy; but notice that this is all within an individual, single code, and that's what the complete parallelism of these three utterances shows us. Within a single code, these ideologemes, which can't really be resolved, get themselves expressed.

All right. Now finally modes of production: plainly, the very existence of Neato and Speedy in the same story suggests that there is a certain tension between the feudal and the bourgeois at work, but it's not a tension that in any way necessarily works itself out. The important thing to notice here, it seems to me, is the conflict between pulling and pushing. It's very interesting--and I've said this before--that a tow truck, something that pulls--and once again Tony is a mode of production, right? He's a tow truck, right? And something that pulls has to be pushed. Bumpy, like the Little Engine that Could, is a sort of a throwback to an earlier, less energized, less powerful mode of production. He has to push. Think of the way walls get put up: a prefabricated wall before the invention of the crane and the pulley has to be pushed up by a bunch of people. Pushing is the essential labor mode before the kind of technology arises that makes it possible to pull something. After that, you have a crane. You run the hook down, and you just pull the wall up into place. Before then, you got maybe one person standing on a rafter with a rope kind of pulling but everybody else is down on the ground pushing; and so the relationship between pushing and pulling in the story is a crucially important one which suggests the overlap of older and newer modes of production, all of which can be resolved at Jameson's third or historical level of analysis.

Okay. So much then for Jameson and for *Tony*. We'll be coming back to *Tony* again next time in the context of talking about the New Historicism.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 19 Transcript**

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| March 31, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So today we turn to a mode of doing literary criticism which was extraordinarily widespread beginning in the late seventies and into the eighties, called the New Historicism. It was definable in ways that I'll turn to in a minute and, as I say, prevalent to a remarkable degree everywhere. It began probably at the University of California at Berkeley under the auspices, in part, of Stephen Greenblatt, whose brief essay you've read for today. Greenblatt and others founded a journal, still one of the most important and influential journals in the field of literary study, called *Representations*--always has been and still is an organ for New Historicist thought. It's a movement which began primarily preoccupied with the Early Modern period, the so-called "Renaissance." The New Historicism is, in effect, responsible for the replacement of the term "Renaissance" with the term "Early Modern."

Its influence, however, quickly did extend to other fields, some fields perhaps more than others. It would be, I think, probably worth a lecture that I'm not going to give to explain why certain fields somehow or another seem to lend themselves more readily to New Historicist approaches than others. I think it's fair to say that in addition to the early modern period, the three fields that have been most influenced by the New Historicism are the eighteenth century, British Romanticism, and Americanist studies from the late colonial through the republican period. That age--the emergence of print culture, the emergence of the public sphere as a medium of influence, and the distribution of knowledge in the United States--has been very fruitfully studied from New Historicist points of view. So those are the fields that are most directly influenced by this approach. When we discuss Jerome McGann's essay, you'll see how it influences Romantic studies.

Now the New Historicism was--and this probably accounts for its remarkable popularity and influence in the period roughly from the late seventies through the early nineties--was a response to an increasing sense of ethical failure in the isolation of the text as it was allegedly practiced in certain forms of literary study. Beginning with the New Criticism through the period of deconstruction, and the recondite discourse of Lacan and others in psychoanalysis, there was a feeling widespread among scholars, especially younger scholars, that somehow or another, especially in response to pressing concerns--post-Vietnam, concerns with globalization, concerns with the distribution of power and global capital--all of these concerns inspired what one can only call a guilt complex in academic literary scholarship and led to a "return to history." It was felt that a kind of ethical tipping point had been arrived at and that the modes of analysis that had been flourishing needed to be superseded by modes of analysis in which history and the political implications of what one was doing became prominent and central.

I have to say that in debates of this kind there's always a considerable amount of hot air, perhaps on both sides. In many ways it's not the case that the so-called isolated approaches really were isolated. Deconstruction in its second generation wrote perpetually about history and undertook to orient the techniques of deconstruction to an understanding of history, just to give one example. The New Historicism, on the other hand, evinced a preoccupation with issues of form and textual integrity that certainly followed from the disciplines, the approaches, that preceded them. Also to a large degree--and this is, of course, true of a good many other approaches that we're about to investigate, approaches based in questions of identity also--to a large degree, appropriated the language of the generation of the deconstructionists and, to a certain extent, certain underlying structuralist ideas having to do with the binary relationship between self and other, and binary relationships among social entities, as opposed to linguistic entities; but still, as I say, essentially inheriting the structure of thought of preceding approaches. So, as I say, it was in a polemical atmosphere and at a moment of widespread self-doubt in the academic literary profession that the New Historicism came into its own--a response, as I say, to the isolation of the text by certain techniques and approaches to it.

Now very quickly: the method of New Historical analysis fell into a pattern, a very engaging one, one that's wonderfully exemplified by the brief introduction of Greenblatt that I have asked you to read: a pattern of beginning with an anecdote, often rather far afield, at least apparently rather far afield, from the literary issues that are eventually turned to in the argument of a given essay. For example: a dusty miller was walking down the road, thinking about nothing in particular, when he encountered a bailiff, then certain legal issues arise, and somehow or another the next thing you know we're talking about *King Lear*. This rather marvelous, oblique way into literary topics was owing to the brilliance in handling it of Greenblatt, in particular, and Louis Montrose and some of his colleagues. This technique became a kind of a hallmark of the New Historicism.

In the long run, of course, it was easy enough to parody it. It has been subjected to parody and, in a certain sense, has been modified and chastened by the prevalence of parody; but it nevertheless, I think, shows you something about the way New Historicist thinking works. The New Historicism is interested, following Foucault--and Foucault is the primary influence on the New Historicism. I won't say as much about this today as I might feel obliged to say if I weren't soon be going to return to Foucault in the context of gender studies, when we take up Foucault and Judith Butler together--but I will say briefly that Foucault's writing, especially his later writing, is about the pervasiveness, the circulation through social orders, of what he calls "power." Now power is not just--or, in many cases in Foucault, not even primarily-- the power of vested authorities, the power of violence, or the power of tyranny from above. Power in Foucault--though it can be those things and frequently is--is much more pervasively and also insidiously the way in which knowledge circulates in a culture: that is to say, the way in which what we think, what we think that it is appropriate to think--acceptable thinking--is distributed by largely unseen forces in a social network or a social system. Power, in other words, in Foucault is in a certain sense *knowledge*, or to put it another way, it is the explanation of how certain forms of knowledge come to exist--knowledge, by the way, not necessarily of something that's true. Certain forms of knowledge come to exist in certain places.

So all of this is central to the work of Foucault and is carried over by the New Historicists; hence the interest for them of the anecdotes. Start as far afield as you can imaginably start from what you will finally be talking about, which is probably some textual or thematic issue in Shakespeare or in the Elizabethan masque or whatever the case may be. Start as far afield as you possibly can from that, precisely in order to show the pervasiveness of a certain kind of thinking, the pervasiveness of a certain social constraint or limitation on freedom. If you can show how pervasive it is, you reinforce and justify the Foucauldian idea that power is, as I've said, an insidious and ubiquitous mode of circulating knowledge. All of this is implicit, sometimes explicit, in New Historicist approaches to what they do.

So as I said, Foucault is the crucial antecedent and of course, when it's a question of Foucault, literature as we want to conceive of it--perhaps generically or as a particular kind of utterance as opposed to other kinds--does tend to collapse back into the broader or more general notion of discourse, because it's by means of discourse that power circulates knowledge. Once again, despite the fact that New Historicism wants to return us to the real world, it nevertheless acknowledges that that return is language bound. It is by means of language that the real world shapes itself. That's why for the New Historicist--and by this means, I'll turn in a moment to the marvelous anecdote with which Greenblatt begins the brief essay that I've asked you to read--that's why the New Historicist lays such intense emphasis on the idea that the relationship between discourse--call it literature if you like, you might as well--and history is reciprocal.

Yes, history conditions what literature can say in a given epoch. History is an important way of understanding the valency of certain kinds of utterance at certain times. In other words, history is--as it's traditionally thought to be by the Old Historicism, and I'll get to that in a minute--history is a background to discourse or literature. But by the same token there is an agency, that is to say a capacity, to circulate power in discourse *in turn*. Call it "literature": "I am Richard II, know you not that?" says Queen Elizabeth when at the time of the threatened Essex Uprising she gets wind of the fact that Shakespeare's *Richard II* is being performed, as she believes, in the public streets and in private houses. In other words, wherever there is sedition, wherever there are people who want to overthrow her and replace her with the Earl of Essex, the pretender to the throne, *Richard II* is being performed. Well, now this is terrifying to Queen Elizabeth because she knows--she's a supporter of the theater--she knows that *Richard II* is about a king who has many virtues but a certain weakness, a political weakness and also a weakness of temperament--the kind of weakness that makes him sit upon the ground and tell sad tales about the death of kings, that kind of weakness, who is then usurped by Bolingbroke who became Henry IV, introducing a whole new dynasty and focus of the royal family in England. Queen Elizabeth says, "They're staging this play because they're trying to compare me with Richard II in preparation for deposing me, and who knows what else they might do to me?" This is a matter of great concern.

In other words, literature--Fredric Jameson says "history hurts"--literature hurts, too. [laughs] Literature, in other words, has a discursive agency that affects history every bit as much as history affects literature: literature "out there," and theater--especially if it escapes the confines of the playhouse because, as Greenblatt argues, the playhouse has a certain mediatory effect which defuses the possibilities of sedition. One views literary representation in the playhouse with a certain objectivity, perhaps, that is absent altogether when interested parties take up the same text and stage it precisely for the purpose of fomenting rebellion. Literature, especially when escaped from its conventional confines, becomes a very, very dangerous *or* positive influence, depending on your point of view on the course of history.

So the relationship between history and discourse is reciprocal. Greenblatt wants to argue with a tremendous amount of stress and, I think, effectiveness that the New Historicism differs from the Old Historicism. This is on page 1443 in the right-hand column. John Dover Wilson, a traditional Shakespeare scholar and a very important one, is the spokesperson in Greenblatt's scenario for the Old Historicism. The view I'm about to quote is that of John Dover Wilson, a kind of consensus about the relationship between literature and history:

Modern historical scholarship [meaning Old Historicism] has assured Elizabeth [laughs] that she had [this is the right-hand column about two thirds of the way down] [laughs] nothing to worry about: *Richard II* is not at all subversive but rather a hymn to Tudor order. The play, far from encouraging thoughts of rebellion, regards the deposition of the legitimate king as a "sacrilegious" act that drags the country down into "the abyss of chaos"; "that Shakespeare and his audience regarded Bolingbroke as a usurper," declares J. Dover Wilson, "is incontestable." But in 1601 neither Queen Elizabeth nor the Earl of Essex were so sure…

Greenblatt wins. It's a wonderful example. It's the genius of Greenblatt to choose examples that are so telling and so incontrovertible. We know Queen Elizabeth was scared [laughs] on this occasion, which makes it quite simply the case that John Dover Wilson was wrong to suppose that *Richard II* was no threat to her. It's not at all the point that a broad, ideological view of *Richard II* was any different from what Wilson said; that was perfectly true. Bolingbroke *was* considered a usurper. It was considered tragic that *Richard II* was deposed; but that doesn't mean that the text can't be taken over, commandeered and made subversive.

Wilson doesn't acknowledge this because his view of the relationship between history and literature is only that history influences literature, not that the influence can be reciprocal. You see, that's how it is that the New Historicism wants to define itself over and against the Old Historicism. If there is a political or ideological consensus about the legitimacy of monarchy, the divine right of kings, the legitimacy of succession under the sanction of the Church of England and all the rest of it--all of which is anachronistic when you're thinking about these history plays--if there is this broad consensus, that's *it*, *t*hat's what the play means according to the Old Historicism, even though plainly you can take the plot of the play and completely invert those values, which is what the Essex faction does in staging it in those places where Queen Elizabeth suspects that it's being staged.

Okay. Now another way in which the Old Historicism and the New Historicism differ--correctly, I think-- according to Greenblatt is that in the Old Historicism there is no question--I'm looking at page 1444, the right-hand column about a third of the way down--of the role of the historian's own subjectivity. "It is not thought," says Greenblatt, "to be the product of the historian's interpretation…" History is just what is. One views it objectively and that's that.

Now notice here that we're back with Gadamer. Remember that this was Gadamer's accusation of historicism, the belief of historicism--what Greenblatt calls the Old Historicism--that we can bracket out our own historical horizon and that we can eliminate all of our own historical prejudices in order to understand the past objectively in and for itself. This is not the case, said Gadamer, remember. Gadamer said that interpretation must necessarily involve the merger of horizons, the horizon of the other and my own horizon as an interpreter. I cannot bracket out my own subjectivity.

Okay. If that's the case, then Gadamer anticipates Greenblatt in saying that the naïveté of the Old Historicism is its supposition that it has no vested interest in what it's talking about--that is to say, its supposition that it wants history to accord in one way or another with its own preconceptions, but isn't aware of it. The anecdote--again, wonderfully placed in the polemical argument--that after all, John Dover Wilson delivered himself of these opinions about *Richard II* before a group of scholars in Germany in 1939 is, after all, rather interesting. Hitler is about to be the Bolingbroke of Germany. John Dover Wilson wants his audience to say, "Hey, wait a minute. Stick with vested authority. [laughs] You have a weak democracy, but it *is* a democracy. Don't let it get away from you." And so he is speaking, the horse already having escaped from the barn, in this reassuring way about German politics as a means of sort of reinforcing his own view of the politics of Elizabethan England.

But this, Greenblatt supposes, is something about which he has very little self-consciousness. That is to say, his own interest, as of course it should be on this occasion, is in the preservation of vested authority, and his own interest then folds back into his understanding of Elizabethan ideology in such a way that it can conform to that interest. He has, in other words, as we say today, a hidden agenda and is very little aware of it, unlike the New Historicist who, following Gadamer in this respect, is fully cognizant of the subjective investment that leads to a choice of interest in materials, a way of thinking about those materials, and a means of bringing them to life for us today and into focus. In other words, it's okay for Greenblatt, as it was for Gadamer--much to the horror of E. D. Hirsch--to find the significance of a text, as opposed to the meaning of a text. The significance of the text is that it has certain kinds of power invested in it. Those kinds of power are still of interest to us today, still of relevance to what's going on in our own world. All of this is taken up openly as a matter of self-consciousness by the New Historicists in ways that, according to Greenblatt and his colleagues, were not available consciously in the older Historicism.

Now the world as the New Historicism sees it--and after I've said this, I'll turn to McGann--is essentially a dynamic interplay of power, networks of power, and subversion: that is to say, modes of challenging those networks even within the authoritative texts that generate positions of power. The Elizabethan masque, for example, which stages the relation of court to courtier, to visitor, to hanger-on in wonderfully orchestrated ways, is a means--because it's kind of poly-vocal--of containing within its structure elements of subversion, according to the argument that's made about these things: the same with court ritual itself, the same with the happenstance that takes place once a year in early modern England, in which the Lord of Misrule is so denominated and ordinary authority is turned on its ear for one day. Queen for a day, as it were, is something that is available to any citizen once a year. These are all ways of defusing what they, in fact, bring into visibility and consciousness--mainly the existence, perhaps the inevitable existence, of subversion with respect to structures and circulatory systems of power. It's this relationship between power and subversion that the New Historicism, especially in taking up issues of the Early Modern period, tends to focus on and to specialize in.

Now it's not wholly clear that Jerome McGann has ever really thought of himself as a New Historicist. He has been so designated by others, but I think there is one rather important difference in emphasis, at least between what he's doing and what Greenblatt and his colleagues do in the Early Modern period. McGann doesn't really so much stress the reciprocity of history and discourse. He is interested in the presence of history, the presence of immediate social and also personal circumstances in the history of a text. His primary concern is with--at least in this essay--textual scholarship. He himself is the editor of the new standard works of Byron. He has also done a standard works of Swinburne, and he has been a vocal and colorful spokesperson of a certain point of view within the recondite debates of textual scholarship: whether textual scholarship ought to produce a text that's an amalgam of a variety of available manuscripts and printed texts; whether the text it produces ought to be the last and best thoughts of the author--that's the position that McGann seems to be taking in this essay--or whether the text, on the contrary, ought to be the first burst of inspiration of the author. All the people who prefer the earliest versions of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for example, would favor that last point of view. In other words, McGann is making a contribution here not least to the debates surrounding editing and the production of authoritative scholarly texts.

It's in that context that the remarks he's making about Keats have to be understood. I think the primary influence on McGann is not so much Foucault, then, with the sense of the circulation of power back and forth between history and literary discourse, as it is Bakhtin, whom he quotes on pages eighteen and nineteen; or whose influence he cites, I should say rather, in a way that, I think, does pervade what you encounter in reading what he then goes on to say at the bottom of page eighteen in the copy center reader:

What follows [says McGann] is a summary and extrapolation of certain key ideas set forth by the so-called Bakhtin School of criticism, a small group of Marxist critics from the Soviet Union who made an early attack upon formalist approaches to poetry [just as he, McGann, is, and as the New Historicists are themselves, in their turn, doing]. The Bakhtin School's socio-historical method approaches all language utterances--including poems--as phenomena marked with their concrete origins and history.

That is to say, phenomena voiced by the material circumstances that produce them or phenomena, in other words, in which the voice of the Romantic solitary individual is not really that voice at all, but is rather the polyglossal infusion of a variety of perspectives, including ideological perspectives, shaping that particular utterance and also, in the case of the textual scholar, shaping which of a variety of manuscripts will be chosen for publication and for central attention in the tradition of the reception of a given text. So all of this McGann takes to be derived from Bakhtin rather than from Foucault. I do think that's a significant difference between our two authors.

Now McGann's most important contribution to the return to history of the seventies and eighties is a short book called *The Romantic Ideology,* and this book--well, what it is is an attack on Romanticism. At least it's an attack on certain widely understood and received ideas about Romanticism--ideas with which, by the way, I don't agree, but this course isn't about me. *The Romantic Ideology* is an amalgam of two titles. One of them is the important early critique of Romanticism by the German poet and sometime Romantic Heinrich Heine called *Die romantische Schule*, or *The Romantic School*, in which the subjectivity, even solipsism, and the isolation from social concern and from unfolding historical processes of the Romantic poets is emphasized and criticized. In addition to that--that's where the word "Romantic" comes from in the title *The Romantic Ideology*--the other title that it amalgamates is Marx's book *The German Ideology,* which is about many things but is in particular about *Lumpenproletariat* intellectuals who think with Hegel-- still following Hegel despite believing themselves to be progressive--who think with Hegel that thought produces material circumstances rather than the other way around: in other words people, in short, who are idealists and therefore, under this indictment, also Romantic.

McGann's title, as I say, cleverly amalgamates these two other titles and sets the agenda for this short book, which is an attack not just on Romanticism but on what he believes to be our continued tendency still to be "in" Romanticism, still to be Romantic. There his particular object of attack is the so-called Yale school, which is still under attack in the essay that you've read for today. Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman's well-known essay on Keats's "To Autumn" are singled out for particular scorn and dispraise, all sort of on the grounds that yes, it's all very well to read Romanticism, to come to understand it, and even to be fascinated by it; but we can't *be* Romantic. In other words, our reading of Romanticism--if we are to be social animals, politically engaged, and invested in the world as a social community--must necessarily be an anti-Romantic critique. This is, as I say, still essentially the position taken up by McGann.

All right. So I've explained the ways in which he differs from Greenblatt in leaning more toward Bakhtin than toward Foucault. I have explained that McGann is engaged primarily in talking about issues of textual scholarship in this particular essay, that he defends Keats's last deliberate choices, that he believes the so-called "indicator" text of 1820 of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is Keats's last deliberate choice, as opposed to the 1848 text published by Monckton Milnes in the edition of Keats's poems that he brought out at that time.

Now I think that in the time remaining to sort of linger over McGann, I do want to say a few things about what he says about Keats. I want to emphasize that his general pronouncements about the historicity of texts, about the permeation of texts by the circumstances of their production, their conditioning by ideological factors, is unimpeachable. It seems to me that this is a necessary approach at least to have in mind if not, perhaps, necessarily to emphasize in one's own work of literary scholarship. The idea that a text just falls from a tree--if anybody ever had that idea, by the way [laughs] --is plainly not a tenable one, and the opposite idea that a text emerges from a complex matrix of social and historical circumstances is certainly a good one. So if one is to criticize, again it's not a question of criticizing his basic pronouncements. It seems to me nothing could be said really against them. The trouble is that in the case of McGann--who is a terrific, prominent Romantic scholar with whom one, I suppose, hesitates to disagree--everything he says about the text that he isolates for attention in this essay is simply, consistently, wrong. It's almost as if by compulsion that he says things that are wrong about these texts, and the reason I asked you in my e-mail last night to take a look at them, if you get a chance, is so that these few remarks that I make now might have some substance.

Take for example "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." In the first place, who *says* we only read the 1848 text? A scholarly edition--and his main object of attack is Jack Stillinger's scholarly edition of Keats--gives you basically a variorum apparatus. Yeah, maybe it gives you a particular text in bold print, but it gives you the variant text in smaller print in a footnote. It doesn't withhold the variant text from you. It says, "No, look, there's this too. Take your choice." Really the atmosphere of a variorum scholarly edition is an atmosphere of take your choice, not a kind of tyrannical imposition on the public of a particular version of the text. Everybody knows the 1820 *Indicator* text. "What can ail thee, wretched wight?" is at least as familiar to me, as a Romanticist, as "What can ail thee, knight at arms?" the way in which the 1848 text begins; and frankly how many people who aren't Romanticists know anything about either text? What are we talking about here? [laughter] [laughs]

The Romanticists know what's going on. They're not in any way hornswoggled by this historical conspiracy against the 1820 *indicator* text, and people who aren't Romanticists don't care. That's what it comes down to; but, if it's not enough simply to say that, turning to the question of which text is better--well, it's hard to say which text is better. McGann's argument is that the 1820 version is better because it's a poem about a guy and a girl who sort of meet, and the next thing you know they're having sex and that doesn't turn out so well. In other words, it's about the real world. These things happen. It's not a romance, whereas the "What can ail thee, wretched knight?" in the 1848 version--and all of its other variants, the "kisses four" and so on--the 1848 version is a kind of unselfconscious--in McGann's view--romance subscribing to certain medieval ideas about women, simultaneously putting them on a pedestal and fearing, at the same time, that they're invested with a kind of black magic which destroys the souls and dissipates the sap of deserving young gentlemen: all of this is ideologically programmed, according to McGann, in the 1848 version. Why? Because Charles Brown behaved despicably toward women, he didn't like Fanny Brawne, and because Monckton Milnes, the actual editor of the 1848 edition, loved pornography and was a big collector of erotica. So that's why the 1848 text with its fear of and denigration of women, in contrast to the 1820 text, is inferior.

Well, two things: first of all, who's to say the 1848 text wasn't Keats's last thoughts? In other words, yes, he was already ill when the *Indicator* text was published in 1820. It is pretty close to the end of his ability to think clearly about his own work and to worry very much about the forms in which it was published, but at the same time we don't know when Brown received his version of the text. We can't suppose, as McGann more than half implies, that Brown just sort of sat down and rewrote it. [laughs] Nobody has ever really said that, and if he didn't rewrite it, then Keats must have given it to him in that form. Who's to say that wasn't his last and best thoughts? Who's to say Keats didn't really want to write a poem of this kind? After all, the title, taken from a medieval ballad by Alain Chartier, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," bears out the "What can ail thee, knight at arms?" version. It's about a Morgan Le Fay-type. For better or worse, whatever we think of that ideologically, it is about, if the title is right, the kind of woman who is evoked in the 1848 version, as opposed to the kind of woman who is evoked in the 1820 version.

So the 1848 version is simply more consistent with the title. That's one point to be made, but the additional point to be made is that taking advantage of the New Historicist acknowledgement that one's own subjectivity, one's own historical horizon, is properly in play in thinking about these things, McGann is then able to infuse Keats's text and therefore Keats's intentions with a pleasing political correctness. That is to say, Keats can't possibly have thought in that demeaning way about women. By the way, everything-- I like Keats, but everything in his letters suggests that he *did*--but back to McGann: Keats can't possibly have thought in that demeaning way about women. Therefore, the 1820 text is the text that he intended and preferred.

Okay. That, of course, makes Keats more consistent with our own standards and our own view of the relations between the sexes, but does it, in other words, make sense *vis-à-vis* the Keats whom we know and, despite his weaknesses and shortcomings, love? There is a great deal, in other words, to be said over against McGann's assertions about this textual issue, not necessarily in defense of the 1848 text but agnostically with respect to the two of them, saying, "Yeah, we'd better have both of them. We'd better put them side-by-side. We'd better read them together; but if by some fiat the 1820 were somehow subsequently preferred to the 1848, that would be every bit as much of an historical misfortune as the preference, insofar as it has actually existed, of the 1848 or the 1820." I think that's the perspective one wants to take.

Now I was going to talk about "To Autumn." I'll only say about his reading of "To Autumn" that McGann, who doesn't seem to like the poem very much--he likes "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," so he makes it politically correct. He doesn't like "To Autumn" because he thinks that "Autumn" was published in collusion with Keats's conservative friends in the *Poems* of 1820, which bowdlerized everything he had to say of a progressive political nature. He thinks that "To Autumn" is a big sellout, in other words, and that yes, 1819 happened to be a year of good harvest, and so Keats turns that year of good harvest into something permanent, into a kind of cloud cuckoo-land in which the fruit falls into your basket and the fish jump into your net and everything is just perfect.

Well, do you think the poem is really like that? You've read the third stanza, which McGann totally ignores apart from "Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?" In other words, he gives you the opening but he doesn't give you any sense of the rest of the stanza, because for him "To Autumn" is all about the first stanza. For him, Keats seems to identify with the bees who think warm days will never cease, "for Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells." Keats is like a bee. He's all into the sensuous.

Well, again just in terms of historical evidence, this is outmoded by at least eighteen months if we consult Keats's letters. He was like that early in his career, but he has had severe misgivings about a point of view which is represented in what he said in an early letter: "Oh, for a life of sensations rather than thoughts…" That's no longer Keats's position when writing "To Autumn." Keats's position when writing "To Autumn" is the position of a guy who has a sore throat just as his tubercular brother did, who is increasingly afraid that he's going to die soon and is trying to confront mortality in writing what is in fact--and I say "in fact" advisedly--the most perfect lyric ever written in the English language, and which is most certainly not a celebration of sort of wandering around like an aimless bee, thinking that the autumn is perfect but that autumn is always perfect, that warm days will never cease, and that everything is just lovely in the garden. It is not that kind of poem, and it's really a travesty of it to suppose that it is simply on the grounds that it was published in the *Poems* of 1820 as a kind of sellout to the establishment under the advice of Keats's conservative friends.

All right. So much then for McGann's remarks on Keats, which I want to say again in no way impugn or undermine the general validity of the claims that he's making about taking historical circumstances into account. Precisely, we need to take them into account and we need to get them right. That's the challenge, of course, of working with historical circumstances. You have to get it right.

With that said, let me turn quickly to a review of *Tony* from Bakhtin to the New Historicism. I may glide over *Tony* according to Jameson, because we did that at the end of the last lecture, so let me go back to Bakhtin. You can see the way in which in the structure of *Tony the Tow Truck* the first part of the poem is absolutely saturated with the first person singular: I do this, I do that, I like my job, I am stuck--I, I, I, I. Then as you read along through the text you see that the "I" disappears, or if it still appears, it's in the middle of a line rather than at the beginning of a line. In other words, the "I," the subjectivity, the first person singular, the sense of having a unique voice--this is gradually subsumed by the sociality of the story as it unfolds. I am no longer "I" defined as a Romantic individual. I am "I," rather defined as a friend--that is to say, as a person whose relation with otherness is what constitutes his identity, and in that mutuality of friendship, the first person singular disappears. What is spoken in *Tony the Tow Truck*,in other words, in the long run is not the voice of individual subjectivity but the voice of social togetherness, the voice of otherness.

According to Jauss, the important thing about *Tony the Tow Truck* is that it is not the same story as *The Little Engine that Could.* In other words, in each generation of reception, the aesthetic standards that prevail at a given time are reconsidered and rethought, reshuffled. A new aesthetic horizon emerges, and texts are constituted in a different way, much also as the Russian formalists have said, only with the sense in Jauss of the historical imperative. *The Little Engine that Could* is all about the inversion of power between the little guy and the big guy, so that the little guy helps the big guy and that is unequivocal, showing, as in *Isaiah* in the Bible, that the valleys have been raised and the mountains have been made low. That's not the way *Tony the Tow Truck* works. The little guy himself needs help. He needs the help of another little guy. There is a reciprocity not dialectically between little and big, but a mutual reinforcement of little-by-little, and that is the change in aesthetic horizon that one can witness between *The Little Engine that Could* and *Tony the Tow Truck.*

In Benjamin the important thing, as I think we've said, is the idea that *the narrator is the apparatus*. The humanization of a mechanized world, through our identification with it, is what takes place in *Tony the Tow Truck.* In other words, all these cars and trucks, all these smiling and frowning houses, of course, have as their common denominator their non-humanity, but the anthropomorphization of the cars and trucks and of the houses constitutes them as the human. They are precisely the human. We see things, in other words, from the point of view of the apparatus. Just as the filmgoer sees things from the point of view of the camera, so we see *Tony the Tow Truck* from the point of view of the tow truck, right? And what happens? Just as the camera eye point of view leaves that which is seen, as Benjamin puts it, "equipment-free"--so, oddly enough, if we see things from the standpoint of equipment, what we look at is the moral of the story: in other words, the humanity of the story. What we see, in other words, surrounded by all of this equipment, is precisely the equipment-free human aspect of reality. So *Tony the Tow Truck* works in a way that is consistent with Benjamin's theory of mechanical reproduction. For Adorno, however, the acquiescence of this very figure--the apparatus of mechanical reproduction, of towing again and again and again--in the inequity of class relations, rejected as always by Neato and Speedy, proves that the apparatus which Benjamin's theory takes to be independent of the machinations of the culture industry, that the apparatus in turn can be suborned and commandeered by the culture industry for its own purposes.

All right. I will skip over Jameson. The Old Historicist reading of *Tony* simply reconfirms a status quo in which virtue is clear, vice is clear, both are uncontested, and nothing changes--in other words, a status quo which reflects a stagnant, existent, unchanging social dynamic. The New Historicism in a lot of ways is doing this, but let me just conclude by suggesting that if literature influences history, *Tony the Tow Truck* might well explain why today we're promoting fuel-efficient cars, why the attack on the gas guzzler and the SUV or minivan--remember the car that says "I am too busy"--is so prevalent in the story, and why if we read today's headlines we need to get rid of the Humvee if GM is to prosper, and we need to downsize and streamline the available models. The little guys, Tony and Bumpy, reaffirm the need for fuel-efficient smaller vehicles and you can plainly see that *Tony the Tow Truck* is therefore a discourse that produces history. All of this, according to the prescription of *Tony*,is actually happening.

All right. Thank you very much. One thing that needs to be said about *Tony the Tow Truck* is it has no women in it, and that is the issue that we'll be taking up on Thursday.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 20 Transcript**

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| April 2, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** This lecture, I think, starts with a series of preliminaries. The technical term for preliminaries of this kind in literary study is "prolepsis"--that is to say, the form of anticipation which, in a certain sense, covers what will be talked about later. They are prolepses of this kind. First, I wanted to say that in entering upon the phase of this course which concerns a series of particular identities as perspectives, as points of departure, we're still thinking about the literary text; and, of course, in thinking about identity itself, we come upon a form of critical endeavor which is, in practical terms, incredibly rich and productive. It is simply amazing how, as Jonathan Culler once put it, "reading as a woman," or reading as an African-American, or reading as any of the other sort of identity that we're going to be talking about--it's simply amazing how this kind of reading, if it's done alertly, transforms everything. That is to say, it has an incredible practical payoff.

Last time in the context of the New Historicism, Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant anecdote begins with Queen Elizabeth saying, "I am Richard II, know you not that?" Well, Stephen Greenblatt isn't concerned with investigating a pronouncement of that sort from the standpoint of feminist criticism, or indeed from the standpoint of something we'll be taking up later on--gender theory; but still, it's rather an amazing thing for Queen Elizabeth to say, isn't it? It suggests really that it's, after all, remarkable that she, a woman, would find herself in a position not so much needing to endure the kind of suffering and peril that her own sex has traditionally endured but rather potentially enduring the suffering and peril that one would experience in the masculine gender position, made perhaps even more interesting and complicated by the fact that Elizabeth knows perfectly well that despite the rarity of her being Richard II, it's nevertheless not a unique position. She has subjected [laughs] Mary Queen of Scots to precisely that position. She has deposed and beheaded her, ultimately, in just the way that she fears the Earl of Essex will depose and behead her. So the way in which this remark, "I am Richard II, know you not that?"--so easily commandeered and made use of from the standpoint of the New Historicism--can come to life in a completely different way when we think about it as a question of a gendered experience is, I think, in itself a fascinating one.

Now at the end of the last lecture, by way of further preliminary, I told a little fib. I said that there were no women in *Tony the Tow Truck,* and of course in your prose text of it--the one that you've been clutching to your bosom feverishly for the entire semester--there are no women. There are just guys talking. However, if to the prose text, and I've told you about these, you add the illustrations--this [gestures to board] is one of them, roughly speaking, and I did it from memory--if you add the illustrations, you'll have to realize that it's not just the cars. You see the little smiles on the faces of the houses there: it's not just the cars that are happy about what's going on when Bumpy finally comes along and pushes Tony, but it's the houses in the background which have been expressing disapproval at the reactions of Neato and Speedy to the predicament. There are big frowns on the faces of those houses in those illustrations, houses that now express beaming approval when the morally correct thing is done.

Now in the Victorian period--and in a certain sense I think *Tony the Tow Truck* in this regard harkens back to the Victorian period--there was a poet named Coventry Patmore who, actually a rather good poet, became notorious, however, in the feminist tradition for having written a long poem in which he describes woman as "the angel in the house." You're probably familiar with that expression, and it's an idea which is also, I think, embodied in a monumental book of some twenty-five years ago by Ann Douglas called *The Feminization of American Culture.* The idea is that moral and aesthetic and cultural values are somehow or another in the hands of women in the drawing room, at the tea table, dictating to the *agencies* of society--all of which are strictly male prerogatives--what a proper ethical sense of things ought to be. In other words, the role of the angel in the house is not just to wash the dishes and take care of the kids, although that's a big part of it. The role of the angel in the house is also to adjudicate the moral aspect of life at the domestic level, and that's exactly what these houses, obviously inhabited by angels--how else could they be smiling and frowning?--that's what these houses are doing. So it is the case after all that there are women in *Tony the Tow Truck.*

All right. Now, as I say, this moment is not exactly a crossroads in our syllabus. It's not like moving from language to the psyche to the social, because obviously we're still very much in the social. In fact, it's not even as though we haven't hitherto encountered the notion of perspective. Obviously, we have in all sorts of ways, but particularly in the work of Bakhtin or Jameson, we're introduced to the way in which class conflict--that is to say, being of a certain class, therefore having an identity--gets itself expressed in literary form dialogically and gets itself expressed either as the expression of conflict between or among classes or as a more cacophonous and yet, at the same time, very frequently harmonious chorus of voices of the sort that--in notions of "carnivalization" and other such notions--one finds in Bakhtin. In other words, the way in which the language of a text, the language of a narrative or of a poem or of a play gets itself expressed, is already, as we have encountered it, a question of perspective. That is to say, it needs to be read with notions of identity, in this case notions of class identity, in mind if it's to be understood.

Well, what's also interesting, though, about turning to questions of identity is that perhaps more sharply now than hitherto--although I have been at pains to point out certain moments in the syllabus in which one really does arrive at a crossroads, and you simply can't take both paths--nevertheless, within the context of thinking about identity in these ways as literary theory, we begin to feel an increased *competitiveness* among perspectives. I'm going to be pointing this out from time to time in the sequence of lectures that we now undertake, but from the very beginning there is a sense of actually a competition which is in some ways unresolved to this day--for example, between the feminist and the Marxist perspective. That is to say: what is the underlying determination of identity and consciousness? Is it class or gender, just for example? This is not a new topic. This isn't a topic that we stumble on today as a result of some belated sophistication we have achieved. Listen to Virginia Woolf on page 600 of *A Room of One's Own* where she says, top of the left-hand column:

For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born today among the working classes. How, then, could it have been born among women whose work began, according to Professor Trevelyan, almost before they were out of the nursery, who were forced to it by their parents and held to it by all the power of law and custom? Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes.

Now in a way, Woolf is pulling her punches here. She is not saying class has priority over gender, nor is she saying gender has priority over class, if we're to understand the history of the oppression of women or the history of the limits on the forms of women's expression. She's pulling her punches, and yet at the same time I think we can see a point of view in Woolf's *Room of One's Own* which is, after all, rather surprising. Think of the title. Think of the later title of a tract in some ways similar about the possible scope for contemporary activity for women, *Three Guineas.* These titles are grounded in material circumstances. Woolf stands before her audience, her Oxbridge audience of women, and says all she really has to say is just this one thing: if you're going to expect to get anything done in the way of writing or in the way of any other activity that's genuinely independent of patriarchal limitation, you've really got to have 500 pounds a year and a room of your own.

That's all she really says she has to say. In fact, as you read through the six chapters of *A Room of One's Own*,you find that, as if on an elastic band after the extraordinary range of impressionist thinking that each chapter manifests, she is pulled back to this one particular--as she sees it--necessary practical precondition, a material precondition. If you want to get anything done--you're not Jane Austen, you're not a genius sitting in your parlor whisking your novel-in-progress under a piece of blotting paper every time a servant comes in to the room, you're not like that--you really do need today the independence of having 500 pounds and a room of your own. In other words, I think one could show that even in *A Room of One's Own*--which is, if not the greatest, certainly the most eloquent feminist treatise on the conditions of women's writing ever written--one could show that even in that, there is a certain priority given to the perspective of class, as opposed to the perspective of gender. Gender will continue to be conditioned by the effects of money and power if in fact something isn't done--let's face it--to redistribute money and power. This is a perspective which, by the way, is even clearer in *Three Guineas* and suggests that despite its main agenda, which is a feminist one--that underlying that there is a sense of the priority of class.

These sorts of tensions continue to haunt not just feminist criticism, but other forms of criticism having to do with other forms of identity really to this day. Conferences featuring a variety of identity perspectives very typically develop into debates on precisely this issue, and the one-ups-persons of conferences of this kind are always the ones who somehow get in the last word and say, "You're all naïve. You suppose that this is the basic issue, but there's an underlying issue which is the basic issue, and that's the one that, I'm going to demonstrate, must absolutely prevail." It's not necessarily always the Marxist card which is played in this context, although it frequently is. It could be some other card, but it's always a card played. It's always the last word at the conference which makes everybody go away and say, "Oh. I thought this was about women. Oh, dear. It must be about something else." We will have to come back to that because in a way, the material we cover today and the way that we're enabled to discuss it by its own nature is something that calls for another lecture and a lecture that we will actually provide. There's a very real sense, as I hope to show by the end of the lecture, in which traditional--I call this "classical feminist criticism"--in which traditional or classical feminist criticism needs to be supplemented, perhaps in the Derridean sense, by something more, which is gender theory. As I say, at the end of the lecture I'll try to explain what that might entail, and then come back to it when we discuss Judith Butler and Michel Foucault a few lectures from now.

All right. So *A Room of One's Own* is an absolutely amazing *tour de force*. It's actually one of my favorite books. I read it like a novel, and in many ways it is a novel. I think immediately that that might give us pause because if Charlotte Brontë is to be called to task for tendentiousness--that is to say, for writing from the standpoint of complaint, of perceived oppression; and if Charlotte Brontë's tendentiousness gets in the way of the full expression of what she has to say--which is to say, the unfolding of a novel; and if as Virginia Woolf, I think, actually rightly remarks, at least from an aesthetic point of view, we wonder why on earth Grace Pool suddenly appears after Jane's diatribe about wishing that she could travel and wishing that her horizons had been broadened, that somehow, Virginia Woolf says, Grace Pool is out of place and there's been a rift in the narrative fabric: if this criticism of Charlotte Brontë is fair, and we'll be coming back to it in other contexts, then of course it could be turned against the choice of narrative style, of narrative approach, in *A Room of One's Own* itself.

This, I suppose, could only strike you forcefully if you read the whole of *A Room of One's Own,* all six chapters, which I urge you to do because it's so much fun. If you read the whole of *A Room of One's Own,* you'd say, "Well, gee. This is sort of a novel, too." The speaker says, "Oh, call me anybody you like," not unlike Melville's speaker saying, "Call me Ishmael." You can call me Mary Beton. You can call me Mary Seton, call me Mary Carmichael. It doesn't really matter, but I've had certain adventures. At least that person speaking has had certain adventures which are fictitious, or at least I reserve the right to have you suppose that they are fictitious. In other words, this is a narrative that moves quite by design in the world of fiction.

In other words, Virginia Woolf is saying it really isn't true, as she tells us in the first chapter, that she, Mary Beton, after sitting at the river thinking, wondering what on earth she's going to tell these young ladies about women and fiction--as she's been thinking about that, finally she gets a little idea. It's like pulling a bit of a fish out of the river, and the fish starts swimming around in her head. She becomes quite excited and she walks away across the grass. At that point up arises a beadle, a formidable person wearing Oxonian gowns and pointing at the gravel path where she, as an unauthorized woman, should be walking, as the grass is the province only for the men enrolled in the university; and then she has repeated encounters of that kind. She goes to the library unthinkingly, only to be told by an elderly wraithlike gentleman that since she's a woman she needs a letter of introduction to get in. And so her day, her fictitious day of thinking about what on earth she should say to these young women about women and fiction, begins, somewhat unpleasantly for her character, as a presented fiction. In other words, *A Room of One's Own* is, in a sense, a novel.

It continues with a very pleasant lunch that she has. She's been invited to the campus as a distinguished writer. It's okay to be a woman who is a novelist as long as you don't rock the boat too much. In that regard, she can have been invited to such a lunch and has a very pleasant lunch because it's provided by men in an atmosphere which is designed for men. Then she goes to visit a friend who is teaching at this fictitious college. She has dinner with the friend in that college's dining hall, and the dinner is extremely inferior and plain, and then they go to her rooms and they start talking about the conditions in which this college was built. A bunch of women in the nineteenth century did all they could do to raise 30,000 pounds, no frills, thank you very much. None of them had any money. There were no major donations and so the grass never gets cut, the brick is plain and unadorned, and that's the way life is in this particular women's college.

The next day she goes to the library because she decides she's really got to find out something about what people think of women; and so, what is a woman? I don't know so I'd better look it up in the library, she thinks. She finds out that hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of men have written books about women: on the inferiority of women, the moral sensitivity of women, the lack of physical strength of women, on and on and on. She lists them as items in the library catalog which actually are there [laughs] in the library catalog--all of them, of course, getting themselves expressed in these hundreds and hundreds of books about women by men. Well, this is very frustrating but, as you can imagine, it's an occasion for wonderful satire--one has to say tendentious satire, because obviously it's male-bashing. My point is that she wouldn't let Charlotte Brontë get away with that. Charlotte Brontë has to suspend her anger, Virginia Woolf wants to say, if she's going to get the whole of what's on her mind expressed. Well, Virginia Woolf, who sort of doesn't sound very angry, but you could well be mistaken about that--she's venting her anger in comic effects--Virginia Woolf allows herself, because that really *is* the case, a measure of anger.

So it is in that chapter. Then she goes home and the rest of *A Room of One's Own* takes place in her home. She's in her study pulling books off the shelf of her library, and this is more or less chronological. It starts with a time when she looks on the shelf where the women writers ought to be and there aren't any women writers, and then later, yes, there are women writers, there are quite a few novelists. Then later in the twentieth century, women writers get a little bit more scope for their activity, and as she passes all of this in review, we continue to get her reflections on the state of literary possibility for women in literary history.

That's the structure of *A Room of One's Own* overall and it is within this structure, which is an impressionistic and narrative, undoubtedly novelistic structure--there are precedents for it. Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Mr. W. H.* is one in particular--and which is, in a way, itself what it's talking about: It is a novella, and in the context of the novella, as I say, there's a certain tension or contradiction in an author who is allowing herself tendentious opinions while denying the right to have such opinions on the part of one of her predecessors. As you can imagine, what she says about Charlotte Brontë has been controversial in subsequent feminist criticism. There are a number of ways in which feminist critics feel that Virginia Woolf is misguided or needs to be supplemented, and this is one of them. By and large, feminist critics feel that Charlotte Brontë, or any other writer, has the right to be tendentious. We'll have more to say about Virginia Woolf's criterion of androgyny, which is not thinking like either sex, in part. We'll come back to that, but most feminist criticism has felt for a variety of reasons that androgyny isn't necessarily the ideal toward which women's prose ought to be aspiring and takes Virginia Woolf to task therefore for having taken this view of Charlotte Brontë.

Now yes, feminist criticism has taken *A Room of One's Own* to task in a variety of ways, but at the same time--and I think this is freely and handsomely acknowledged by feminist criticism--it is amazing--when you read the whole text, and even when you read the excerpts that you have in your anthology--it is amazing how completely Virginia Woolf's arguments anticipate the subsequent course of the history of feminist criticism. I just want to point out a few of the ways in which it does. As Showalter points out, the first phase of modern feminist criticism was the kind of work that primarily paid attention to men's treatment of women in fiction. Mary Ellmann's book of 1968 called *Thinking about Women,* Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* in 1970 are both books which focus primarily on sexist male novelists whose demeaning treatment of women is something that the feminist perspective needed to bring out. This criticism is superseded in Elaine Showalter's account by what she calls, and prefers, "gynocriticism" or "the gynocritics." Gynocriticism is not so much concerned with men's treatment of women in fiction as with the place of women as writers in literary history and as characters--regardless of whether they are characters in men's or women's books in their own right--in the history of fiction. In other words, gynocriticism turns the topic of feminist criticism in the late sixties and early seventies from the history of oppression by men to the history of a women's tradition.

Now this sense of the unfolding of things, it seems to me, is already fully present in Woolf. She, too, wants to talk about the possibilities for women writers, about the need for women writers to feel that they're not alone. Above all at the same time, however, she frames this emphasis on the woman's perspective with the sort of trenchant, frequently satirical observations about men's treatment of women and men's way of demeaning women and keeping them in their place--as, for example, all the men, most of them professors, who wrote books about women, as she discovered in the British library, do. All of this is very much in the tradition of that first phase of feminist criticism that Showalter identifies with Ellmann and Millett and others of that generation. So the capaciousness of Woolf's approach in one sense can be understood as precisely her ability to bridge both sorts of modern tradition--no longer chronological as Showalter presents them as being, correctly--but rather as a kind of simultaneity in which the emphasis on men's marginalization of women and the emphasis on women's consciousness and traditions can be set forth at the same time.

Now also in Virginia Woolf there is what--Since the publication of the fascinating book by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar called *The Madwoman in the Attic--*this is also an allusion to *Jane Eyre*, you remember Bertha, the madwoman in the attic of *Jane Eyre--*since the publication of *The Madwoman in the Attic,* feminist criticism has talked about the madwoman thesis: the idea, in other words, that because they could not openly express themselves creatively as writers or as artists of other kinds, women were forced to channel their creativity into subversive, devious and perhaps psychologically self-destructive forms, as in, for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. You find Woolf already on page 600--just actually below the passage about class and gender that I read before--you find her touching on this madwoman theme long before Gilbert and Gubar. She says:

When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, [and then of course she adds] and even of a very remarkable man who had a mother…

There, in other words, one strongly suspects that there is a person whose creativity has been oppressed and unfortunately channeled in unsocial or antisocial directions. This, as I say, is a tradition that's sustained. It still exists in Showalter. In her gynocritical perspective--that is to say, her insistence on our registering, chronicling, and becoming familiar as scholars with the history of women as well as the history of women's writing--the recognition of such forms of repression as witchcraft, as madness, as herbalism, as whatever it might be, need to be taken into account.

Also very much on the mind of Woolf already, as it still is particularly for Showalter because this is Showalter's understanding of the task of gynocriticism, is the notion that one needs a tradition, that one of the great difficulties and shortcomings facing the woman's writer is that, yes, there are a few greats--the same ones always named, Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot--but there is not a sense of an ongoing tradition, of a developing tradition within which one could write; so that Woolf on page 606, the right-hand column, talks about "the man's sentence," the difficulty of coming to terms with not having, not just a room of one's own, but a language of one's own. This is toward the top of the right-hand column: "Perhaps the first thing she would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her use." All the literary models, all the models of novelistic prose--most of them, in any case, are engendered male; because the atmosphere of writing--and this is a point that we'll be getting to soon--the very fact of writing is something that we have to understand as having a male stamp on it.

Further down in the right-hand column:

That is a man's sentence [she's just quoted a long sentence]; behind it one can see Johnson, Gibbon and the rest." It was a sentence that was unsuited for a woman's use. Charlotte Brontë, with all her splendid gift for prose, stumbled and fell with that clumsy weapon in her hands. George Eliot committed atrocities with it that beggar description. Jane Austen looked at it and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use and never departed from it. Thus, with less genius for writing than Charlotte Brontë, she got infinitely more said.

By the way, this is disputable because certainly it's possible to understand Jane Austen's prose style as emerging from the work of Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, in particular, so it is disputable. At the same time, Woolf's point is that Austen was able to shake herself free from this terrible problem of wanting to say something but finding that one doesn't have one's own language, a language suitable to-- appropriated by and for and as one's identity--for saying it. "So I want to write as a woman, I want to say the things that a woman wants to say, but all I've got to say it with is a man's sentence." That's Woolf's point, and of course it has many and long ramifications.

I'm holding at bay the criticism of a great deal of this that has to be leveled at it by feminist criticism and gender theory roughly since 1980, but in the meantime the ramifications are interesting and they are reinforced by the theoretically very sophisticated wing of feminist criticism that we call French feminism. Some of you may know the work of Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. Writers of this kind insist that there is such a thing as women's language. Women write not just with their heads and their phalluses but with their whole bodies. Women don't write carefully constructed periodic sentences. Women write ongoing paratactic, impressionist, digressive, *ad hoc* sentences: sentences without ego--being without structure more or less corresponding to being without ego. We'll come back to this in a minute in Showalter, but in the meantime French feminism was willing to settle on and for an idea of women's writing and, implicitly behind this idea, an idea of what a woman is that is very easy to identify as somehow or another essentializing.

Why *can't* a woman write a rigorous periodic sentence? After all, that's the kind of sentence that Jane Austen did, in fact, write. In a whole variety of ways that one might think of, why can't a woman, if she is to be free to be whatever she wants to be, write a sentence which isn't necessarily of this gendered feminine sort? Why does women's writing, in other words, have to be *women's* writing?

It seems to me that it is French feminism and the possible critique of French feminism that Virginia Woolf is anticipating when she embarks on this perilous idea of androgyny, of the kind of mind that needs to be both male and female and that needs to write in a way that Virginia Woolf says is actually very sexy, precisely in the moment when one is not thinking about one's sex--the moment, in other words, when there is no longer a question of the man's sentence and the woman's sentence. I think it has to be said that although one could emphasize in *A Room of One's Own* this sort of advanced criticism of French feminism, and also of the idea that there is essentially something that we call woman--and I'm not through with that topic--I think it has to be said that although we could read *A Room of One's Own* in this way, at the same time we have to recognize an ambivalence on Virginia Woolf's part on this subject. There is a difference between her insistence that Jane Austen wrote like a woman, that she shrugged off the tyranny of the man's sentence and wrote her own kind of sentence, a woman's sentence--regardless of whether or not that is actually in literary historical terms true--between the idea, on the one hand, that it's important to write like a woman and the idea, on the other hand, that it's important to write androgynously.

We have to concede, I think, the impressionistic form of these lectures that she's giving. We have to concede that she wavers on this point; that somehow or another it's very difficult to pin down in Woolf the question of whether there is essentially something to be called "women's writing"; just as the question behind that, whether there is essentially something to be called "woman," or the question on the contrary--whether the ideal of all writing is to shed as fully as it can precisely its gendered aspects. There is perhaps a kind of creative or rich inconsistency on this point that, it should be said, one also finds and needs to take into account in reading *A Room of One's Own.*

All right. Now getting a little closer to this whole question of beyond the gynocritical--because Showalter, for example, in talking about the history of the novel talks about those three phases: first the "feminine," the phase in which women try very much to write as though they were men by deferring completely to male values in all the ways that they can; perhaps introducing a kind of, again, "angel in the house" cultural benevolence and benignity into perspectives of men that can be sometimes rather militaristic and harsh. but nevertheless hiding behind frequently male names like Currer Bell, Acton Bell, George Eliot, and so on, and not really entering into questions of the place of women in society. Showalter then says this is a phase supplanted by a feminist moment in the history of the novel in which novels like the late work of Mrs. Gaskell, for example, and other such novels become tendentious, and the place and role of women becomes the dominant theme of novels of this kind. By the way, this takes Woolf's critique of Charlotte Brontë a little bit out of chronology, because presumably Charlotte Brontë belongs to what Showalter is calling "the feminine phase" in the history of the novel, and so it's interesting that Woolf finds a kind of proto-feminism, damaging to the texture of *Jane Eyre*, already in Charlotte Brontë's novel.

Then finally what Elaine Showalter likes best: the supplanting of the feminist novel--because Elaine Showalter, too, is nervous about the tendentiousness of fiction--the supplanting of that by what she calls "the female novel," which is the novel that simply takes for granted the authenticity and legitimacy of the woman's point of view, writes from that point of view but, as in Virginia Woolf, having shed or shaken off the elements of anger or adversary consciousness that earlier novels had typically manifested. This history of the novel is very similar to what Showalter is doing with her sense of the history of recent feminist criticism. That's in two phases: first the feminist, as she calls it, when the treatment of women by men in fiction is the main focus; and then the gynocritical, which is the appropriation for women of a literary tradition. Showalter is at pains to point out that much of the most important work of recent feminist scholarship, the feminist scholarship of the 1970s, is in simply the unearthing of and expanding of a canon of women's writing not exclusively novelistic, because there had been a time when the novel was sort of half conceded to women as a possible outlet for their writing. But this concession was accompanied by the sovereign assertion that they couldn't write poetry and plays, and so an expansion of the canon such that all forms of writing are available and made visible and recognized as actually existing in a tradition--so that we can trace women's writing, as Showalter puts it, from decade to decade and not from great book to great book, so that there really is a tradition comparable to the male tradition that one can think about, think within, and draw on as a creative writer oneself, is necessary. So both Showalter's history of the novel and her history of modern feminist criticism--or modern women's criticism, one had better say--end at the point when it is still a question of the woman's perspective.

But this raises a question--and I've been touching on it in a variety of ways--but it really raises the question that has to haunt thinking of this kind. We're going to be encountering it again and again and again as we move through other forms of identity perspective in criticism and theory. It raises the question whether if I say that a woman's or women's writing is of a certain sort, if I identify a woman in a way that I take somehow to be recognizable--let's say I identify a woman as intuitive, imaginative, impressionistic, sensitive, illogical, opposed to reason, a refuser of that periodic sort of subject-predicate sentence that we associate with men's writing--I can appropriate that for women like the French feminists and I can identify women in so doing as such people--but isn't that simply inverting what men say in Virginia Woolf's discoveries in the British museum in the second chapter of *A Room of One's Own--*isn't that just inverting all the negative values that men have attached to women all along? Isn't it ultimately to accept men's opinions of women, men's ways of saying that because they are avatars of reason, science, logic and all the rest of it--isn't a way of saying that the head is higher than the heart and accepting, in other words, the lower or inferior status of this organ to this organ even though one supposes oneself to have transvalued them and insisted, in promoting women's consciousness, that the heart is higher than the head? One hasn't done anything, in other words, to the essential identities that have governed patriarchal thought from the beginning. It is precisely this characterization of women that has enabled and engendered patriarchy. This is where the theoretical problem arises. It calls for, it seems to me, a sense that somehow or another one has to put the possibility--and there's really no other way to say it, and this is something that Judith Butler frequently says and people who work in the mode of Judith Butler say--one has to put the suggestion that perhaps the best thing one can say as a feminist is there is no such thing as a woman; there is no woman.

Now of course this is perilous, and this is what drives such an unfortunate wedge in the midst of feminist thought. In real life, in real material existence, there certainly are women. They are oppressed by laws, they are oppressed by men, and their rights and their very lives need to be protected with perpetual vigilance. The theoretical idea, in other words, that there's no such thing as a woman is not an idea that can be sustained in life. Yet at the same time, the implications of what the language of identity politics is always calling "essentialism," the implications of saying "woman" is one particular thing--and it might be better if we said "woman" was one particular thing, but something other than what men have been saying she was all along--but making the problem worse, saying that "woman" is one particular thing, which is just what men have always said she was--only it's a good thing, right, that positions of this kind are taken up in this way, despite the fact that they're absolutely necessary for practical feminism and for real-world feminism--is nevertheless detrimental to a more sensitive theoretical understanding of gender and of the possibilities of gender.

It's all very well to be intuitive and emotional and impressionistic, but one wants to say two things about that. In the first place, a guy gets to be that if he wants to, right? [laughs] In the second place, why does a woman *have* to be that, right? It's perfectly clear in both cases that there are exceptions which go vastly beyond the exception that proves the rule. It's perfectly clear that in both cases there are sensibilities across gender that completely mix up and discredit these categories, and so for all of those reasons there is a problem.

Just very quickly I want to point out, looking at Showalter's essay, that this is a bind that criticism around 1980 really hasn't gotten past. Time's up. I'm not going to take the time to quote passages, but notice her animus--and here, in a way, we go back to the beginning--her animus against Marxism and structuralism on the grounds--and of course we've said this ourselves--on the grounds that both of them present themselves as "sciences." Aha! They're gendered male! Marxism and structuralism aren't anything we want to have to do with because this is just Virginia Woolf's beadle raising its ugly head again and imposing its will--through its superior rationality--on women. So we don't want any of that. What we want instead is a form of criticism, and this is what she says in effect at the end of the essay on pages 1385 and 1386, that evades scientificity; a form of criticism that engages with the reality of texts and of the textual tradition but doesn't trouble its head with theoretical matters. In other words, a form that dissociates itself from the logical, from overarching structure, from scientificity.

Showalter leaves herself in this position, and she leaves feminist criticism in this position as--how might one put it?--a colonized enterprise that can do anything it likes as long as it's not reasonable. If that's the case, then of course it imposes an essentializing limit on the possibilities of feminist criticism, just as of course the characterization of men's criticism in the way that it's characterized, needless to say, also imposes limits on that. Whether fair and legitimate limits, or perhaps exaggerated limits, is open to question. That's not nearly as important a point as the reminder that there is a kind of marginalization of the possibilities for feminist criticism involved in saying that it has to be something other than the sort of thing that Marxist and structuralist paradigms make available.

Okay. Now I think that Henry Louis Gates, influenced by Bakhtin, will have a very interesting way of coming to terms with this question of what's available for a marginalized minority criticism once it avoids or has succeeded in avoiding the terms of the mainstream criticism. I want you to read Gates' essay with that particularly in mind. Then we'll come back with the question of, as it were, the future of feminist criticism, in a way since 1980, when we turn to the work of the gender theorists, in particular Judith Butler.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 21 Transcript**

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| April 7, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** So I'm not sure how long this lecture is going to be. We could be finished in ten minutes, though I doubt that, and if we're not finished at the end of the fifty, there are some things that I've reserved for the end of the lecture that I definitely do want to get said. I don't know if you've noticed that there are times when the last point or two that I appeared to have been preparing to make never get made, but in this case I want to make sure that they are made so that if I don't finish today, or if I still have a point or two to make, I'll definitely be taking up those points at the beginning of Thursday's lecture.

All right. Now the African-American tradition of literary production is rich and long standing. As Henry Louis Gates tells you, the first really rather important poet in the tradition, Phillis Wheatley, is an American colonial writer. The flourishing of the slave narrative form begins in the eighteenth century, continues into the nineteenth, the nineteenth century witnesses extraordinary works of fiction, and in the twentieth century, of course most conspicuously in the Harlem Renaissance, but throughout the century there has been extraordinary work done in the African-American literary tradition. It's a very rich tradition--in other words, somewhat in contrast with the very rich but also very recent tradition of African-American literary theory and criticism.

It's possible to argue that the development of theory and criticism in this tradition was somewhat balked by a preliminary way in which it found itself at odds with itself. Black criticism and black feminist criticism from the beginning saw that they didn't have quite the same agenda. This is something that can resonate, perhaps, later in this lecture when we move to other topics, but in the meantime critics like Barbara Christian, Barbara Smith, Hazel Carby, and Bell Hooks were in their variety of ways working with emphases that other, male African-American critics weren't quite comfortable with. So while work, especially beginning in the eighties, proliferated, there was, as I say, a kind of internal divide which has been a complex matter to negotiate and which is, I think, now largely sort of--well, *détente* has been achieved, and African-American literary theory is moving forward unfettered any longer by these concerns, or at least by any excess of these concerns. But in the meantime that may partly account for a certain delay in the emergence of theory and criticism given the long-standing richness of the literary tradition.

Now the role of Henry Louis Gates in African-American criticism is, it seems to me, exemplary, although there are some rather harsh moments in this essay, moments that I wish to take up, that would suggest an element of--what shall I say?--extremism or overkill in Gates's thinking. This is actually not at all the persona that he has projected. Indeed what's extraordinary about Gates, whose administrative power and whose abilities as a program builder are remarkable. After he left Yale to go to Harvard, he was able to gather to Harvard Anthony Appiah, Cornel West, and others who have since departed from Harvard, but Gates is in a way an empire unto himself and he has been an extraordinary figure. The earliest work, which is actually among the earliest work in African-American criticism, is what you've been reading for today, and it established his reputation together with--not so much discovery of, but authentication of--a manuscript by Harriet Wilson which he published, an important contribution to our knowledge of nineteenth-century African-American literature.

In any case, what happened then was that Gates who by some miracle or other--he was a perfectly good writer in the first place but gradually became a marvelous writer--began writing for *The New Yorker,* and during this phase of his career, when among other things he produced a remarkable autobiography about growing up in West Virginia, during this phase Gates really became a spokesperson for a *détente* among races and racial factions. In other words, he was a voice of moderation without incurring any imputation of Uncle Tom-ism or anything of the sort. His sheer urbanity as the remarkable writer that he is in those years when he wrote under Tina Brown for *The New Yorker* was just a remarkable achievement, and his career is still going strong.

Now for Gates, as for Elaine Showalter last week and for Woolf before her, the problems surrounding the concept of identity persist. Identity--which of course is an important anchor for the thinking of people who feel the need for voices, for a place in the literary and cultural horizon--is nevertheless at least potentially, as we've begun to notice already, a kind of quicksand. There are two problems really that dog the issue of identity. One of them is the problem of "essentializing" which I'll take up now, and then, as I'll take it up next, also the problem of what might be called the identity queue. In other words, I am a lower-class black lesbian feminist whose nation is Palestine. Needless to say, I have a variety of identity options to choose from, but the result is I've got to figure out which of them has priority. In other words, which of those identities do I suppose has the underlying integrity and essence, *essentiality*, that can motivate, as it were, the characteristics of my other identities, which are therefore somehow or another placed further down in the queue?

So this is a topic that I'll come back to in a minute, but in the meantime the problem of essentializing, as we call it: for example, as Gates describes it on page 1893 in the right-hand column, where he's very clear on the dangers of ascribing, whether positively or negatively, attributes to any group that is constituted as or thought of--because of course, the notion of race and whether there *is* race is in itself according to Gates problematic--the problem of ascribing attributes even honorifically to a race is, as he describes it on page 1893:

The sense of difference defined in popular usages [finally my voice is changing] [laughter] [laughs] of the term *race* has been used both to describe and *inscribe* differences of language, belief system, artistic tradition, "gene pool," and all sorts of supposedly "natural" attributes such as rhythm, athletic ability, cerebration, usury, and fidelity.

In other words, obviously, apportioning out stereotypes to the various groups that may come forward as candidates to be races--he's pointing out that all of these stereotypes do nobody very much good.

So the problem of essentializing, which undergirds the wish to make manifest the existence of race gives pause. Think about it. On the other hand, Gates seems to be divided at the beginning of his essay between a certain candor about race, as in the work of Hippolyte Taine that he describes, in which "race," "milieu" and "cultural moment" are considered the key determining issues of any kind of artistic or cultural production. He says of that in effect, "Well, at least race is being talked about," while at the same time obviously wincing away from the implications of race and from the belief that there is such a thing as race, which goes all the way back to Montesquieu and others from Taine. Nevertheless, as I say, he's rather cheerful about the fact that at least race is being discussed, unlike the twentieth century when the whole thing is swept under the rug and a kind of *ersatz* and hypocritical politeness prevents anybody from talking about such categories at all, and gives rise to the idea that we all exist in the same Great Tradition, that work either belongs to that tradition or, if it for some reason seems egregious or outside the tradition, it just can be shoved aside and neglected.

That's the supposition of the twentieth century when folks don't talk about race. So the very question whether it is an issue is part of this problem that is dogged by the more complicated issue of essentializing. For example, suppose--and of course, you've been reading about this in Showalter as well--you ascribe positive value to what another person might call a stereotype. This is what the important Francophone African poet Senghor does, as Gates says at the top of page 1901, the right hand-column. Gates says:

When we attempt to appropriate, by inversion, *race* as a term for an essence, as did the Negritude movement, for example ("We feel, therefore we are," as Senghor argued of the African), we yield too much, such as the basis of a shared humanity. Such gestures, as Anthony Appiah has observed, are futile and dangerous because of their further inscription of new and bizarre stereotypes.

So you can see there are a lot of landmines to be avoided in negotiating the discourse of race, and certainly Gates is aware of them.

Now there's also the problem, as I say, of the identity queue, and Gates himself may have a little difficulty with this, at least from time to time, because as I said at the beginning, he does have this sort of uneasy *détente* with feminism in the African-American critical tradition still to work within. So for example, on page 1894, a somewhat problematic passage in which the identity queue seems to be at issue, about a third of the way down, the left-hand column, he says:

The sanction of biology contained in sexual difference, simply put, does not and can never obtain when one is speaking of "racial difference." Yet we carelessly use language in such a way as to *will* this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations.

So what he's saying is in biological terms there's definitely a difference between the sexes, but in biological terms there is not necessarily a difference among the so-called primary races. The result is that at least when one speaks of women and men in the feminist tradition, one has to come face to face with the problem of actual difference; whereas when one speaks of black and white in the traditions of discourse about race, one isn't actually talking about a genuine difference at all. Therefore the discourse with the greater integrity of the two is the one which is about differences that are absolutely ephemeral, as opposed to the one which is about differences, which, whatever one thinks of them and whatever one wants to make out of them, are nevertheless essential.

Now plainly when we go back to feminist criticism, particularly the gender theory of Judith Butler, we'll see of course that the whole question of the biological basis of sex, the biological difference between the sexes which essentializes what we will be wanting to talk about, is of course something that is profoundly in question, and not just because of so-called trans-gender issues but also, at the same time, because of the way in which our very sexual identity is something which, according to Butler, we construct. So there is an insistence here on a biological difference between these two forms of discussing identity which may or may not seem to us to be problematic.

Now I think this is the point at which we can see the importance of the extraordinary essay that I've also asked you to read, by Toni Morrison. We know her best, of course, as a novelist, but she's also a distinguished critic, as she has been a distinguished editor of other important work. Here it seems to me that her reflections in some ways give us a sideways exit from the predicaments that I have been talking about, the problem of essentialism and the problem of the identity queue, because what Morrison wants to say--and I think she borrows here particularly from the famous discussion of the master-slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind--*what Morrison wants to say is that identity isn't so much a question of what something is but rather a question of what it is not. She says not that we should be so much preoccupied with what it is to be black, but rather that, as we think about the way in which being black is inscribed within the white tradition--as we think about that, we need to think about what *white is not*: in other words, as she says repeatedly, about black as absence, as negation, as negativity. We have to understand the absolute--and this is where she drives her argument from the master-slave dialectic--the absolute necessity in the construction of white identity for there to be, as an absence and as a lack over against white identity, the existence of the African American and, more particularly, for the better part of the American cultural tradition, of the slave.

Let me quote then from her essay on page 1795, the left-hand column, where she says:

In that construction of blackness [this is a third of the way down] and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. And what rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and rationalize external exploitation was an Africanism--a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire--that is uniquely American.

Then she points out that although her subject is the American tradition, there also exists a European Africanism with its counterpart in its own colonial literature. To reinforce this, she takes a remarkable example which must have reminded you, those of you who know Faulkner, of Thomas Sutpen or at least reminded you in some ways of Thomas Sutpen--the example of this character Dunbar, who actually rose up not so much out of the swamp as out of the Scottish Enlightenment and came to the United States and--according to Bernard Bailyn, the historian from whom she cites her information--became a completely transformed character. I won't quote to you the long passage from Bailyn's text which makes what Morrison wants to take from it clear, but rather from what Morrison summarizes of it on page 1796, the top of the right-hand column:

I take this [William Dunbar] to be a succinct portrait of the process by which the American as new, white, and male was constituted. It is a formation that has several attractive consequences, all of which are referred to in Bailyn's summation of Dunbar's character and located in how Dunbar feels "within himself"--"a power, a sense of freedom he had not known before."

This is uncannily parallel by the way to the rationalization for slaves in Greek culture. The Greeks always said that the reason they had slaves was so they could be free: in other words so that the home or ruling population was liberated in the case of the Greeks from performing the daily necessities that are life sustaining and keep us going. In other words, to be free according to the citizen of the Greek *polis* is to be free from work.

Now in a certain way, this is still a rationalization that Tony Morrison sees in the American slave-owning tradition, but it's not so much in the case of this Dunbar a freedom from work. It's a more broad and insidious idea of freedom: freedom from responsibility, freedom from the need to acknowledge otherness as human--freedom, in other words, from the sorts of constraint imposed by old world civility in Scotland and in London; freedom on this frontier, in this wilderness, in this swamp, simply to be whatever one wants to be. That freedom is achieved on the backs of the black slaves. It is in some ways similar, as I say, to the rationalization for slavery in Greece, but it is in a way more insidious and certainly more--in the terms that Morrison's giving it to us in--more dialectical. That is to say, it is the question of whether a person could become white without the availability of a black absence, of that which can be oppressed-- like a kind of spring for the jack-in-the-box--which allows the white jack-in-the-box to leap out of the box because of that which has been suppressed down below.

All of that is part of Toni Morrison's concern, and it colors her, well, certainly controversial reading of *Huckleberry Finn*--which nevertheless, it seems to me, has a quite profound interest. Now my own first instinct when people single out *Huckleberry Finn* for blameis to wince away, because it's an extraordinary novel. The controversy about it in the school districts which made it a banished book had mainly to do with the "N-word," to which we'll return, and the question of who has the right to use the "N-word," which is not an easy question to answer, as we'll see. But that controversy, while it had an authentic basis, was nevertheless certainly in literary terms and in terms of the imagination perhaps rather limited.

Morrison gives rise to another equally and intensely critical way of thinking about *Huckleberry Finn.* She argues that to liberate Jim--which of course is the tremendous failure at the end of the novel, a failure of imagination on the part of Tom Sawyer and a failure of will or independence of mind on the part of Huck himself--that the failure to liberate Jim, which would have been the easiest thing in the world, because all they had to do was point out the right fork in the river, is an absolute necessity for the ongoing self-definition of whiteness as it's available both to Tom and to Huck and, after all, by implication, to Mark Twain himself. He couldn't figure out how to end the novel. He wrote it, then it lay on his desk for a long time because he just couldn't figure out what to do with it, and he finally comes up with this--as we all agree--appalling ending. Toni Morrison says it's the *only ending available* because in ways that the, as she sees it, sentimentality of the novel and the sentimentality of the relationship between Huck and Jim, which is so strong that it caused another critic named Leslie Fiedler to talk about a homoerotic relation between them--the title of Fiedler's famous essay is "Come Up on the Raft, Huck, Honey"--with all of that in the background, Toni Morrison says the basic structure of consciousness in Twain's novel is obscured, a basic structure which makes it absolutely imperative that Jim not be free. If Jim is free, then there is no Other over against which whiteness can define itself. That's the way in which she makes use of the general argument about the traditions of American literature in culture in applying it to *Huckleberry Finn.*

All right. Let's go back to Skip Gates--Henry Louis Gates's nickname, sorry--another person who was at Yale and whom I knew very well. I actually had a little bit to do with the origin of the notion of the signifying monkey; I'll come back to that later. Barbara Johnson, also now at Harvard, and I had a lot of conversations with Skip at that period about this, and so it's not that I feel proprietary--it's Skip's idea--but I was in on that, and so it's not just name dropping. I get to call him by what his friends call him. However, I'll try to remember to say Henry Louis Gates, and in any case to return to him now.

Before moving on to this crucial central issue, I want to talk a little bit simply about his understanding and the understanding of others of the African-American tradition--both of the critical tradition and of the literary tradition. First of all, the grasp of the critical tradition as basically a two-step or two-part progression is something that he shares with Elaine Showalter from last time. You remember Showalter says that the important movement of feminist interventions in literary criticism begins with the moment that she calls "feminist": that is to say, the moment of Kate Millett and other authors who talk about the degradation and unfair treatment of women in male books, and then what Showalter prefers and supposes to have supervened and to have become more important, "gynocritical criticism," which is women's appropriation of literary traditions for themselves, the archival work that makes the canon of women's literature not just leaping from great name to great name, but an actual unfolding and continuous development from decade to decade, as Showalter puts it.

Now Gates on page 1896, the right-hand margin, sees it in much the same way for the development of African-American criticism. You can do two things basically, says Gates. He doesn't put them chronologically, but you could map onto what he's saying here the same chronological sequence. He says:

What I mean by citing these two overworked terms [he's talking about "the other" in particular] is precisely this: how blacks are figures in literature [that is to say, how they're represented in literature, demeaningly, even perhaps honorifically], and also how blacks *figure*,as it were, literature of their own making. [You can see, in other words, the same movement in his thinking about these issues.]

As Showalter argued too, the question of the *literary* tradition is more complicated; it has more steps. In other words, the powers of self-expression available to women from the beginning of their creative expression passed through more than just two stages, and the same thing is true of African-American literature. Now I think that Gates simply takes for granted as an implicit premise of the work that was done the year before he published this essay in *Critical Inquiry* by another colleague of ours here at Yale--who died tragically not too long thereafter--named Michael Cooke, who in 1984 wrote a book called *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy.* Cooke argued in this book that the history of African-American literature passes essentially through four stages. It begins with what Cooke calls "self-veiling": the period, in other words, in which people attempting for the first time to write--and of course Gates talks about the way in which writing is really writing oneself into the human community for black people--the people who first attempted to write used white models. Phillis Wheatley, the poet whom Gates talks about, a remarkable poet and a very interesting one, nevertheless wrote in the manner of Alexander Pope, so much so that a great deal of her work is almost impossible--which is course a point of praise--to distinguish from that of Alexander Pope. She is an instance of the first phase, which Cooke calls "self-veiling."

The second phase, which Cooke calls "solitude," involves continuing to use white models, a white prose style, a way of narrating which is obviously derived from white teachers and white models but which nevertheless involves, as its central theme, self-definition. Here you might want to think of Douglass and of slave narratives in general, where the emphasis is on being taught by white people, but nevertheless there is a tension which exists and which founds and governs the possibility of self-liberation and self-freedom. In other words, the slave narrative as an ongoing form partakes of this second phase in the development of African-American literature as Cooke understands it.

Thirdly, there is what Cooke calls "kinship," a literature in which African Americans reach out to each other, identify themselves as a community, not as individuals struggling to be free but rather as a community. Cooke identifies this phase with the experimentation with dialect and a way of narrating and poetizing which involves a self-conscious insistence on verbal and linguistic difference. You can think of many of the poems, for example, of Langston Hughes in this regard and of a great deal else that goes on in the Harlem Renaissance; so that's the third phase, kinship.

Then the last phase--and what I'm going to want to say is that Gates doesn't think we've reached this. In other words, the point of disagreement between Cooke and Gates is precisely about this. The last phase, which Cooke calls "intimacy," is the freedom to expropriate any and all models, not in other words to insist necessarily on one's own creative paradigms as a racial tradition but to expropriate anything that comes ready to hand. Ellison's *Invisible Man*,for example, is a masterpiece of High Modernism. It takes freely, in other words, from whatever traditions come to hand and are most readily available for the kind of work that Ellison wants to do. Cooke identifies this perhaps rather optimistically with what he calls "intimacy": in other words, a merger, a finally achieved merger of traditions such that--and this is plainly the ideal of Virginia Woolf as well--such that one no longer has to write as a spokesperson. One no longer needs to be concerned with thematizing the kinds of identity out of which one's writing has arisen. One can write just anything one wants to--in other words, the utopian vision of "no matter who I am, I have access to absolutely any forms and themes I care to work with."

That is the vision of Michael Cooke, which Gates, I think, unfortunately, rightly feels that we haven't quite arrived at, and that's why I deliberately used the word "expropriate" in talking about Cooke's fourth phase. If I use models other than models made available by my own tradition, I'm not just kind of pulling them out of the air. I'm using them with a calculated purpose. I always have something in mind in choosing the model that I choose. We're not really quite at intimacy because self-definition is still at issue. You can talk about the High Modernism of the *Invisible Man* all you like, but think of what the *Invisible Man* is about. The *Invisible Man* is still about what it means to be black. What is "passing"? What does it mean in other words to have this racial identity? So that, yes: traditions, manners, styles have been expropriated, but at the same time the business of writing as an African American continues, and it is as much, after all, a question of self-definition as it has been hitherto.

As Gates sees it, it continues to be the issue. We use other models. We need to make them our own. Otherwise we're just colonized by them, and then after all we're back in phase one, right? We're back in self-veiling because, after all, Phillis Wheatley used other models. Phillis Wheatley actually aspired to the idea that she was *just a poet*. She could write about anything she wanted to write about--the tears of Niobe in the painting by Richard Wilson--whatever it might be, she could write about it because she was just a poet. That was her great aspiration, to be received *not* as that amazing thing, a young black slave woman who could write. She wasn't interested in that. She wanted to be a poet, and so in a certain sense you can see the problem. If intimacy is achieved in the fourth phase, well, then that's finally just the realization of what Phillis Wheatley wanted in the first phase, [laughs] and we have to admit, for all of the complicated reasons that these critics go into, that this is not a moment which can be said yet to have been achieved.

Okay. Now this brings us to Gates's key concept: what does it mean to expropriate other people's traditions, more particularly the white tradition, and what is the advantage of doing so? Here Gates is after all thinking primarily about criticism. How can we do theory and criticism in the white man's language? How can we appropriate or expropriate for ourselves the white man's language? The necessity of bending language to one's own purposes is what is emphasized in the remarkable epigraph on page 1891 that Gates takes from Bakhtin. This is, it seems to me, as central a passage in Bakhtin, by the way, as anything that we studied when we were actually reading Bakhtin, and I'd like you to make note of it because I think it really can illuminate a great deal that's going on in Bakhtin that we didn't perhaps fully articulate at the time. This is what Bakhtin says:

… language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent [and you can hear Gates wanting to emphasize that word "accent"], when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!) [how true], but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it "one's own."

Now actually during the course of his essay, Gates echoes this sentiment of Bakhtin by quoting Derrida at the very top of the right-hand column on page 1901, where he says, "We must master, as Derrida wrote, 'how to speak the other's language without renouncing (our) own."

Now how do you do this? How do you set about talking the language you are given? This isn't, of course, just a question of the difference between the races. It's a question of all of us in relation to each other. As Bakhtin says in what you have already read, most of the time we're speaking other people's languages. It is rare indeed that we can say, feeling very much like creative writers when we do so, that we have somehow wrenched other people's language out of its conventional usages and made it our own, slightly rewritten it so that it is truly our own. So more broadly speaking, this is the challenge that faces a theoretical tradition or a theoretical enterprise, I should say, that doesn't want to be just derivative from what other folks have already said.

The concept that Gates brings to bear on this, because after all he recognizes, as does Showalter too, that the notion of the *sign* is probably the cornerstone of white male literary theory--he recognizes that in order to perform this expropriative act, he's got to do something with the notion of the sign, and so he talks about the way in which one can *signify on* something. He introduces it very quietly on page 1900, the right-hand column, just seemingly in passing, near the top of the right-hand column:

Since writing, according to Hume, was the ultimate sign of difference between animal and human, these writers implicitly were Signifyin(g) upon the figure of the chain itself…

Notice the accent. You don't necessarily pronounce the *g*: they were signifyin' on the chain. Of course, the great chain of being, which is hierarchical, is very different from the vertical chain of the chain gang, isn't it? It's very different from the chain that holds slaves together. That's part of what it means to "signify on" something. At least allegedly, the "signifier" in the white male theoretical tradition is just a kind of placeholder in a play of linguistic differences. The question of the underlying sociological and cultural basis of this play and of the way in which this play takes shape isn't taken into account--again, allegedly--because--well, in ways that you can probably grasp from what we've said all along, this is slightly to oversimplify, but this is the position taken up. In any case, you therefore need to take the signifier and signify *on* it.

Well, what is it to signify on something? This is an expression that Gates takes from the trickster tradition, the tradition of African storytelling in which the weaker is also the smarter, and the monkey or Anansi the Spider--some of you may remember the songs of Rafi from your childhood about Anansi the Spider--in which the monkey or the spider tricks the big, bad guys, the elephant, the lion. All of the bad guys get tricked because they are stupider, and the little guy is always able to signify on them, to trick them, and to lie to them without their realizing what's going on. This way of talking about signifying is very much in the tradition of African-American folklore and first comes to public consciousness in a song by the scat singer Oscar Brown, Jr., written by Oscar Brown, Jr., called "The Signifyin' Monkey." If I could sing, I'd sing it to you. Fortunately, I can't sing, but it became extremely popular and was picked up by various instrumental jazz groups and was a staple in the jazz tradition of the fifties and sixties. In any case, Oscar Brown Jr.'s notion of the signifying monkey is where Gates takes his essay's title from and which is where also he gets this idea of taking somebody else's discourse out of its context and insisting on bending it into an African-American context--in other words, a context which is one's own and not just the context one is given.

Now the other example of "signifyin' on" that Gates gives is the culminating example of *The Color Purple*,and the conversation about "gettin' the man out of your eye," which is a way of taking back a problem that exists even within the African-American tradition. As Gates has been pointing out, Wheatley and later Rebecca Jackson take their models of education and self-development from white male figures who have taught them how to read. In each case of course, this is pernicious because the existence of the white male figure is very much still in your eye. You got to get the man out of your eye, at least according to the dialogue Gates quotes from *The Color Purple.*

Well, the interesting thing there is that in a way the issue of feminist criticism comes back to haunt Gates's argument because plainly Shug doesn't just mean the *white* man when she says "the man." A big issue in *The Color Purple*,of course, is the emergence of a possible feminism from social constructions that aren't just defined by race; so that when Gates says "the man," which all of us recognize as shorthand for "the white man," can be signified on by an African-American tradition, making it a term of opprobrium, right?--"get the man out of your eye"--at the same time it can be signified on by the *feminist* tradition, making it a term of opprobrium not in a completely different way, but in an overlapping and partially different way. Gates, in emphasizing the one as opposed to the other, is perhaps tilting again toward a certain imbalance.

Now finally I want to take up the example, the most controversial example in his essay, one which is a source of outrage for most readers, at the bottom of page 1893 in the left-hand column. He's been talking about the New Agrarian moment out of which there emerged a number of figures associated with the New Criticism, including Robert Penn Warren, who very early on repudiated the New Agrarians and became a politically progressive figure in his own writing. Many of you have probably read *All the King's Men,* certainly, and his poetry as well. He was an avatar, a central figure, in the development of the thinking of the New Criticism, which we have briefly studied.

Now Warren wrote a poem called "Pondy Woods," which is quoted completely out of context by Sterling Brown and unfairly out of context in the passage which I'm not going to read because I don't think I have the right to speak the "N-word"; so I'll just have you look at it--and I'll come back to that in a minute. Sterling Brown's response is also recorded there for you. Well, the problem is, from the standpoint of anybody who's actually read the poem--but remember in some ways it's a problem raised by a New Critical perspective, and I'll explain what I mean in a minute--that expression is spoken by a buzzard or vulture from--I forget whether it's Tennessee or Kentucky. The episode takes place in northern Louisiana, and the buzzard is sitting expectantly on a tree waiting for a fugitive slave who has been chased into the swamp by his white pursuers to die. The vulture is sitting there--well, if it could it would be--rubbing its hands with glee waiting for this to take place. It's the vulture that says it in the poem: nothing to do in other words, as we say, with the author of the poem, Warren, who is writing a completely sympathetic evocation of what it's like to be a fugitive slave in this state of terrible and overwhelmed panic.

So it seems completely unfair and it is, I think, unfair as Sterling Brown took it up and as Gates then perpetuates the idea in his own reference. The one thing I would add, however, is that it's a New Critical idea that we invoke to *say* that it's unfair. It's the New Criticism, in which Robert Penn Warren was a participant, that tells us we shouldn't confuse speakers in poems with authors. In other words, an author is someone, according to the New Criticism, who is dispassionate and who introduces dramatic voices even in lyric poems, voices with which we are merely confusing ourselves if we associate them with an author.

Now this is something that we just take for granted when we read poems. All poems for us are to some degree dramatic monologues on the model of Browning and others in the nineteenth century. We read them that way now, but it is, as I say, a New Critical idea, and it comes back to the question, "Who has the right to use the 'N-word'?" It's a frequent term used on the street, as you know, in African-American culture, used almost with a certain fondness as a form of mutual greeting, but at the same time it is a term that continues rigorously to be rejected as available to anyone other than someone who belongs within this community. And so that issue lingers. It's an issue that Warren--because of course he wrote long before this controversy began to arise around the word--the controversy really boiled over precisely at the time of the banning of *Huckleberry Finn* from public schools, much later, and so there's a kind of innocence perhaps in Warren's use of the word. Nevertheless, in the critical tradition it's a question, "Who has the right to use it?"

This gives rise perhaps to the suggestion of a certain insularity in the thinking of the New Criticism. Use any model you like: the model of the Freudian unconscious, the model of the political unconscious. In other words, we've been reading a lot in this course about our never quite saying what we mean to say, of our never quite being fully in control of our discourse because it bubbles up from the unconscious, right? Now if you take a model like this, even though it's a nasty buzzard from Kentucky that's saying what Gates quotes, nevertheless there is an author, and it has bubbled up from the unconscious of that.

Well, what are you going to do with that? There's a kind of impasse there. We feel distinctly and vividly and even bitterly--because I love Warren, I love "Pondy Woods" and I also am something of a New Critic--so we feel a bitterness about the expropriation, the "signifying on" what Warren says in this fashion. At the same time, we have entertained these ideas of a subliminal author, not an authority but an author welling up from below. If that's the case, then we have to worry a little bit about how an expression like that got into the poem after all. I call it a lingering problem because it strikes me as one of those moments when probably it would have been better if Gates hadn't followed Sterling Brown, one of those moments when there is a kind of overkill in the zeal of argumentation, but which at the same time we can't absolutely dismiss out of hand for the variety of reasons that I have mentioned.

Okay. I'll leave it there, and we'll return to many of these issues in a new vocabulary and in new forms when we read the examples of post-colonial criticism on Thursday that you've been assigned.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 22 Transcript**

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| April 9, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Well, post-colonial studies is really by far the most varied and eclectic of the identity fields that we're passing in review in this portion of the course: eclectic really of necessity, of course, because of the immense variety of the materials covered, but also because of swirling issues and controversies within post-colonial studies or "po-co," as it's affectionately known, which kind of pose a number of questions from the side that keep things lively, to say the least. We are taking up only one strand, one developmental strand, in post-colonial studies today, a kind of progression from the work of Said to the work of Bhabha which is relatively easily mapped, simply in terms of the intellectual agendas of each of them, but there's a great deal else going on.

I suppose I should just mention in passing certain topics that we won't be discussing, at least except possibly in passing and that, however, you might really be interested in considering if you do have an interest in this field. The first issue, of course, is who says "post-colonial," and who says that we're necessarily out of colonialism? Just because the local viceroy packs up and goes home doesn't necessarily mean that things change all that significantly in the so-called postcolonial setting, and it needs to be taken into account, seriously considered, whether or not one isn't still in colonial or colonial studies and that the moniker "post-colonial" might therefore be inappropriately applied. There's also the question that arises in the study of the so-called third world, which is obviously in itself a controversial term. It arises as that which is not comprised as either of the great sort of trajectories of the superpowers during the Cold War. There is no Cold War, at least allegedly no Cold War any longer, and so the question of the status, nature, and structure of the third world is obviously wide open.

But the issue I mean to touch on in terms of post-colonial studies is whether, in fact, crises and concerns with respect to the third world are necessarily always to be understood in terms of coloniality. Is it just that certain parts of the globe have been colonized that constitutes them as they are and shapes their identity? Said in a very interesting way takes this up in trying to figure out how it is that German Orientalism so very closely resembles French Orientalism, even though the Germans had no colonial interests in the Middle East. During the whole period--the early nineteenth century in particular, when German Orientalism is practically indistinguishable from the French, takes up the same concerns, and has the same interests--how is it that the French are undoubtedly in some sense, in Said's view, determined by their colonial interests, and the Germans, who seem so much to reflect French attitudes, have no colonial interests, at least in the Middle East?

Said sort of quite honestly tries to come to terms with this. His answer is, "Well, German Orientalism is simply derived in scholarly terms from French Orientalism. It has the stamp of that thinking and reflects that thinking," and so there you are. He could have said on the other hand, however, that a certain mindset toward the third world--and this is the point I have been making about this particular issue--dictates a certain way of structuring one's thought about that world, irrespective of whether or not there are colonial interests involved. That's what I mean by raising the question, "Is coloniality always at issue in cases of this kind?"

There's a kind of confusion in thinking about these things, a confusion which is distilled in the history of the British East India Company--which is both nationalist and, as it were, globalizing--but a confusion which comes out in more recent history of coloniality, and that is: well, what drives coloniality? Is it always nationalism or, as seems increasingly the case in the modern world, is it transnational interests in globalization? In other words, is the relationship between the colonist and the colonized a relation of some sort of metropolitan nation with respect to a provincial empire, or is it a relation which is dictated and generated by the economic interests of globalization? This is a complex subject which generates a great deal of debate in the field that we take up today, but in a way, we can't just say, "Well, nationalism isn't important anymore, now it's globalization" because actually nationalism seems to have reappeared in the Bush foreign policy, even possibly to be continued in the Obama foreign policy, and so there's a complex relationship still between nationalism and globalization that needs to be considered and thought about if these social relations are to be clearly understood.

Finally, there is within post-colonial studies--especially among those who represent the various colonized interests of the world--there is the question, to borrow an expression from Gayatri Spivak, "How should the subaltern speak?" It has to do most vividly with the very question, "Which language should the subaltern speak in?" Spivak's own question is, "Can the subaltern speak at all?" and Said raises that question, as you notice, during the course of his analysis; but the related issue is, okay, suppose that the subaltern can speak--suppose Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example, can write a novel. What language should it be written in? Ngugi campaigned in his more recent career not to write in English and also to urge other African writers to write in native languages and not in the language of the colonizer. This is a frequently heard opinion from within post-colonial studies, but debate swirls around it because, of course, the means of circulation of literary influence is languages that draw upon international publishing possibilities and not languages that can only be grasped and published and disseminated locally. So there, too, you have a complicated issue or controversy on both sides, of which there is much to say; but as I say, for us today it's simply a question-- or more simply a question, because when you've got Homi Bhabha on the syllabus there's no such thing as simplicity--so I should say it's a question of following the trajectory or development specifically between Said and Bhabha.

In beginning to think about Said, I thought we wouldn't think about him. We'd think instead, for a moment at least, once again about Virginia Woolf. In the second chapter of *A Room of One's Own,* this young woman, Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael--whoever she is, is sitting in the British Library. She's thought that she'd spend the morning trying to figure out what scholars think about women. After all, the subject is women and fiction. I'm supposed to be addressing these undergraduates on this subject: "what do I know about women? I'd better go to the library and find out." So she expects just to find a couple of books and she'll be all set.

Instead she is simply overwhelmed, and there's this avalanche of material. She submits maybe a dozen or two call slips and then sits back waiting for the material to appear. Of course, the point of it is that everything in the British Library on what turns out to be the voluminous subject of women is written by men, right? Everything. She begins to take note of the way these things are described in the sort of pre-computer database. That is to say, how do you classify the various things that men have to say about women? This is the way it goes: "condition of Middle Ages of; habits in the Fiji Islands of; worshipped as goddesses by; weaker in moral sense than; idealism of; greater conscientious of; South Sea islanders age of puberty among; attractiveness of; offered as sacrifice to; small size of brain of; profounder sub-consciousness of; less hair on the body of; mental, moral and physical inferiority of; love of children of; greater length of life of; weaker muscles of; strength of affections of; vanity of; higher education of; Shakespeare's opinion of; Lord Birkenhead's opinion of; Dean Inge's opinion of; La Bruyere's opinion of; Dr. Johnson's opinion of; Mr. Oscar Browning's opinion of; and dot, dot, dot--the list can continue. In other words, she sits there. She's simply overwhelmed, and what she of course is telling us is that there's lots and lots and lots and lots of opinions on record about women, all of them expressed by men.

So now thinking about Edward Said, if Edward Said had taken up Virginia Woolf's project, if Edward Said had undertaken to write *A Room of One's Own,* the title of it would have been Female-ism, right? That's precisely what he means by "Orientalism," the vast body of information--some of it scholarly, some of it just sort of sheerly doxological--the vast body of information about peoples called "Oriental" by and large, especially in the nineteenth-century tradition. Said's main concern is the peoples of the Middle East, and he shows how it is that there's a certain reason why this is an appropriate term to use for that tradition of scholarship and philology in the nineteenth century.

In any case, the vast body of material published about these people--and it's perfectly true that there are the infinitely long shelves of the library devoted to multivolume treatises on this topic, all of them written by us in the West--us--about this other who is perpetually in our imagination and constructed by us in the variety of ways that Said discusses on page 1811, the right-hand column. He says toward the bottom of the column:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.

Just as in Woolf, men's opinions about women getting themselves expressed in books make the subject of woman clear to an audience of men.

All right. So before moving in with some more depth and precision into Said's text, let me quickly explain what I mean by saying that Said and Bhabha constitute a kind of sequence. I'm thinking in particular of Elaine Showalter's distinction between feminist and gynocritical criticism. You remember the distinction which is echoed, by the way, in Gates's essay. The distinction is: first you get criticism in which the treatment of women in literature by men is the focus of attention, and then subsequently you get criticism in which the women's tradition, the voice of women themselves, is the focus and, as Showalter believes, the more fruitful terrain for criticism. You can see that in that context, by way of making that distinction, you can see that Said is decidedly phase one because, of course, Orientalism is about the treatment of the Middle Eastern other by the West. It can be slotted into that same moment.

Then Homi Bhabha obviously in a variety of ways takes up the subject position of the colonized, of the subaltern. He doesn't leave out the subject position of the colonizer because he sees them as being radically interrelated, but he plainly is as interested in a variety of ways of talking about the traditions of the colonized as he is of talking about the way in which colonization takes place and expresses itself. So in that sense, we can see Said and Bhabha as belonging to these two phases as mapped by Showalter. As I say also in passing by Gates--and I'm sorry for the confusion of this heading [gestures to board]--actually there's another way in which Said and Bhabha can be understood as phase one and phase two. That has much more to do with the tradition of literary theory, which in their ways both Showalter and Gates have rejected, insisting that one needs to commandeer white male literary theory for one's own purposes.

I suppose it's a question of how this issue doesn't come up in Said and Bhabha. It could perhaps be answered by saying that precisely in the situation of colonialism, the intellectuals--third world, colonized intellectuals--nevertheless are educated in high-octane male metropolitan institutions, by which of course one means primarily Oxford and Cambridge. In a certain sense, they come to identify--and this is not actually a thing apart from Bhabha's argument about hybridity--they come to identify in some measure with the educational agenda of the colonizer and participate in it.

Now that's speculative. It may simply be that we have missed out on those moments when Said and Bhabha, too, may be talking about the way in which the white male tradition of literary theory needs to be appropriated; but for the moment what I want to point out is this: Said's Orientalism works very much in the historical moment of what we call structuralism. That is to say, it's primary concern is with the binary opposition, a mutual and interdependent binary opposition of central self and decentralized other including, as we'll see in a minute, the way in which the construction of the otherness of the other is actually covertly also at the same time a means of constructing, defining, and delimiting the nature of selfhood, or in this case of being Western. There is a fundamental binarism in Said's point of view, which by the way has often been criticized, and it's been criticized most often from the standpoint of Bhabha--if only because he's constantly referring to Derrida's famous essay, "The Double Session," which is about Mallarmé, and also because he appropriates a great deal of the language and style of Derrida.

You can see that Bhabha takes, with respect to the binarism of structuralism, a deconstructive attitude. In other words, his sense of these relations breaks down into, at the very least, a redoubling sense of what he calls "double consciousness" so that one can't clearly identify colonizer and colonized as a binary opposition. It's more complicated than that, and it's a series of issues that turns on a highly Derridian sense of what one might mean by difference. All I want to say is that the relation, Said-Bhabha, is phase one-phase two in that regard as well.

By the way, this is a tendency that one can find in other forms of theory having to do with identity. The relationship between the classical feminism that we have been discussing so far and the gender theory that we will be discussing on Tuesday, especially in the case of Judith Butler, is once again a relation that could be understood as between structuralism and deconstruction. There, too, you have a not completely overlapping but, from the standpoint of our concerns in literary theory, nevertheless rather interesting way in which this succession, Said-Bhabha, is phase one-phase two in two different ways that can be identified, I think, usefully.

All right. So that then about their relationship. So what about Said? How do we get at the issues that Said wants to talk about and understand the way in which he thinks they have integrity? I think I'd like actually to begin with a word or two about truth, because Said makes it clear that in a way, the demonization of Orientalism that his project undertakes isn't really undertaken because Orientalism is necessarily a pack of lies. Maybe he waffles a little bit about this, but it's not really ultimately the point for him whether Orientalism lies or tells the truth. This is the way he puts it on page 1802 in the right-hand column:

… [A] third qualification. One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away. I myself believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient... Nevertheless, what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse…

In other words, one of Napoleon's adjutants during Napoleon's campaign through Egypt wrote a ten-volume *Eastward de l'Egypt.* Many of the texts which Said mentions in passing in his introduction to Orientalism are just as long. You've got fifty-volume, sort of gigantic scholarly undertakings, and you've got to admit, well, if they are saying that much, there's got to be something in it that's true. There is, after all, a great deal of knowledge of a certain kind, at least, that has gone into thinking of this kind, and so one can't just say, "My point is that none of it's true." Said is at pains to make a distinction, therefore, between truth and value. It's not that Orientalist discourse is necessarily true or false. It is the case though that it is insidiously devaluate of its object of attention--that there is an implicit euro-centrism which Said does go so far as to consider a form of racism in Orientalism, quite irrespective of any measure or degree of truth that what are, after all, the meticulous researches of a lot of these characters turn up. For example, on page 1812, the left-hand column, he says:

My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis [this is about a third of the way down] on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations *as representations*, not as "natural" descriptions of the Orient.

Now we might pause for a minute over that as a possible object of critique because at the end of his essay, or at the end of the introduction as you have it, you notice Said saying, "Look, I don't take up here the question of how one might actually write correctly [laughs] about these people." He doesn't take up, for example, the question of what it might be like to be sort of a representative of these minorities or colonized figures and to write about oneself. He doesn't really take up the question of whether the bias of somebody else writing about me, a man writing about a woman, is worse than the bias of my own preconceptions and prejudices about myself. He admits that he doesn't really have an advanced theory that secures one kind of representation as true or authentic and secures another kind of representation as bias and inauthentic. He says, "Another scholar will perhaps take this up. I leave it alone in my book," and it is left alone, the problem being that the claim remains that he does--anticipating many other people who have written on this subject--he does impugn Orientalism as mere representation: that is to say, as the opposite because it is a representation, the opposite of a natural evocation of an ethos or world.

So we just do want to put a little question mark in the margin and then say, "Well, fine. Granted this is all representation, where is the text? Where could the text be that would be natural?" Is there, for example, any such thing, as we've asked ourselves over the course of the semester, as a natural sign? The sign being arbitrary, it does place us already pretty securely in the realm of representation. So all of these questions are then posed by Said's sense of the relationship between truth and value in the history of Orientalist scholarship.

Now where is he coming from? He's quite open about it, and it's perhaps worth pausing over an idea common to the two scholar-theorists who matter most to him, Michel Foucault and the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. First of all, just to pass in review the way in which he's indebted to Gramsci on page 1803, the left-hand column, Said says:

Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent.

In other words, it's not just a question of having forced down your throat certain ideas of concepts or laws, for that matter, but a circulation of knowledge, so called, of feeling about things, of ideology, which through consent establishes certain attitudes of bias. This is the distinction that Gramsci makes between the way in which one is imposed on by actual power and authority and the way in which one is imposed on by the circulations of what we've been exposed to in the past as being called "ideologemes."

So to continue:

In any society not totalitarian [says Said], then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*.

This is a term that you will frequently encounter, particularly in Marxist criticism, but it is also a term very closely related to what for most Western readers is more famous in the work of Michel Foucault, the term "power" or sometimes "power/knowledge."

As you will learn in the excerpt from Foucault that you'll be reading on Tuesday, Foucault like Gramsci makes a distinction between power merely as that which is exercised by the police, by the legal arm of society, by the dictator, by the government, and by power as the ways, the frequently insidious ways, in which knowledge is circulated and made hegemonic--that is to say, made authoritative. Foucault is fascinated by the structure of this circulation of knowledge. That is, in fact the essential subject matter of all of his late work, the way in which we are thinking that we are sort of free contemplative agents in the world, in fact browbeaten by structures of opinion circulating around us that lull us into feeling that we are in the presence of the truth, whereas of course, we're only in the presence of one form or another of motivated bias. Both Gramsci and Foucault make the distinction between absolute power and, as Gramsci calls it, hegemony and, as Foucault calls it, power/knowledge.

Said is talking here about power/knowledge. He's not talking about the imposition of law through force or any other means on a colonized world. He's talking about the way in which opinions construct that world and simultaneously reinforce the authority of those who generate the opinions. I think it's important to point this relatively subtle distinction out: he does, however, disagree from Foucault in one respect. On page 1813 he goes back to what we already know about Foucault, which is Foucault's interest in the author function as opposed to the author. Authors, generally speaking, Foucault wants to say, are not authorities but simply vessels of forms of opinion. Certain authors who come very close to being authority we call founders of discursivity, but even in their cases it's the nature of the discourse and not their existence as authors which is important. Said wants to say, "I take authors a little bit more seriously than that," and he does on page 1813 in the right-hand column where he says:

Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically [that is to say, "through my experience"], in the case of Orientalism, and perhaps nowhere else I find this not to be so.

In other words, the author is the central philologist, and social historians, explorers, and demographers who have written so extensively on this part of the world are authorities. They are the oracles from which generalized and ultimately commonplace opinions disseminate as power/knowledge. It's not a question, therefore, of a kind of silent drumbeat of opinion expressing itself over and over again, which is more what interests Foucault. So Said, as I say, distinguishes himself subtly from Foucault in that regard while nevertheless confessing openly the influence both of Foucault and of Gramsci on his way of approaching his material.

So as a circulation of power, the effect of Orientalism is something that ultimately concerns Said.Well, he says this somewhat rhetorically because it obviously does concern him that it has an effect on the peoples in question, but what ultimately concerns Said is the effect of Orientalism on the Euro-centric mind, indeed the degree to which it even can be said to construct the Euro-centric mind, page 1806, the right-hand column:

… [M]y real argument is that Orientalism is--and does not simply represent--a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world.

Now here you can see the degree to which Said is saying something very similar to what Toni Morrison said in her essay. The existence of black as absence needs to be understood--for example, if we are studying the history of American literature--as the means of constructing whiteness, of that which liberates whiteness from the forms of constraint under which it's been chafing at the bit. Morrison, of course, develops this argument beautifully, and she quite clearly takes it from the fourth chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* as a way of understanding the master-slave dialectic. In other words, in Hegel it's clear as Hegel develops the idea that master and slave are absolutely necessary to each other in a structure of mutuality. The master isn't the master, can't define himself as free or superior without the existence of the slave. The trickiness that the slave learns being in the position of subordination involving the development of all sorts of complicated skills means ultimately that the slave becomes, as it were, that which drives the master technologically and ultimately controls the master in a kind of fable of class reversal, which continues to reverse itself again and again and again on various grounds. This is the fable, which at the same time is a philosophy of class relations that structures Morrison's argument and which, I think, also structures Said's.

I want to make the transition to Bhabha because obviously this is a form of binarism. The two signifiers in relation to each other need each other in the way that we described when we were discussing Saussure and structuralism. I can't simply say that a red light has positive value. You remember the whole argument: I have to see the red light in the context of the semiotic system to which it belongs. I have to see it as being different from, or opposed to, something else in order to grasp it. I cannot know it positively, in other words; I can only know it negatively.

This basic concept of structuralism in the Saussurian tradition is what creates, is what shapes binary arguments of the kind that one finds in Said. That we know ourselves negatively as the not-other is the basic principle, the theoretical principle which underlies obviously aspects of the argument which are also, as Said says, empirical. Yes, I can say it's a structuralist idea, but I really believe it because I've seen it in operation. It's not just structuralism in other words. It shares, however, with structuralism a theoretical predisposition.

Bhabha, if you look at page 1879, openly criticizes the premise of binarism of this kind--not just any binarism, but he actually does go directly back to Hegel. In other words, he identifies the source of thinking of this kind, bottom of 1879, right-hand column, when he says:

It is this ambivalence that makes the boundaries of colonial "positionality"--the division of self/other--and the question of colonial power--the differentiation of colonizer/colonized--different from both the Hegelian master/slave dialectic or the phenomenological projection of Otherness.

He goes on to mention other things, but I just want to focus on this as a moment in which Bhabha is distinguishing himself as clearly as he can from the project of Said.

Now the passage I just read begins with the word "ambivalence." What does Bhabha mean by ambivalence? Let's try to start there and see if we can work our way into Bhabha's complex thinking on these matters, first by way of the notion of ambivalence. I'm going to put this in terms of an historical example because I hope that will make it a little clearer. There is the ambivalence of the colonizer toward the colonized. In other words, it's not just one mindset that drives colonization. In the historical experience of England in the East India Company, there are two distinct phases, phases which actually repeat themselves recurrently even throughout the twentieth century. The first in the eighteenth century is the period of the government of the East India Company by Warren Hastings who in a certain sense was interested in what we call "going native" and also encouraged all of his provincial administrators to do likewise. Hastings, in other words, in Saidian terms knew a great deal about the Orientalized other. He knew all the local languages and dialects. He knew all the customs. He really knew everything there was to know and in a certain sense was a person who did go native while at the same time wielding with an iron grip of authority power over the colonized other. He himself then embodies a certain ambivalence in not giving an inch as to the actual control of authority, while at the same time seeming to become one with the other.

Then there is the historical ambivalence which expresses itself in a completely different attitude, an attitude which surfaced in the East India Company early in the nineteenth century under the supervisorship of Charles Grant. There had been a tremendous revival of fundamentalist religion, mainly Methodism, in England, and this evangelical enthusiasm spread itself into the interests of the empire. Charles Grant and others like him no longer had any interest at all in going native but, on the contrary, insisted that a standard of Englishness and, in particular, the standard of the English Bible--the coming of the English book that Bhabha talks about at the beginning of his essay--be firmly implanted, and that the imposition of Englishness on the colonized other be the agenda of colonization. The famous historian Thomas Babington Macaulay codified this attitude in a famous, and soon to be infamous, document he wrote called "The Minute on Education," which insisted that the education of the Indian people under the regime of the East India Company be conducted strictly according to English models: that missionaries no longer try to adapt their ideas to local customs and folk ways but that everything be strictly anglicized. This is a completely different attitude toward colonization, and it can be understood as a sort of historical ambivalence.

I'd actually like to pause over an example of what you might call the Warren Hastings moment, a vicious example although an absolutely fascinating one in the disturbing masterpiece by John Ford called *The Searchers.* I hope some of you at least know that film. The John Wayne character is sort of a lone stranger--which is of course not infrequent in the western--who shows up at the house of some relatives and hears that a daughter has been abducted by native Americans, by Indians. Now the thing about John Wayne is that in this film is that he's a vicious racist, that he absolutely hates the Indians, but he is not a vicious racist from the standpoint of ignorance. He is in fact a person who has himself, in a certain sense, gone native. He knows all the Indian languages and dialects. He knows all their customs. He has throughout a lifetime made a careful study of the people he hates, and this is a volatile mixture to be exposed to in a film because we are much more comfortable with the idea that hatred arises out of ignorance, right? What is so deeply disturbing about John Ford's *The Searchers* is that it is a portrait of absolutely vicious racism: again Said says, "Hey, it's not necessarily truth, but we do have to acknowledge a certain local, thick description. We have to acknowledge that there's quite a bit of information [laughs] at this person's disposal, and all of that is borne out in the characterization of John Wayne in this film.

Warren Hastings was a lot like that. Warren Hastings knew everything about people whom he ultimately didn't really respect and whom he insisted on ruling with the iron fist of authority. That's the kind of thing that Bhabha is thinking about when he thinks about the ambivalence of the colonizer, the relationship between knowledge and value as it's already been enunciated in Said but also the fact that there is more than one mindset for the colonizer. There is the local knowledge mindset, and there is the sort of raising the absolute unequivocal standard of the colonizer that these are two different attitudes, each of which dictate different strategies, particularly strategies of education.

So that's the ambivalence of the colonizer. Then there is the ambivalence of the colonized, and that, too, has to be understood as a complex relation to co-optation. The anecdote with which Bhabha begins, I think, is fascinating and well worth attending to. You have not a colonizer but someone thoroughly co-opted, an evangelical converted Christian of Indian descent who represents, in a way, that the people he finds sitting under the trees reading the Bible consider to be completely authentic because he believes and is perfectly happy to believe that the Bible, and for that matter Christianity itself, is an English gift. But he's met with the response of people who resist that, who say, "This is very interesting stuff. We wish we could have some local authority for it. Our understanding is we got this book directly from God, right? That's our understanding and we have our own attitude toward it. Sure, maybe we'll get baptized one of these days, but in the meantime we got to go home and take care of the harvest, so we'll get around to that. Don't worry about it. By the way, if we get baptized we certainly can't take the Eucharist because that's eating meat. We don't eat meat. We are who we are."

You can see that these cunningly insinuated provisos to the attitude that the missionary wants to inculcate in them in a very real way completely undermines his purpose. They don't think of it as the English Bible. They won't accept it as the English Bible. They will only accept it as an authority that's mediated by their own values, which transforms the document. You can see it again--this is1813, as Bhabha points out. This is precisely at the moment when we're moving, when the regime of authority is moving from the Warren Hastings paradigm to the Charles Grant paradigm. It's no longer possible to think in terms of adapting the Bible to local beliefs and circumstances.

This is a moment in which the complexity of the attitude of the colonized is brought up. There's the attitude of the suborned missionary, and there's the more complicated and interesting attitude of the people he encounters sitting under these trees. Turn to page 1881, the left-hand column. This is a very difficult passage. Everything in Bhabha is difficult. I think I want to gloss it by suggesting to you that what he's talking about is that the ambivalence which--and we might as well say right out that he has a term for this ambivalence, and it's "hybridity"--is the double consciousness of the colonized hovering between submission--that is to say, submission to authority but with a difference, submission to authority on one's own terms, and on the other hand, acquiescence in authority as given, which of course is basically the position of the missionary. With that said, I'll read the passage in which Bhabha describes this hybridity in the double consciousness of the colonized:

The place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of "disposal" as I have proposed, is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional. [Not just, in other words, again as a question of us versus them.] It is a pressure, and a presence, that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization [which is also authority], that is, on the surface between what I've called disposal-as-bestowal [I take that meaning submission--simply "okay, fine, I give in"] and disposition-as-inclination [which is "hey, I kind of like that, I go along with it, I give in spontaneously"].

Now to give in simply as a form of recognizing that one's beaten, as a form of submission, puts one in the position of what Bhabha calls "sly civility." This is the position that I'd like to go back to for a moment as being very closely related to what Gates calls signifyin'. Bhabha gives a number of examples of this sly civility in his text, but of course it's all present in the clever and wonderfully rich ironies of these figures sitting under the trees in his opening anecdote. Let me just give you an example of how sly civility works as a form of signifyin' and as a stance of colonized resistance, a recuperation of the will, perhaps in a post-modern sense, which is nevertheless not rebellious, not in any way envisioning an overthrow of authority, but is a means of living in the framework of authority.

Just a quick example and then I'll let you go. Two African-American people are having a conversation in the presence of a white person, and they cheerfully and with broad smiles on their face refer to this person in his presence as Bill. Now "Bill" is a derisive and derogatory term for white people, and the white person standing there has two choices in response to hearing himself referred to as "Bill": he can either take umbrage and say, "Why are you saying that about me? I'm a nice guy. You don't want to say that," in which case the needling effect of the term has taken hold; or he can play the fool and pretend that he doesn't know that he's being signified on and pretend that, well, it's perfectly okay to be called "Bill." Either way you see it's a win/win situation. This guy, Bill, is the slave owner, right? He likes to get along with people, so he's sitting around having this conversation and he hears them calling him "Bill," right? Because there is an element of good nature in his slave-owning personality, he's stuck. He can either complain that people are treating him unfairly--which of course is neither here nor there in terms of the structure of power involved--or he can play the fool and pretend that he doesn't even notice that he's being made fun of. Either way, this is an example of that sly civility which signifies on the man and which makes it clear that while the structure of power can't be overthrown anytime soon, there nevertheless is a way of living--at least of keeping one's sense of humor within the existing structure of power--while giving the man a hard time.

That is the set of attitudes that Bhabha is articulating in his notion of the hybridity of the colonized, which takes the form in performance--we're going to have a lot more to say about performance on Tuesday--in performance of this sly civility. I think it's on page 1889 that he gives us that expression, which I think you should keep hold of--which I would compare very closely with what Henry Louis Gates calls "signifyin'." Okay. See you on Tuesday.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 23 Transcript**

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| --- | --- |
| April 14, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Now, I don't think it's ever happened to me before--although it might have but I can't recall its having happened--that I found myself lecturing on a person who had lectured yesterday here at Yale, but that's what happened in this case. You read--let's just call it--the facetious article on the lecture in *The Daily News* this morning. Some of you may actually have been in attendance. I unfortunately could not be, but as it happened I ran into her later in the evening and talked to some of her colleagues about what she'd said, so I do have a certain sense of what went on.

In any case, as to what went on, I'm going to be talking today about the slipperiest intellectual phenomenon in her essay having to do with what she calls "psychic excess," the charge or excess from the unconscious which in some measure unsettles even that which can be performed. We perform identity, we perform our subjectivity, we perform gender in all the ways that we'll be discussing in this lecture, but beyond what we *can* perform there is "sexuality," which I'm going to be turning to in a minute. This has something to do with the authentic realm of the unconscious from which it emerges. What Butler did in her lecture yesterday was to return to the psychoanalytic aspect of the essay that you read for today, emphasizing particularly the work of Lacan's disciple, Jean Laplanche, and developing the ways in which sexuality is something that belongs in a dimension that exceeds and is less accessible than those more coded concepts that we think of as gender or as identity in general. So conveniently enough, for those of you who did attend her lecture yesterday, in many ways she really did return to the issues that concerned her at the period of her career when she wrote *Gender Trouble* and when she wrote the essay that you've read for today.

All right. Now I do want to begin with what ought to be an innocent question. Surely we're entitled to an answer to this question, and the question is: what is sexuality? Now of course you may be given pause-- especially if you've got an ear fine-tuned to jargon--you may be given pause by the very *word* "sexuality," which is obviously relatively recent in the language. People didn't used to talk about sexuality. They talked about *sex*, which seems somehow more straightforward, but "sexuality" is a term which is not only pervasive in cultural thought but also has a certain privilege among other ways of describing that aspect of our lives. In other words, there is something authentic, as I've already begun to suggest, about our sexuality, something more authentic about that than the sorts of aspects of ourselves that we can and do perform. That's Butler's argument, and it's an interesting starting point, but it's not yet, or perhaps not at all, an answer to the question, "What is sexuality?"

Now for Foucault sexuality is arguably something like desired and experienced bodily pleasure, but the problem in Foucault is that this pleasure is always orchestrated by a set of factors that surround it, a very complicated set of factors which is articulated perhaps best on page 1634 in his text, the lower right-hand column. He's talking about the difference between and the interaction between what he calls the "deployment of alliance" and the "deployment of"--our word--"sexuality." I want to read this passage and then comment on it briefly: "In a word [and it's of course not in a word; it's in several words], the deployment of alliance is attuned to a homeostasis of the social body..." The deployment of alliance is the way in which, in a given culture, the nuclear reproductive unit is defined, typically as the "family," but the family in itself changes in its nature and its structure. The way in which the family is viewed, the sorts of activities that are supposed to take place and not take place in the family--because Foucault lays a certain amount of stress on incest and the atmospheric threat of incest--the sorts of things that go on in the family and are surrounded by certain kinds of discourse conveying knowledge--and we'll come back to the latter part of that sentence--all have to do with the deployment of alliance. On the other hand, the deployment of sexuality we understand as the way in which whatever this thing is that we're trying to define is talked about--and therefore not by any state apparatus or actual legal system necessarily--but nevertheless simply by the prevalence and force of various sorts of knowledge police.

Okay. To continue the passage:

In a word, the deployment of alliance is attuned to a homeostasis [or a regularization; that's what he means by "homeostasis"] of the social body, which it has the function of maintaining; whence its privileged link with the law [that is to say, the law tells us all sorts of things about the family--including whether or not there can be gay marriage, just incidentally: I'll come back to that in a minute]; whence too the fact that the important phase for it is "reproduction." The deployment of sexuality has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way.

What he's saying is, among other things, that a deployment of sexuality, which isn't necessarily a bad thing--these deployments aren't meant somehow or another to be terroristic regimes--a deployment of sexuality, which for example favored forms of sexuality such as birth control or homosexuality, would certainly be a means of controlling reproduction. Just in that degree, the deployment of sexuality could be seen as subtly or not so subtly at odds with the deployment of alliance, alliance which is all for the purpose of reproduction or at least takes as its primary sign, as Foucault suggests, the importance, the centrality, to a given culture--or sociobiological system, if you wil-- of reproduction. These are the ways in which the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality converge, don't converge, and conflict with each other. But in all of these ways, we keep seeing this concept of sexuality; but, as I say, it continues to be somewhat elusive what precisely it is.

Just to bracket that for the moment, let me make another comment or two on the concepts in the passage that I have just read. Let's say once and for all at the outset that the central idea in Foucault's text, the idea which he continues to develop throughout the three volumes on the history of sexuality--the central idea is this idea of "power" as something other than that which is enforced through legal, policing or state apparatus means. This is power which is enforced as a circulation or distribution of knowledge, which is discursive in nature, and which enforces its norms for all of us, for *better* or for worse--because discourse can release and can constitute sites of resistance as well as oppress--which, for better or worse, circulates among us ideas that are in a certain sense governing ideas about whatever it is that's in question, in this case, obviously, sexuality. Foucault calls this, sometimes hyphenating it, "power-knowledge."

This is absolutely the central idea in late Foucault. I introduced it, you remember, last time in talking about Said. I come back to it now as that which really governs--and guides you through--the whole text of Foucault: the distinction between power as it's traditionally understood as authoritative--as sort of top- down, coming from above, imposed on us by law, by the police, by whatever establishment of that kind there might be--the distinction between power of that kind and power which is simply the way in which knowledge--and knowledge is not, by the way, necessarily a good word, it's not necessarily knowledge of the truth--the way in which knowledge circulates and imposes its effects on us, our behavior, the way we are or the way at least that we think we are--the way in which we "perform," in Butler's term. All of that in Foucault is to be understood as an effect of power-knowledge.

Now notice, however, in terms of our question--What is sexuality?--that Foucault is being quite coy. He's talking about sexuality but he's not talking about it in *itself*, whatever it "in itself" might be. He's talking about the deployment of it, that is to say the way in which power-knowledge constructs it, makes it visible, makes it available to us, and makes it a channel through which desire can get itself expressed, but a channel which is still not necessarily in and of itself that natural thing that we look for and long for and continue to seek: the nature of sexuality. So when the emphasis in Foucault's discussion is really on deployment, that is, the way in which alliance--the family, whatever the nuclear social structure might be--or sexuality--whatever it is that gets itself expressed as desire--the way in which these matters, these aspects of our lives, can be deployed, we still aren't necessarily talking about the thing in itself. Foucault isn't an anthropologist. He's not talking about the *family* in itself either. He's talking about the way in which a basic concept of alliance out of which reproduction arises and gets itself channeled can be deployed, and understood as manipulated by, the circulation of power-knowledge.

The issue of gay marriage is very interestingly, by the way, *between* the concepts of the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality, because there's a certain sense in which the deployment of sexuality is at odds with the deployment of alliance. If sexuality is something that is really just looking around for ways to get itself expressed, taking advantage of deployment where that's a good thing and trying to resist deployment where that seems more like policing--if it's just looking around for a way to get expressed, it's not particularly interested in alliance. It's not interested in the way in which relationships involving sexuality could settle into any kind of a coded pattern or system of regularity, so that there is this tension which, of course, gets itself expressed whenever, within the gay community, people strongly support gay marriage and see that as the politicized center of contemporary gay life; *or* people *also* in the gay community, many of them theoretically advanced, think of it as a non-issue or a side issue which loses track precisely of what Foucault calls the deployment of sexuality, simply trying to extend the domain, arguably a tyrannical domain, of the deployment of alliance--in other words, to redefine the basic concept of alliance in such a way that doesn't really touch very closely on the deployment of sexuality. So it's an interesting and rather mixed set of issues that the whole question, the whole sort of profoundly politicized question, of gay marriage gives rise to. So that's what sexuality is [laughter] in Foucault.

In Butler it's just clearer that to ask the question--What is sexuality?-- is--well, it's just been a false start. We thought it was an innocent question, but you get into Butler and you see very clearly that you simply can't *be* a certain sexuality. You can perform an identity, as we'll see, by repeating, by imitating, and by parodying in drag. You can perform an identity, but you can't *wholly* perform sexuality precisely because of this element of psychic excess to which her thinking continues very candidly and openly and honestly to return. Butler's work, in other words, is not just about "the construction of identity." It's not just about the domain of performance, as one might say. It acknowledges that there is something very difficult to grasp and articulate beyond performance. Its main business is to explain the nature and purview and purposes of performance, but it's nevertheless always clear in Butler, as she returns to the question of the unconscious in particular, that there is something in excess of, or not fully to be encompassed by, ideas of performance.

So we've made a false start. We've asked a question we can't answer, but at the same time we have learned certain things. We've learned certainly that sexuality, whatever it is, is more flexible and also in some sense more authentic--that is to say, closest to the actual nature of the drives. Yesterday Butler made a distinction between instinct and drive which I won't go into because it had to do with her reflections on what is cultural and what is biological or not cultural in the life of the unconscious. For our purposes, whatever role sexuality may play in the unconscious, and however authentic--that is to say, however *not* culturally determined that role may turn out to be--it's more flexible. That's the important thing, more than any kind of social coding: the sort of coding, for example, that Foucault would indicate in speaking of alliance or deployed sexuality and the sort of coding that Butler refers to repeatedly as "gendering."

Still, for both of them--and this is the other thing we've learned--even sexuality through deployment, or through the way in which it can get expressed in relation to gender and performance, is discursive. It's a matter of discourse. It arises out of linguistic formations, formations that Foucault understands as circulated knowledge and that Butler understands, again, as performance. Foucault sees sexuality as the effect of power-knowledge, power as knowledge. Butler sees it as the effect--insofar as it's visible, insofar as it is acted out--sees it as the effect of performance.

So now to take the way in which Butler makes this relationship between what one might suppose to be authentic, actual, all about one's self, and that which is performed, that which is one's constructs toward being a self, let's take one of the most provocative sentences in her essay, which is on page 1711 about a third of the way down: "Since I was sixteen, being a lesbian is what I've been." Now what she's doing--remember at the very beginning of the essay she says that her whole purpose is to reflect, is somehow or another to register a politicized intervention in gender studies in terms of a philosophical reflection--on ontology, on "being." What is it in other words, she says, to *be* something? Now what she's doing in this sentence, which is an awkward-seeming sentence, "[B]eing a lesbian is what I've been," is pointing out to us that to be something is very different from to be "being" something.

For example, I can say I'm busy. (By the way, I am.) I can say I'm busy and I expect you to take it that there's a certain integrity, there's a certain authenticity in the fact that I'm busy. Yes, I'm busy, but suppose you say, suspecting that I'm not really busy, "Oh, he's *being* busy." In other words, he's performing busy-ness. He's going around being busy, sort of imposing on me the idea that this lazy person is actually accomplishing something. So, the performance of being busy. But here's the interesting point that Butler is making: the ontological realm is supposed to be about the simple being or existence of things, and it's always in philosophy contrasted with agency, with the doing of things, with getting something done, with the performance of things. But what Butler is saying--and that's why she says that she takes an interest in the ontological aspect of the question--what she's saying is that there is an element of the performative which actually creeps into the ontological. Even being, she says, is something that in some measure--perhaps not altogether but in some measure--something we perform. Hence the doubling up of the word "being" in the sentence, "Since I was sixteen, being a lesbian is what I've been."

In one sense, yeah, I am--that's what I am, but in another sense I've been performing it. I've been being one. [laughs] I've been outing myself, if you will. I have been taking up a role that can be understood, as all roles can, intelligibly in terms of its performance. So that's why she puts the sentence that way, and if you made a big mark in the margin and said, "Aha, got her! This is where she says she really *is* something. No more of this stuff about just constructivism, making oneself up as one goes along. This is where she says she really *is* something," then you're wrong. [laughs] She's escaped your criticism because she says, "Oh, no, no, no. I have been being a lesbian: I've been being one, which is a different thing, although not altogether a different thing, from being one." She is deliberately, in other words, on the fence between the sense of the ontological as authentic and her own innovative sense of the ontological as belonging within the realm of performance. She doesn't want to get off the fence. She really doesn't want to come down squarely on either side because for her--and this is what I like best about her work, even though it's perhaps the most frustrating thing about it--because for her, what she is talking about is ultimately mysterious. She has a great deal to say about it, but she's not pretending that in what she has to say about it she's exhausted the "subject." That's why it seems to me to be admirable that she stays on the fence about this, and not simply an occasion for our frustration.

So with all of this said--and mystification aside, if you will, as well--with all of this said, it seems plain that Foucault and Butler do have a common *politica*l agenda. Foucault is a gay writer who was, in the later stages of writing *The History of Sexuality*,dying of AIDS; Butler is a lesbian writer. Both of them are very much concerned for the political implications of their marginalized gender roles, while at the same time--of course, being theoretically very sophisticated about them. Their common political agenda is to destabilize the hetero-normative by denying the authenticity, or in Butler's parlance "originality," of privileged gender roles. In other words, who says heterosexuality came first? Who says the nuclear family is natural? Who says sexuality can only get itself expressed in certain ways that power-knowledge deploys for it? These are the sorts of questions, the politicized questions, which these discourses raise in common.

So it seems to me that they have a very broad agenda in common, and it also seems to me that they are very closely in agreement. I say that just in order to pause briefly on the moment in which they seem not to be. You've probably noticed that one text is referring to another at one point in your reading, and so let's go there: page 1712, the right-hand margin. The context for this, of course, is Butler talking about Jesse Helms having deplored male homosexuality in attacking the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, and by implication, Butler argues, simply erasing female homosexuality because his diatribe pays no attention to it. Butler then complains that there's a certain injustice in that because, in a way, it's even worse, she says, sort of to be declared nonexistent than it is to be declared deviant. At least the male homosexual gets to be declared deviant: we're simply erased. That's the position she's taking here, and then at that point, what she says is:

To be prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverse-discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition.

Here's where she gives us a footnote on Foucault, footnote fifteen (you know we love footnotes):

It is this particular ruse of erasure which Foucault for the most part fails to take account of in his analysis of power.

Butler's argument is that in Foucauldian terms, there's got to be *discourse* for there to be identity. Helms's refusal of the category of "lesbian" simply by omission--and of course, we know, by the way, that this is a refusal *only* by omission--Helms's refusal of this category is, in other words, an erasure of discourse. No discourse, no identity. That is, in other words, what Butler is claiming Foucault's position entails. Discourse creates power-knowledge. Power-knowledge creates identity. Therefore, where there's no discourse, there can be no identity, and since Helms has erased the lesbian by refusing discourse about it, it must follow that there is no such thing as a lesbian. That's the implication of this footnote. To continue:

He almost always presumes [and we must do honor to that word "almost"] that power takes place through discourse as its instrument, and that oppression is linked with subjection and subjectivization, that is, that it is installed as the formative principle of the identity of subjects.

Now in defense of Foucault, let's go to page 1632, the upper right-hand column, a passage that's fascinating on a number of grounds. It's rather long but I think I will read it, upper right-hand column. Foucault says:

Consider for example the history of what was once "the" great sin against nature. The extreme discretion of the texts dealing with sodomy--that utterly confused category--and the nearly universal reticence in talking about it made possible a twofold operation.

Okay. Here's Foucault saying that this is a category. The homosexual identity, as understood in terms of sodomy, is a category. He's going to go on to say that it's punishable in the extreme by law, but in the meantime he's saying there's no discourse. There's a kind of almost universal silence on the subject. You don't get silence in Dante, as I'm sure you know, but in most cases in this period nobody talks about it. It's punishable, severely punishable by law, and yet nobody talks about it. This would *seem* to violate Foucault's own premise that discourse constitutes identity but also plainly *does* contradict Butler's claim that Foucault supposes that discourse always constitutes identity.

Let's continue:

… [T]he nearly universal reticence in talking about it made possible a twofold operation: on the one hand, there was an extreme severity (punishment by fire was meted out well into the eighteenth century, without there being any substantial protest expressed before the middle of the century) [Discourse is here failing also in that it's not constituting a site of resistance, and nobody's complaining about these severe punishments just as on the other hand nobody's talking very much about them: there is, in other words, an erasure of discourse], and [he continues] on the other hand, a tolerance that must have been widespread (which one can deduce indirectly from the infrequency of judicial sentences, and which one glimpses more directly through certain statements concerning societies of men that were thought to exist in the army or in the courts)--

In other words, he's saying there *was* an identity and that identity was not--at least not very much-- constituted by discourse. As you read down the column, he's going to go on to say that in a way, the plight of the homosexual got worse when it started being talked about. Yes, penalties for being homosexual were less severe, but the surveillance of homosexuality--the way in which it could be sort of dictated to by therapy and by the clergy and by everyone else who might have something to say about it--became far more pervasive and determinate than it was when there was no discourse about it. In a certain way, Foucault is going so far as to say silence was, while perilous to the few, a good thing for the many; whereas discourse which perhaps relieves the few of extreme fear nevertheless sort of imposes a kind of hegemonic authority on all that remain and constitutes them as something that power-knowledge believes them to be, rather than something that in any sense according to their sexuality they spontaneously are. It seems to me that this pointed disagreement with Foucault, raised by Butler, is answered in advance by Foucault and that even there, when you think about it, they're really in agreement with each other. Foucault's position is more flexible than she takes it to be, but that just means that it's similar to her own and, as I say, that fact together with the broad shared political agenda that they have seems to me to suggest that they're writing very much in concert and in keeping with each other's views.

Now in method they are somewhat different. Foucault is a more historical writer, although historians often criticize him for not being historical. The reason historians don't think he's historical is that he never really explains how you get from one moment in history to the next. He talks about moments in history, but he talks about them in terms of bodies of knowledge--"epistemic moments," as he sometimes says. Then these moments somehow mysteriously become other moments and are transformed. The kind of causality that might explain such a thing from an historian's point of view tends in Foucault's arguments to be left out.

He nevertheless is concerned, however, with the way in which views of things change over time, and it's the change in those views that his argument in *The History of Sexuality* tends to concentrate on; so that he can say that starting in the nineteenth century and continuing to the present, there are essentially four cathected beings around which power-knowledge deploys itself. He describes them as the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple--meaning the couple that is enjoined not to reproduce too much because the economy won't stand for it, which is a way of, you see, of deploying alliance in such a way as to manipulate and control reproduction. That's a moment, by the way, in which the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality may be in league with each other, because obviously birth control and homosexual practices can also control reproduction. As you see, it's not always a question of conflict between these two forms of deployment. So in any case, there's the Malthusian couple and then the perverse adult, meaning the queer person in whatever form. He says about this--on page 1634 in the left-hand column--that you get these four types, and he says that therapy, the clergy, family, parental advice, and the various ways in which knowledge of this kind circulates have to do primarily with the preoccupation with, tension about, anxiety about these four types. The hysterical woman is determined to be hysterical once it begins to be thought that her whole being is her sexuality. The masturbating child violates the idea that children are born innocent and must be--because it suggests something terribly wrong about the cult of the innocent child that begins in the nineteenth century--it's something that is subject to extreme and severe surveillance. "Who knows what will come of this?" Scientific thinking about masturbation had to do with the notion that it led to impotence, that by the time you got around to being in a relationship, there wouldn't be anything there anymore. Just terrible thoughts--also it stunted your growth and you died sooner--just terrible, terrible thoughts about masturbation existed. All of this dominated the scientific literature until well into the twentieth century.

Then the Malthusian couple, which was primarily a phenomenon of what's called "political economy" in the earlier nineteenth century but has prevailed, by the way, in what we suppose to be, and indeed what is, our progressive technology of the promotion of birth control around the world. "We must control population" is still the Malthusian principle on which we base the idea that people really need to be enlightened about the possibility of not just having an infinite number of children. Again you see that Foucault is right still to suppose that the notion of the Malthusian couple prevails among us. Then finally the perverse adult, who is first discoursed about in the nineteenth century, as the earlier passage that I read suggested, and is still, of course, widely discoursed about. Of course it now has a voice and discourses in its own right: a literature, a journalism and all the rest of it, and is in other words very much in the mainstream of discourse and still has controversy swirling around it, precisely because of the discursive formations that attach to it.

All of this Foucault takes to be in the nature of historical observation. For Butler on the other hand, as you can tell from her style--I am sure that, as in the case of reading Bhabha, you recognize a lot of Derrida in Butler's style--in Butler it's a question of taking these same issues and orienting them more in the direction of philosophy. I've already suggested the way in which she understands this particular essay as a contribution to that branch of philosophy called "ontology," the philosophy of being. In general she takes a particular and acute interest in that. Her basic move is something that I hope by this time you've become familiar with and recognize and perhaps even anticipate.

For us, perhaps, the inaugural moves of this kind were the various distinctions made by Levi-Strauss. The one that I mentioned in particular--as accessible and I think immediately explanatory of how the move works--is "the raw" and "the cooked." I tried to show that intuitively, obviously, the raw precedes the cooked. First it's raw, then it's cooked, and yet at the same time if we understand the relationship between the raw and the cooked to be a discursive formation, we have to recognize that there would be no such thing as the raw if there weren't the cooked. If you talk about eating a raw carrot, you have to have had a cooked carrot. You don't just pick up a carrot, which you've never seen before, and say, "This is raw." The only way you know it's raw is to know that it can be and has been cooked.

Well, this is the Butler move, the move that she makes again and again and again. What do you mean, the heterosexual precedes the homosexual? What do you mean, the heterosexual is an original and the homosexual is just a copy of it? Who would ever think of the concept of the heterosexual? You're the only person on earth. You stand there and you say, "I'm heterosexual." [laughs] You don't do that. You just say, "Well, I have sexuality." You could say that. If you had enough jargon at your disposal, you could say that, but you can't say, "I am heterosexual." You can't have the concept heterosexual without having the concept homosexual. They are absolutely mutually dependent, and it has nothing to do with any possible truth of a chicken and egg nature as to which came first. In sexuality, the very strong supposition is for Butler that neither came first. They're always already there together in that psychic excess with which we identify sexuality, but in social terms the idea that what's natural is the heterosexual and what's unnatural, secondary, derivative, and imitative of the heterosexual is the homosexual is belied simply by the fact that you can't have one conceptually without the other.

It's the same thing with gender and drag. Drag comes along and parodies, mimics, and imitates gender, but what it points out is that gender is always in and of itself precisely performance. This could, of course, take the form of a critique, I suppose, but we're all quite virtuoso when it comes to performing. Here I am. I'm standing in front of you performing professionalism. I'm performing whiteness. I'm performing masculinity. I'm doing all of those things. I'm quite a virtuoso: what a performance! [laughter] Perhaps it's kind of hard to imagine my standing here sort of exclusively performing masculinity as opposed to all the other things that I am performing, but okay, I'm certainly doing that too. I'm insecure about all of these things, Butler argues, because I keep performing them. In other words, I keep repeating what I suppose myself to be. I'm not comfortable in my skin, presumably, and I don't just relax into what I suppose myself to be. I perform it. It is, in other words, a perpetual self-construction which does two things at once. It stabilizes my identity, which is its intention, but at the same time it betrays my anxiety about my identity in that I must perpetually repeat it to keep it going.

All of this is going on in this notion of performance, so what drag does is precisely bring all this to our attention. It shows us once and for all that that's what's at stake in the seemingly natural categories of gender that we imagine ourselves to inhabit like a set of comfortable old clothes. Drag, which is not at all comfortable old clothes, reminds [laughs] us how awkward the apparel of ourselves that we can call our identity actually is, and so it plays that role. The relationship between identity and performance is just the same. This notion of performing identity should recall for you "signifyin'" in the thinking of Henry Louis Gates. It should recall for you, in other words, the way in which the identity of another is appropriated through parody, through derision, through self-distancing, and through a sense of the way in which one *is* something precisely insofar as one is not simply inhabiting the subject position of another.

It should also recall for you the "sly civility" of the subaltern in Homi Bhabha's thinking: the way in which double consciousness is partly in the subject position of another, partly in one's own in such a way that one liberates oneself from the sense that it's the other person who is authentic and that one is oneself somehow derivative, subordinate, and dependent. All of these relations ought to gel in your minds as belonging very much to the same sphere of thought. The way in which you can't have the raw without the cooked is the way in which, generally speaking, categories of self and other and of identity *per se* simply can't be thought in stable terms in and for themselves, but only relationally.

Now "why is this literary theory?" you ask yourself, or you have been asking yourself. Of course, Butler gives the greatest example at the end of her essay when she says, "Suppose Aretha is singing to me." "You make me feel," not a *natural* woman, because there's no such thing as natural. "You make me feel *like* a natural woman," "you" presumably being some hetero-normative other who shows me what it is really to be a woman. Suppose, however, "Aretha is singing to me," or suppose she is singing to a drag queen. That is *reading*. That's reading a song text in a way that is, precisely, literary theory.

Now obviously I'm thinking of Virginia Woolf's Mr. Ramsay in writing this sentence [gestures to sentence on chalkboard: "The philosopher in a dark mood paced on his oriental rug."]. It's a terrible sentence for which I apologize. Virginia Woolf never would have written it; but just to pass in review the way in which what we've been doing *is* literary theory: the Marxist critic would, of course, focus on "his" because the nexus for the Marxist critic in this sentence would be possession--that is to say, the deployment of capital such that a strategy of possession can be enacted. The African American critic would call attention to white color-coded metaphors, insisting, in other words, that one of the ways in which literature needs to be read is through a demystification of processes of metaphorization whereby white is bright and sunlit and central, and black, as Toni Morrison suggests in her essay, is an absence, is a negation, and is a negativity. This is bad, a dark mood. For the postcolonialist critic, obviously the problem is an expropriated but also undifferentiated commodity. By "Oriental" you don't mean Oriental. You mean Kazakh or Bukhara or Kilim. In other words, the very lack of specificity in the concept suggests the reified or objectified other in the imagination or consciousness of the discourse.

Finally, for gender theory the masculine anger of the philosopher, Mr. Ramsay--you remember he is so frustrated because he can't get past *r*; he wants to get to *s*, but he can't get past *r*--the masculinized anger of the philosopher masks the effeteness of the aestheticism of somebody who has an Oriental rug. That in turn might mask the effete professorial type, *that* might mask an altogether too hetero-normative sexual predation and on and on and on dialectically if you read this sentence as an aspect or element of gender theory.

Okay. I will certainly end there, and next time we'll take up the way in which what we've been talking about for a few lectures, the construction of identity and of things, which has obviously been one of the common features of this course, is theorized at an even more abstract level, with certain conclusions.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 24 Transcript**

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| April 16, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** We've been passing through a variety of discourses concerning the nature of identity, the way in which identity is constructed--incidentally with varying degrees of emphasis, the way in which identity is constructed in literature. I'm going to come back to this perhaps missing link, literature, in a minute. In the meantime, I just wanted to point out something that I'm sure you've inferred for yourselves: namely that each one of these approaches to identity has a history, and that the history results in a recent chapter which is something like what you might call a deconstructive moment, signifying on theory itself such that the claim of theory as a mainstream discourse to hold certain views is something that in and of itself, from a subversive perspective, needs to be deconstructed and undermined. There is the idea in postcolonial studies of hybridity as the undermining of cultural binaries--that is, the double consciousness in which one experiences simultaneously a kind of identification with a state apparatus and a will to subvert it.

By the way, I thought I'd give you another example of how that works because it applies to me. I don't actually watch talk shows very often, but should I be watching a talk show, they often invite people on to these shows whom they call professors. I just wanted to point out to you the degree to which the sly civility, the hybrid sly civility with which people are called "professors," is for a professor one of the most discouraging sounds in the language, because they know very well when someone is addressed by a talk show host as "professor" what they mean is you are a pedant. You don't know how to park a bicycle straight. You have no understanding of the real world. I don't know why I've invited you on this show in the first place, [laughter] except somebody told me you were an expert. That's what it means in the public sphere to be a professor.

Bhabha perhaps exaggerates a little bit when he says the discourse of hybridity has an element of terrorism about it. Bhabha is writing long ago before 9/11 and so on and perhaps uses the term a little loosely, but I have to say when I hear somebody addressing me, someone not in the academy--because of course, people have contempt for me in the academy, too, but it's a more complicated thing. They may not have contempt for other professors, if you see what I mean, so that's more complicated. But when someone not in the academy addresses me as "professor," I suppose I can't say that I feel terrorized exactly, but I do feel depressed. [laughter] That's an important part of the double consciousness of the subaltern, as Bhabha expatiates on it. Then in any case, finally there is the deconstructive moment of gender theory in which gender is understood not as something essential but as something performed--something brought into existence not just by verbal discourse but by all the semiotic systems, including gesture, dress, and all the rest of it that constitutes the way in which gender comes into being.

Now in each case you have instances of knowledge as negation. I'm just trying to pull this back into the perspective of what we recognize perhaps more readily as literary theory. By "knowledge as negation" I mean semiotic knowledge, something that I've been trying to stress really as a central theme throughout this course. "I am--well, I don't know what I am, but I'll tell you this: I'm not that." In other words, the way in which I come to understand myself as not that--and I, of course, am the person who possesses hegemonic discourse, so I see myself, I come to understand myself for the first time in the argument of a Toni Morrison or an Edward Said or, in a certain sense, of a Judith Butler. I come to understand, in a way, for the first time when I reflect on what I'm not--that is to say, when I try to objectify or to pigeonhole that which I'm not, which is of course not what I'm really not but what I suppose myself not to be. In all of these ways then, you can see that the way in which, according to the sorts of thinking we have been reviewing in recent weeks, one comes to understand oneself is precisely negative in the tradition of semiotic and formalist understandings of language. I am not at all necessarily what I am. I am precisely as I understand it not that, not the other; and I grasp myself perhaps in ways that deepen my alleged understanding of myself as a result of this negative process.

All right. So I say all these things again to reassure you that we still are talking about literary theory, that the ways of thinking about things that we've encountered recently really do arise out of issues given to us by deconstruction and by negation in the semiotic and formalist tradition. We can understand what has happened basically--this in terms of the overall structure of the course--not as a change in the structure of thought we examined when we took up language as the primary determinant of understanding, but as a transformation of language--the determinant of social understanding--into what we call "a social text"; so that our head now is not the repository of Saussure's *langue*, that is something that just sits there in and of itself as a system, but rather it's full of other people's language. It is a space in which society itself understood as discourse jostles for attention and struggles somehow or another to shape itself into intelligibility. That's the fundamental change.

Language is still preeminent in the kinds of thinking that we've been doing. We haven't really gotten away from language, but we have altered our understanding of language. Language is now a social text. It is now, in Bakhtin's words, other people's language, and we understand it therefore not--and of course, semiotics and deconstruction don't understand it as our own either, because language always precedes us; but we understand it more clearly as something that is given to us as a social formation that in turn forms us.

In a way that does bring us to our topic today because this topic, almost the last topic of the course, has to do with the preconditions of interpretation. What makes it possible for us to think something? How is it that we come to think one thing as opposed to another thing? How is it that there are areas of agreement among us? How is it, for that matter, that there are areas of disagreement among us and indeed that these areas characteristically seem to be so nonnegotiable? [laughs] The point arises at which we just can't find ourselves in agreement on things just as the point arises when we realize that we are in some profound way in agreement about other things. How is it that all of this comes to be?

In order to do that, let's first go back to *Tony the Tow Truck*. Because we've said all along that it's about whatever it is that we happen to be talking about, let's think about *Tony* once again as being about the things we've been discussing recently. We can say, for example, that *Tony* is a Marxist contestation of the social determinacy of identity in other forms. It's a realist text because, as we've said before, nothing happens. There is no change in the social formations that are the givens of the story, but it nevertheless does lay out the relationship among social norms in ways that show that life goes on despite social inequality, despite--of course here I'm going to throw something at you that you perhaps hadn't thought of so much in terms of *Tony* before--despite ethnic and gender difference.

Now what happens then in *Tony,* to move to a slightly different way of thinking about it, is we can see that it's a global story masked as a story of hybridity in the American melting pot. It should have been perfectly plain to you all along that Tony is an Italian American with the complex personality of the subaltern. On the one hand, he believes in the American dream. He likes his job. He buys into the system, in other words, but on the other hand he recognizes that he has his own place in the world, the little yellow garage. It's his niche in the world and it's something that is partly what affords him his identity.

Neato, of course, on the other hand is the neurotic WASP in the manor house, sort of representing that sort of class, and Speedy very interestingly is a member of what John Guillory calls "the professional/managerial class." What's interesting about Speedy is that suddenly we realize that his ethnic origins, his class origins, and even his gender--because he may be a woman--are not perhaps as relevant as one might have imagined them to be because the professional/managerial class is interesting--as Guillory's source, Alvin Gouldner, points out at length--precisely as the emergence of a body of people with common interests who really can't be said, at least, to derive from, or perhaps in a way even to belong to, a common class. Speedy is certainly in *Tony the Tow Truck* a representative of this new emerging class. Perhaps it's no accident that Neato comes first. I think memory serves me in saying that Neato comes first in the sort of folkloric triad because Neato represents an older class, a class which in a certain sense is giving way to the professional/managerial class. It makes sense that first you get Neato and then you would get Speedy.

So then we can also think of *Tony the Tow Truck*,of course, in terms of gender. We've said there are no women in it, and yet at the same time you do have those frowning and smiling houses sort of embodying the angel in the house, but it's not just that. Obviously, Neato--I've never drawn a picture of Neato but with his little bow tie and his prissy "Oh, I don't want to get dirty" he's just a bundle of gay stereotypes. [laughter] Then obviously with Bumpy, he pushes and pushes--you don't even want to go there. [laughter] In any case, this is plainly a story about gender, and so you can see that it's about all these things.

So then here is the question, and it really does provide us with our transition to today's materials: what have I been doing all this time with *Tony the Tow Truck?* I've been doing exactly, as you can see now, what Fish does with Jacobs, Rosenbaum, Levin, Thorne, Hayes, and Ohmann. I've been showing that if you bring a certain supposition to what you're reading, you're going to perform a certain kind of hermeneutic act, not with any particular strain but more or less spontaneously because that's what you are conditioned to do.

Now Fish's class had no trouble construing the assignment for his previous class as a poem, and you can see, of course, that it was sort of ready to hand to be construed that way. Fish admits that, but he's lecturing some people in Kenyon College and he just sort of runs his finger down the list of faculty names and says, "Look what I could do with these names." I think he does make his point because you can do it with absolutely anything. We can see, of course, that his class actually missed a few points. It forgot to mention that an ancient and important meaning of the word "Levin" is lightning, so that a flash of revelation is entailed in any religious understanding of the poem. It's almost impossible to understand why his class was stumped by the word "Hayes" because "Hayes"--well, we see things through a glass darkly. We see them in a haze, and that's exactly the way in which we're likely to respond to instances of religious revelation as they are given in the devotional poetry of the seventeenth century.

In any case, what we've been doing with *Tony the Tow Truck* is of this kind. We've taken a text with a--by the way, you may want to know whether I think *Tony* is really about something as opposed to about all those things. Well, I actually do, and I mentioned it in passing, but it's only an intuition and it really doesn't arise out of any particular predilections I have for psychoanalysis. It does seem to me, however, that a story written to that age group in which the climactic line is "He pushed and he pushed and I'm on my way" is pretty obviously about one thing as opposed to a lot of other things. If you really pushed me about what *Tony the Tow Truck* is about, I would say, "Well, I think it's an anal phase parable and that Robert Kraus very possibly wrote it for that purpose. In other words, this would engage the attention of the toddler who is having the story read to him or her, and its meaningfulness probably is going to come across to the toddler in that way perhaps in more pronounced fashion than in any other--certainly and obviously in a more pronounced fashion than most of the ways in which we've been talking about the text.

So that's what I think. Of course, I've disclaimed any connection with psychoanalysis but nevertheless I know something about it, and so that's part of my interpretive community. We'll get back to that. In any case, we've been treating *Tony the Tow Truck* in this way and we have been, well, nodding our heads and saying, "Yeah, yeah, it's about that, too," and "Guess so, yeah. Interesting, isn't it? Wonder what it's going to be about on Thursday." We've been doing this because we belong to an interpretive community.

Now I want immediately to add here two caveats. I would say that within the interpretive community that makes up this room, a community of people who are interested in interpretation, you probably have suspected all along that interpretation was a mug's game and therefore wanted to take a course of this kind to find out just how bad it was. All of us at least have in common a concern with the potential complexity of those circumstances that surround interpretation. We are an interpretive community that's interested in interpretation, so we play the game. However, I would hazard that within this interpretive community there are two sub-communities which probably, in a certain sense, while they see the significance of the exercise, nevertheless want to hold out against it.

One of them is the community which either always has or has now come to have a very, very strong commitment to one or another point of view that's been passed in review in this course and who therefore finds it demeaning of the important point of view that it would be treated simply in a survey in a serial way with all sorts of other points of view that may or may not supplant or jostle with it. Now this takes us back to the remarks I was making at the beginning about the way in which one can perhaps acknowledge the usefulness of a survey course but nevertheless bridle at the very idea of a survey course when, after all, the only thing that matters is Marx's thought. Why do we spend any time with all of these other approaches to things and so on--just sort of whichever form of thought is the only thing that matters to you. This would probably lead you to say not so much that *Tony* is only about this one thing but "Oh, this is a really facile and irrelevant exercise because the important thing is to take this one thing seriously." The implication is that if you take a lot of other things in review, you're not taking this one thing seriously.

So that might be one sub-community within our interpretive community. Another one might be a sub-community that is still committed, as one's tempted to say, to high culture and says, "I think we should have used 'Lycidas' or 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner.' It was demeaning to high culture to use *Tony the Tow Truck* and furthermore," this sub-community might very well say, "if we had used 'Lycidas' or 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner,' a certain approach, a certain way of reading either of those poems, would have made sense self-evidently--meaning that all of the other approaches are trivial." If your commitment is not so much to one point of view as to some idea of high culture, you're not going to say in advance which approach it is, but you're going to suppose that somehow or another such is the value and nature of high culture that it will be possible to arrive at a sort of consensus view of what's going on in one of its products. This is what Guillory is talking about at least in part in his review of defenses of Western civilization, Western culture and so on. They have a meaning. They have a continuity. They have a stability which is worth preserving and which ought to be the central business of the schools to promulgate.

So those are possible sub-communities within our interpretative community, but we all do have in common the recognition that it's possible to riff on a text in this way. If somebody does it, we recognize that whether we like it or not, we ourselves could probably do it ,too--which is proof, from Stanley Fish's point of view and also from John Guillory's point of view, because we're in a school that we have a great deal in common. It's what we have in common that brings the text into visibility in the variety of ways that we've performed on it.

Now with all of this said, let's talk a little bit more about what an interpretive community is first, according to Stanley Fish, and then move to the point where we may wish to suggest one form or another of criticism of this idea. Let's begin with Fish's first sentence, which is on page 1023, the upper left-hand column. This is a series of lectures, and so he begins by saying:

Last time I sketched out an argument by which meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretative communities that are responsible both for the shape of a reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce.

I don't know that he really carries his argument all that much farther forward in this lecture, which is why I think it's worthwhile to begin with this sentence because in some ways it does anticipate what he then lays out once more in this lecture.

Now an interesting thing about the career of Stanley Fish is that he actually, in the course of that quite high-visibility career, changed his mind twice. His changes of mind are actually recorded residually in this essay that you read, "How Do We Recognize a Poem when We See One?" which, by the way, is a completely disingenuous title because we don't see poems. [laughs] That's the whole point. There is no poem there. If it's there, it's because you put it there. In any case, these changes of mind are residually present in this text. They are actually manifest in the peculiar vagary of the argument of an earlier essay he wrote called "Interpreting the Variorum," which is what was in the second edition of [laughs] the Richter anthology and the one that I used to teach, but I think it's still worth harkening back to those changes of mind. When I was his student at the University of California, he held his first opinion. This was just before he published *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost,* a book for which a seminar that I was in was a kind of guinea pig. To give you an example of what he meant by saying that a stable text produces a reader, which was his first belief, I give you an example that he uses from Milton about Satan's spirit. This is Satan standing by the fiery lake. He's just pulled himself up to his full height, he has a spear, and Milton writes about it [points to board]:

His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine [okay: spear, pine about the same size]

Hewn… to be the Mast

of some great Ammiral [well, let's see, mast-pine-spear] were but a wand…

Then you realize that the sequence of sizes is completely reversed and what you thought, what you'd already filled your consciousness with--the tallest pine--is just a wand compared with the size of Satan's spear. So what's he saying? He's saying you think that your mind can grasp the magnitude of Satan, you think you know how big Satan is, but the language of *Paradise Lost* is going to teach you, is going to educate you into realizing that you shouldn't mess with Satan because Satan is much bigger than you think he is.

What I didn't write here, and what continues the passage, shows that even here Satan is absolutely at his weakest. The passage continues [points to board]: "He walkt with to support uneasy steps…" In other words, he's just risen from the fiery lake. He's as weak as he's ever going to be right now [laughs] and yet he's already a lot more than you can handle. That is the way the syntax of *Paradise Lost* educates us into realizing that every time we think we grasp the point of a text, we prove that we are fallen readers, that we have prematurely understood what's there, and that only understanding it in the long run can prevail upon us to realize the fallen condition, which the text is obviously after all about.

That was Fish's first opinion. Not too long after that, in the course of writing a book called *Self-Consuming Artifacts*,he began to have a different opinion which more or less reversed the first one. He decided it isn't the text that brings the reader into being--that is to say, brings about the self-realization on my part that I'm a fallen being in the case of *Paradise Lost.* It isn't the text that brings the reader into existence. It's the reader that brings the text into existence. It's the reader, after all, who performed this act of reading, and it's the reader who made visible in the text the possibility that this is what Milton is doing. So he reverses his field while retaining the same structure of argument and the same range of insight about what one can think about a text.

Well, that was fine until he realized that a reader has to come from someplace. A reader isn't just an autonomous being. This is where he realized that the third step in his development, his second change of mind, means this: it's not the text that produces the reader, it's not the reader that produces the text, but it's the community that produces the reader who in turn produces the text. Those three points in other words map the progress of his thinking on these issues. Take a quick look at page 1025, the right-hand column. He says, bottom of the paragraph: "Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them."

When he says that, he's only at phase two of his thinking, because there is still the possibility open to the reader of thinking that the interpreter is an autonomous being whose thoughts, whose interpretive powers, and whose strategies of reading emanate from something from within. Then on page 1027 he clarifies, toward the bottom of the right-hand column: "This does not, however, commit me to subjectivity..." In other words, it's not just a question of whatever I think is in a text is in a text. I'm the one who makes the text, and you make the text, and the other person makes the text. We all make different texts because we all have different subjectivities--that's not what he's saying.

This does not, however, commit me to subjectivity because the means by which they are made are social and conventional.

In other words, I can't have an off-the-wall interpretation of anything if anyone else ever hears it. Yeah, if I'm [laughs] just in my room, surrounded by yellow wallpaper or something like that, I suppose I can have an off-the-wall interpretation of something, but if I try to publish it, forget it. When I try to publish, when I try to express myself, when I expose myself to any aspect of the public sphere, my interpretation--if it's to be judged as an interpretation at all, if it's to count as an interpretation, and if it's to count as an opinion--must already be enmeshed in the interpretative community to which it's addressed. It must have some sort of link with that community. It must involve some sort of membership or relationship with that community, so that what Fish concludes is that there are neither subjects nor objects.

In other words, this is Fish's way, following Derrida and deconstruction, of attacking the Western metaphysical tradition. As long as we suppose that understanding is a matter of parsing or coming to terms with subject-object relations, we're on the wrong track to understanding. We have to understand the way in which neither the subject nor the object can be said to have a stable existence, to have integrity of any kind, before we can come closer to grasping how it is that interpretation is made and achieved. We've seen this before all the way back at the beginning of the semester when we talked about fore-having in Heidegger and Gadamer, about the way in which we always see something as something: we never see it as an object, we never see it in and of itself. We've seen this before, but there is a slight difference because Heidegger and Gadamer hold out the object as a standard against which one's opinions about it can be tested. In other words, the hermeneutic circle is a movement back and forth between interpretation and what's being interpreted, so that what's being interpreted is a constant check on the process of interpretation just as interpretation, as it deepens, is a finer and finer outlining of the nature of the object.

So the hermeneutic circle which resembles, which anticipates the thinking of Fish in that it insists on the way in which all interpretation begins as preconception, nevertheless does also entail that subtle difference in that the object is there. It's not that Fish denies the existence of objects--although sometimes his rhetoric makes it seem that way. He simply denies that we can know them as objects at any point. We bring them into being, and in bringing them into being we construct them in whatever way it is that we construct them.

Okay. Interpretive community. What do we make of this idea of interpretive community? I have just said we all belong to an interpretive community. We sitting here all belong to an interpretive community. There may be a couple of sub-communities here, but basically we're an interpretive community. We understand each other, and yet at the same time it's equally the case, as I'm sure all of you are thinking to yourselves, that no one of us has exactly the same set of opinions as anyone else. We say we belong to an interpretive community. We can in fact, according to a certain weak form of the argument, understand the way in which yes, we do bring things into being according to certain habits that have evolved through our membership in such a community; but at the same time we say, "Guess what? I don't quite interpret [laughs] Jacobs, Rosenbaum and the rest of them in the way Fish's class did. I still don't interpret it in the way that Professor Fry supplemented their interpretation. I interpret it a little differently, and furthermore I knew all along it wasn't a poem. You can't fool me," and so on. Each of us says to ourselves, "Okay. Yeah, we have certain things in common, but there are also ways in which we differ."

What would Fish say to that? I think what he would say is this, and I do think this needs to be acknowledged: it weakens his position. He would say, "All right, granted: in a rough sense, we belong here--just as John Guillory says in a rough sense we're all in a school--we belong to an interpretive community; but there's another sense in which we are each of us the sum total, the composite, of all the interpretive communities to which we now in some way or another have an affinity and from which, in all the variety of ways one can mention, we have emerged. Yes, we're each different because the sum of the interpretive communities to which we belong, constituting the ultimate interpretive community that indeed we are, is always going to be a little different from the sum of the communities to which other people belong. This reduces the idea of interpretive community to a kind of atomism whereby we all concede and all say, "Yes, it's true. I am in a certain sense a community."

That's all Bakhtin said: "I am a community. I am a community and, of course, what communities do when they think is interpret." Thinking is interpretation. But at the same time "What's the point," we then say, "of saying I'm a community if, in fact I'm a little different from everybody else?" Why not retain a certain sense of subjectivity, or why not at least retain that sense of individuality which results from the fact that none of us ultimately or completely on every particular agree with anybody else--the reason being that the sum of our interpretative communities that makes up that fundamental community to which we say we belong is always a little bit different?"

Now there is another argument against this position which might be called radical constructivism. We hear very frequently from sociobiological thinkers like Edward O. Wilson, for example, who point out that consciousness is hard wired to do and to recognize all sorts of things. It has been shown in the lab that aesthetic preference, which of course was always held up to derision as anything like an objective standard--"There is no disputing tastes," we always say--but even aesthetic preference, it's been shown in the lab, involves certain predilections we all do have in common. We all prefer the so-called golden section, we love arches, and this can explained in all sorts of ways. The most common explanation has to do with what's called shelter theory. We like shapes that somehow or another offer shelter or protection. In any case, the fairly conclusive evidence is that in a variety of ways, we are hard wired to recognize things. Darwin's last book is all about how we recognize each other's expressions, we recognize the expressions of animals with which we have a great deal in common, and that we do this from infancy--in other words, all sorts of evidence to this effect.

I'm not sure Fish's argument is vulnerable to that position because, after all, hard wiring is communitarian. [laughs] The point is precisely that we all have it and that it's not something that we can call individual, not something that we can call autonomous to any one of us as individuals. So it seems to me that although the argument against so-called radical constructivism usually does take this form, it actually is not a very good argument, and that the argument objecting to the mere weakness of the way in which interpretive community as a concept ultimately becomes atomistic is a stronger argument; because what does it matter if I'm an interpretive community if I'm still a community of one? In some measure, it's something that seems less worth talking about once one's put it in those terms.

Very quickly then on Guillory whose argument actually ended the very debate that he thinks is going to intensify and get worse. In other words, he thought that the big, hot-button topic in the academic world for the next twenty-five years or more would be the canon wars: canonical, non-canonical, cultural, and multicultural--he thought this would be the fundamental point of contention in the academic world. Well, it wasn't, and the reason it wasn't is that his argument was so brilliant everybody came to their senses and realized [laughs] that they were barking up the wrong tree, literally. His book, *Cultural Capital,* simply silenced not the public, because nothing ever silences the public, [laughter] but simply silenced the debate about the culture wars in the academy. In some ways Guillory amusingly undermines his own prophecy, which by the way is on page 1477 in the upper right-hand column if you care to read it.

Now Guillory's main preoccupation--which he takes largely from Pierre Bourdieu but also, as he argues in a long constructive digression, from Antonio Gramsci--his main preoccupation is with the school as a means of establishing and proliferating what Gramsci called "hegemony." The school, in other words, on this argument doesn't typically--and we'll come back to the exception that Guillory himself does make--doesn't typically send out into the world minds armed with specific bodies of knowledge or understanding. It sends out into the world, especially when it's a question of the humanities--which Guillory thinks are painting themselves into the corner in their obtuseness--the school sends out into the world people endowed with a certain quantum of cultural capital. It repeats, in other words--in Bourdieu's term it "reproduces"--a structure of class, but really class in the sort of super-structural sense: class superiority that regardless of the specific content that a person supposes himself to have been mastering, simply replicates an orientation to the ruling class that the school in Western culture, according to Guillory, has always had. What the school reproduces is not knowledge so much as itself, the attitude that it embodies, its reason for being, its reason for continuation, and its relation to power and state apparatus. That's Guillory's basic position and it's why he says that the culture wars simply play into the hands of the monolithic ideology of the school.

What happens when you embrace multiculturalism as the only means of inculcating what Guillory calls "progressive pedagogy"--what happens when you embrace multiculturalism, according to Guillory, is that you deracinate the objects of your intention from the culture to which they belong in precisely the way that the great monuments of Western civilization have long since been deracinated from their historical and cultural circumstances. You reduce both Western Civ and alternative canons to the same deracinated, rootless sort of nature as cultural capital. "I have read this. I have a certain status and negotiability in the world as having read this." In the case of Western Civ, it's quotations from the poets and after-dinner speeches. In the case of multicultural curricula, it's the opportunity to allude in precisely the same way on largely the same occasions, and in either case it has nothing to do with learning anything, according to Guillory, about the historical and social circumstances in which any kind of cultural production are grounded.

Now the argument depends, of course, on supposing that the way in which the great works are taught is as though they embody certain ideas of principles. That is to say, they're taught as messages, in Guillory's view, whatever form of message it might be. The Western canon has a message about the importance of being an American. The multicultural canon has a contestatory message about the importance of being whoever happens to be speaking, but in each case they're merely messages. They're not cultural artifacts. They don't emerge from the real sort of historical and living circumstances in which they are written, which of course is, most broadly speaking, simply an appeal to method, a new way of teaching.

Guillory's own deepest commitment is, in fact, to the great works. Guillory began as an early modern scholar. He wrote a very, very fine first book on Spenser and Milton. His later work in literary sociology in no ways discredits or undermines the fact that earlier in his career he was interested in a cultural canon. In fact, probably the most interesting chapter in *Cultural Capital* is maybe not this introductory theoretical one but an amazing chapter in which he shows how Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" came to predominate in English curricula even though it was written in the vernacular, in English. He shows in other words how "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," in the way in which it situated itself in culture at that time, actually undermined the premium place on the classics, on Latinity, and helped the emergence of a vernacular national curriculum. It's an absolutely brilliant argument in which "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" is itself constantly and steadily and fascinatingly invoked.

In other words, Guillory himself likes the classics. Perhaps the most interesting part of this argument is the way in which the Western Civ mavens are simply fooled about their own understanding of what a canon is because perpetually, history changes canons. The more books you get, the fewer you can read, and the more gets dropped out of any curriculum, including the Western Civ curriculum. Today we're proud if we're proponents of great books. We're proud of reading Plato and Aristotle. In the old days, people didn't stop with Plato and Aristotle. They read everything there was to read in Greek and Latin culture and then they read such few books as may have been published in English. Well, a great deal has happened since then, and perforce modern languages and literatures have altered the canon always to the end of thinning it out. More and more gets left out. This is an inevitability even in the so-called "canonical" and therefore itself needs to acknowledge the centrality of historical change.

Guillory's argument obviously hinges on the failure of anybody involved in these debates to distinguish between the two forms of culture. [laughs] There is culture, the kind of culture on which a person without any education at all and the new professional/managerial class can meet, the kind of culture in which precisely literature doesn't matter. Who needs literature? "I'm running Hewlett-Packard. Do I need literature?" At the same time, there is the kind of culture with a capital *K*, as we say, which is all about the great books, high culture, the monuments of civilization, and so on. Guillory says the total disconnect in the way in which we understand the relations between these two forms of culture is what leads to the kinds of deracination in teaching that he complains about. He himself finally thinks that anything is fair game to be taught, and it can be taught progressively as long as it is taught in terms of its social and historical circumstances. He points out that a great book--I will quote this and then I'll leave you--is great in part because it can't possibly be reduced to the silliness that the advocates of Western Civ attach to it. He says, page 1482, right-hand column:

No cultural work of any interest at all is simple enough to be credibly allegorized in this way, because any cultural work will *objectify* in its very form and content the same social conflicts that the canon debate allegorizes by means of a divided curriculum.

*The Odyssey* is full of lying, trickery, class betrayal. In *The Iliad,* perhaps the most interesting character, as I'm sure you'll all agree, is Thersites who is scarcely an advocate of the values that we associate with Western culture. In any case, this is what Guillory means by saying that you cannot monumentalize anything in this way if you read it carefully and attentively enough. So ultimately it's simply a program for reading.

Okay. Next time we'll talk about the idea that we shouldn't have theory at all.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 25 Transcript**

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| April 21, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Well, I'd like to welcome the prospective students. I won't say the word "Yalie" prematurely, but of course I hope you all come. I wish I had a chance to provide a little context for what I'm going to say today, but maybe you'll scramble into some sense of things as we go along. This lecture concerns an essay written to immediate widespread acclaim and controversy by two young, at the time quite uninfluential and untenured scholars trying to make their way in the world. They certainly succeeded with this essay, which was published in *Critical Inquiry,* then certainly the leading organ for the dissemination of innovative theoretical ideas, and they were, generally speaking, gratified by the results. Almost immediately the editors of *Critical Inquiry* decided to publish, together with "Against Theory," in book form a series of responses to "Against Theory*,*" all of them sort of polite, carefully thought-through responses which made a very interesting thin book, which is still available. I think it's still in print and well worth having if you take an interest in the controversies that the article generated, and of course, I'm hoping in the time remaining to get you to take an interest in them.

Knapp and Michaels were then, still are, what's called "neo-pragmatists," which is to say they are influenced most immediately by an important book written in the 1970s by the philosopher Richard Rorty called *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*;but Rorty was writing in a tradition that goes back through the important work of John Dewey in the 1930s and '40s, and before then not only to the great philosophical interventions of William James, Henry James's brother, but also a theory of signsby Charles Sanders Peirce, a theory which at the time didn't generate too much recognition or controversy. It was taken up by the so-called Cambridge School of literary critics headed by I. A. Richards. He and C. K. Ogden wrote some reflections on Peirce's semiotics, but today with pragmatism, neo-pragmatism--a fairly important strain in academic theoretical and literary thinking--Peirce's semiotics is in a way receiving more attention, in a way also challenging the hegemony in the field of literary theory of Saussure's semiotics. This sense of the sign as something different from what Saussure said it was is going to be the underlying theme of the second and central part of this lecture.

Nineteen eighty-two was probably the high-water mark both of the fascination and the frustration with literary theory in this country. It was a hot-button topic--we've gone into this before--in ways that it is not really today, so that our interest in literary theory is at least in part historical, one might want to say. In 1982, though, where you stood on these matters just made all the difference, and it was in that atmosphere that Knapp and Michaels's "Against Theory" was published.

Now as I say, they were neo-pragmatists, and what that means basically is that one knows things, which is the same thing as to say that one believes things, such that one acts in the world unhesitatingly as an *agent*. Everything that matters in being human has to do with one's powers of agency, but there are no actual foundations in what we can know objectively for our beliefs and actions. In other words, it's a position which is called anti-foundational or anti-foundationalist but not a position that, as such a position might imply, somehow entails nihilism or a kind of crippling radical skepticism. On the contrary, it's a position that insists that we just do what we do, that we are always doing, thinking, believing, and saying something; that we are always exerting an influence as social beings in our surroundings, and that the only thing that needn't concern us about our powers of agency is that perhaps we don't really have a full, adequate objective account of how and why it is that we do and say and believe and influence things in the way that we do. That position is essentially the position taken up in Knapp and Michaels.

Now you saw it last time already in the essay of Stanley Fish--Stanley Fish, who takes it that we are largely produced by the interpretive community to which we belong. You'll recall his understanding of this community as that which constitutes our values--in other words, there's nothing intrinsic to ourselves, nothing unique in our own modes of perception, but rather only the ways in which our educational circumstances bring us to believe and understand things. This, too, is a neo-pragmatist position.

Now you notice that in the third part of the Knapp and Michaels essay, they engage in a kind of polite disagreement with Fish. There is an underlying, very broad agreement with him, but remember in the third part of the essay they're talking about the synonymity, the identity, of knowledge and belief, and they point to a particular passage in one of Fish's arguments where he kind of slips into the idea that, on the one hand, you have knowledge and then, on the other hand, you have, in relation to that, belief. They say, "No, no, no, no. You can't separate knowledge and belief," and just on those grounds they disagree with Fish. Fish writes one of the responses in the book that's then subsequently published concerning "Against Theory,"but it's a completely friendly controversy about a transitory and superficial matter. As a matter of fact, while I'm going to pay a lot of attention to the first two arguments--there are basically three arguments in this essay--I'm going to pay very little attention to the third argument in which Fish is challenged about the relationship between knowledge and belief, in part at least because it's an argument that belongs to philosophy. It is the cornerstone of Rorty's argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and perhaps not so immediately relevant to the kinds of things that we think about in doing literary theory.

So to turn then to what they actually do say in relation to this movement that I'm talking about, you notice for example that in tone, their work is very similar to that of Stanley Fish. It's a kind of a downright, no-nonsense, let's-get-on-with-it kind of tone that, after reading Derrida and other writers of that kind, you're perhaps not quite ready for. In a way it's bracing. It must be kind of a relief to get this sort of no-nonsense attitude toward these issues after all the tacking and veering that we're likely to have experienced in earlier writers. In a way, the tone comes with the territory. You take these views and in a way, the tone seems to follow from it, because what they're saying in effect is, You just do what you do. You think what you think. As a literary interpreter, you're bound to have some opinion about what you're looking at, so just get on with it. Express that opinion, that's your job of work. On this view and in this tone, the only way you can go wrong is to grope around for some theoretical justification for what you're doing. It's just fine that you're doing it. Don't worry about it. Get on with it, but don't think, according to the argument of Knapp and Michaels, that you can hope to find anything like an underlying or broad theoretical justification for what you're doing. Obviously, that rather challenging and provocative notion is something that lends itself readily to the sort of no-nonsense tone that I'm talking about.

So turning then to their argument, they argue that people become entangled with issues of theory, all of which in their view should be avoided, when they do two--well, three but, as I say, we're going to set "knowledge and belief" aside--when they make three fundamental mistakes. The first is to suppose that there is a difference between meaning and intention: in other words, for example, that to know a meaning you have to be able to invoke an intention, on the one hand, or in the absence of an intention, we cannot possibly speak of a meaning, on the other hand. That's their first argument: people become embroiled in theory when they make one of those two mistakes. We'll come back to that in a minute.

The second argument is their insistence that there is no such thing as a difference between language and speech: in other words, the Saussurian idea that we have language somehow or another virtually present in our heads as a lexicon and a set of rules of grammar and syntax, that language or *langue* produces speech, what I say from sentence to sentence, or *parole*--this notion is simply false because there is no difference between language and speech. That's their second premise.

Now before I launch into those arguments, let me say one more thing about their attitude toward theory. Let me call your attention to the very first paragraph, which in your copy center packet is on page 079. This is the very first paragraph of "Against Theor*y*," where interestingly they exempt certain ways of thinking about literature, certainly quasi-scientific ways of thinking about literature, from their charge against theory. They say:

The term ["theory"] is sometimes applied to literary subjects with no direct bearing on the interpretation of individual works, such as narratology, stylistics, and prosody. Despite their generality, however, these subjects seem to us essentially empirical, and our arguments against theory will not apply to them.

Well, now this is a little surprising because for one thing, in this course, which is presumably devoted to theory, we've talked about some of these things--especially about narratology: stylistics--which is the science of style and how one can approach style syntactically, statistically and in the variety of ways in which that's done--and poetics, which is general ideas about what constitutes a poem, or a text written in some other genre. All of these, for example, must remind us very much of the Russian formalists. Narratology, as we studied it, is largely derived from structuralism, indeed also from certain ideas of Freud, and all of this sounds suspiciously like theory.

What point are they making about it? Well, simply, the point that those ways of thinking about literature, which they exempt from their diatribe against theory. are the ways that they call "empirical," ways of thinking about literature that are based on observation--and that, of course, would certainly, it seems to me, apply to the Russian formalists or at least to what the Russian formalists think they're doing--ways that are empirical in the sense that they observe data, they build up a kind of database, and they generalize from what they have observed. They begin, in other words, with the object in question and then draw conclusions from it. So empirical approaches to literature, the simple observation of data from which one can generalize--they exempt these from the general charge against literary theory.

Turning then to the idea that intention and meaning just must be the same thing, and then subsequently the idea that language and speech just must be the same thing: in the background I'd like you to be thinking about some of the implications of this sentence [points to board: "I can know the meaning of a word, but can I know the intention of a word?"] by Stanley Cavell which was written in another one of the responses to this essay that was published in the book, *Against Theory.* I don't want to reflect on it now, but it seems to me a strikingly vivid way of posing a challenge to the Knapp and Michaels position which in a variety of ways, if only by implication, we'll be touching on.

So what do Knapp and Michaels do in order to convince us?--and I'm going to be going a long way with them here, indeed almost all the way, even though I'm going to be taking a sharp turning toward the end of the road which, I hope, saves theory. After all, it's scarcely conscionable to stand here twenty-six times in front of you for an hour each and then finally to confess at the end that the thing we have been talking about should be banished from our vocabulary. [laughter] Needless to say, it's incumbent on me to save our subject matter. I will, but you're going to have to wait a while because, as I say, I am going to be going a long way down the road with Knapp and Michaels.

Knapp and Michaels say in effect, Well, you know what? The thing about the way in which we approach any text, any utterance, any instance of language floating before us, is just to take for granted that it has an intention. As theorists and critics, we worry away at the question of how we can know intention, and all of this is a dangerous mistake because the fact is, in everyday practice any piece of language we encounter we just assume to have an intention.

All right. So they give us an example in which this assumption is tested and makes us realize what's at stake in supposing that we know the meaning of something. Ordinarily, we just spontaneously say, "I know what that means," or if we don't know what it means, we say, "It must mean something even though I don't know what it means." That's our normal approach to a piece of language. Then they say, Suppose you're walking on the beach and you come across four lines--"lines" is already a dangerous thing to say--four scratches in the sand that look an awful lot like the first stanza of Wordsworth's 'A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal':

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears.  
She seem'd a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

There it is on the beach just right in front of us; and we say, Oh, well, somebody's come along, some Wordsworth lover has come along here and scratched these lines in the sand, so that the intention of the text is unquestioned. Wordsworth wrote it. Somebody now wants to remind us of what a wonderful stanza it is, and there it is. Of course, it's very difficult to know what it *means*, but at least I can ascribe meaning to it because, no doubt, it's an intended thing.

But then what happens? A huge wave comes along and leaves on the beach underneath the first stanza the other stanza, and this of course is highly problematic. There it is:

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees;  
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course,  
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Now we are really puzzled. Maybe, as Knapp and Michaels say, the sea is a kind of a pantheistic being that likes to write poetry--so the sea wrote it. Maybe, they say later on, there are little men in a submarine who look at their handiwork and say, "Gee, that was great. Let's try that again." In other words, we can infer all sorts of authors for the stanza, but it's much more likely that instead of saying that the sea writes poetry, or instead of saying there are little sort of homunculi in submarines writing poetry--instead of saying that, it's much more likely that we'll say, "This is an amazing coincidence, truly amazing, but it's just a coincidence. What else could it be?"

Knapp and Michaels's point, which was the same point that you might make about a parrot saying, "My boss is a jerk," for example--you know the parrot doesn't mean that. The parrot is just making words. Somebody else meant it, maybe, but that's just words for the parrot, okay? Or monkeys at typewriters writing Shakespeare. We are told that given eternity, this is a task that could be accomplished, always supposing somebody were there to whisk away the sheets whenever they wrote a word [laughs] and finally put it back together. All of these things are possibilities, but we suddenly realize that those texts, "My boss is a jerk" and "A slumber did my spirit seal," written by chance by whatever it is--and already there is a sort of an intentionality entailed in the idea of writing "by" something--but just left by chance, we suddenly realize, according to Knapp and Michaels, that in that case those words are only *like* language. They are not actually language because nobody wrote them; nothing wrote them; no entity or being from God on down wrote them. They are just there by chance. Therefore, even though they look like language, we suddenly realize that it would be foolish to suppose that they have meaning. There is a poem that exactly resembles this bunch of marks that we see in front of us, and that poem has meaning, but this bunch of marks does not have meaning.

Now I think probably most of us--and that's why I think in a way Knapp and Michaels could have chosen a better example--I think probably most of us would resist the idea that we can't interpret the bunch of marks. They're identical to language. We feel free to interpret them. After all, nobody knows what the poem means anyway! It's been the subject of critical controversy for decades. That's one of the reasons Knapp and Michaels choose it, and so okay, there it is on the beach. I'll have my stab at it. It must mean something, so here goes. And so we resist that.

That's why I gave you this other example, because it seems to me that in a way, the other example is more compelling than that of Knapp and Michaels. [Points to handout.] Now you see these two ladies looking up at the tree. The upper--what do you call them? What do you call it when the branches are sawed off and eventually there's a kind of a scar formed?

**Student:** A burl.

**Professor Paul Fry:** Burl? The upper burl certainly looks an awful lot like Jesus, [laughter] and when this appeared in Milford about fifteen years ago, not just these two ladies but hundreds and hundreds of people visited the site. Now they, of course, believed that that was on the tree because God put it there. Therefore, it had meaning. We knew what it was. It was a representation of the face of Jesus, and the feeling that one could know what it was, interpret it, and take it to be an actual representation of something was therefore unquestioned. As we would all agree, you accept the premise: God wrote it or I should say put it there. He's been known to do the same thing with toasted cheese sandwiches and tacos, and it happens, right? You accept that premise and you're all set. But suppose you say, "No, no, no, no. God didn't write that. God didn't put that there. It's just an accident." Wouldn't you then say, "Oh, therefore it has no meaning, it's not a representation of anything, it just looks like something"?

In other words, in *this* case--however you feel about "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal"-- in this case you would accept Knapp and Michaels's argument. You would say, "It really does depend on the inference of an intention. If I infer no intention, I ascribe no meaning. If I infer an intention, I ascribe meaning." So Knapp and Michaels are simply making the same argument about "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," and I think it's a very strong argument. Once you realize--or once, I should say, you accept the idea--that meaning just is intention and think about it etymologically--when I say "I mean," that precisely means "I intend," right? It doesn't quite work that way in all languages, but it certainly works that way in English, and it's worth remembering *to mean* is "to intend" --it makes a lot of sense to say that a meaning just is an intention and that it's perhaps against the grain of common sense to factor them apart, to say, "Well, I can see this sentence and I have a certain notion what it might mean, but I still don't know what the author intended to say," which is forbidden from the standpoint of Knapp and Michaels. Of course, you *know* what the author intended to say. You've just ascribed meaning to the sentence.

Now mind you, you may be wrong, but that isn't to say that your being wrong hinges on knowing what the author intended. In a certain sense, Knapp and Michaels agree perfectly well with the New Critics and with Foucault or whoever it might be and say, "Well, you can never know what an author intended." But that's not the point. The meaning of the sentence in itself entails intention. If it weren't a sentence spoken intentionally by an agent, human or otherwise, it wouldn't have meaning because it wouldn't be language. In a certain sense this, then, can carry us to our second argument because, having established in their own minds satisfactorily that for any text the meaning of the text must just *be* its intention--in other words, to be understood as language at all, to repeat myself once again, and to be understood as language at all, an intention needs to be inferred. The argument here is that we ought to be able to recognize, supposing we succeed in *not* inferring an intention, that what we are looking at is actually not language; it's just a simulacrum of language, an effective copy of language like, for example, the speech of a parrot or the words produced by monkeys on typewriters and so on. We should not from such simulacra of words infer not only intention but meaning as well. It is meaningless to speak of marks that are not signs as language.

Bringing us to the notion of "sign": for C. S. Peirce, who actually discriminated among hundreds of different kinds of signs, all signs are *active*--that is to say, they have an agency, they have a purpose, they have a function. Peirce, in other words, does not understand them in the way that Saussure does as being differential. He understands that too, but for him the central point about a sign is the agency of the sign.

Now the implication of this is clear, and it's the implication that Knapp and Michaels draw on in this argument. Their claim is that there is no distinction to be made between language and speech. Now let's just pause over their argument. I would think the fact that as we think about that--especially since we have been exposed to Saussure and, I hope, have come to accept the idea that language is a virtual synchronic entity laid out in space, and speech is an actual diachronic performance derived from language laid out in time--since we have absorbed that and since we just have this sort of spontaneous belief, if we're students of literary theory, that there is a distinction between language and speech: what do we do when we come face to face with this claim of Knapp and Michaels's?

Now I think that they make their most effective case in a footnote. This is the last footnote I'll be calling your attention to this semester, and it's, like all footnotes, perhaps the most telling thing in the essay. It appears on page 084 in the copy center packet, footnote number twelve. I'm not going to read the whole thing. I'm just going to read a single sentence at the top their page twenty-one, footnote twelve, in which they say, "… [A] dictionary is an index of frequent usages in particular speech acts--not a matrix of abstract, pre-intentional possibilities." Think about that. Language, we suppose, is, in addition to being a set of grammatical and syntactical rules, also a set of definitions made available for speech acts. That is the assumption that a course in literary theory provides for us.

Knapp and Michaels are denying that in this footnote. They are saying that dictionary definitions are just a sum total, as it were, of words in action, that any definition is of a word which is *already* a speech act. You go through all eighteen definitions of a word. They're all of them embedded in sentences, speech acts, and can be taken out of sentences and still understood in their agency as performed. Any word in a dictionary, in other words, according to Knapp and Michaels, is a word performed, and the record fossilized, as it were, in the dictionary is a record not of meaning *per se* but of performance, of the way in which the word works in speech, in history. A dictionary is nothing other than a composite or a sum total of speech acts. To distinguish, therefore, between language as something which is pre-action and speech as the implementation of language is a mistake. Language, even in the sense that it's always there before us, is nevertheless always active. It is a record of those actions that have taken place before our own actions as speakers. There's no difference between me acting through speech and language preexisting as something which is not action. It's all continuous as an ever-deepening, broadening, and self-complicating record of action, or speech action.

Now this is a very interesting idea and I think, again, it's an idea that one might well go a long way with. I think it should be said in defense of Saussure, by the way, that in a certain way he anticipates this position. Remember I told you that although for purposes of learning, to understand structuralism and its aftermath we only distinguish between language and speech, *langue* and *parole*, but in Saussure there's actually a third category, a sort of intermediate category, which he calls *langage*. *Langage* is actually the sum total of all known speech acts. If you could codify or quantify everything that's ever been said or written, that would be *langage*. You can see how it's different from *langue*, which needn't necessarily ever have been said at all. I'll be coming back to that in a minute. *Langage*, in other words, is "empirical," as Knapp and Michaels would say. It is something that, had we enough information, we could actually codify into a vast database. It would be the sum of all speech acts, and that actually, what Saussure calls *langage*, would be not unlike what Knapp and Michaels mean by *language*. Saussure is aware that you can think of the sum of speech acts in the way that Knapp and Michaels do, but he still holds out for this other category, this notion of *langue* as the code from which speech acts are derived, as a thing apart.

Now I think, as I say, this is a persuasive position, because after all, as long as we suppose that language exists for communication, that it is interactive--as long as we accept, as we have accepted from Bakhtin and others during the course of the course--the idea that language is social, that all of its deployments are interactive, derived from the speech acts of others, appropriated for oneself as one's own set of speech acts, and influential on yet other people as a speech act--as long as we accept this, we say to ourselves, "Yeah, it makes a lot of sense to think of language as inseparable from speech, to think of language simply as the sum of all agencies so that no meaningful distinction between that sum of agencies and the individual agency of a speech act needs to be made." Notice though--and here, by the way, is where I'm going to make my turn and save theory, so sharpen your pencils!--notice that I began that last riff by saying "as long as we suppose language exists for communication."

Now we *do* suppose language exists for communication. What else could it exist for? What do we do with language except to communicate? You could say, "Well, we write doodles. We make meaningless marks in the sand." There are all kinds of things that maybe we do with language, but let's face it: we don't, right? If I do, in fact, make marks in the sand amounting to "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," it's because I love Wordsworth, as by the way I do, and I wish to communicate that love to the rest of the world. It's a speech act. Come on, I'm not just making marks. If I wanted to make marks, I'd do something rather more mark-like [gesticulates]. Well, so [laughter] in any case, we certainly inhabit a life world in which it is almost inconceivable for anyone to come along and tell us, "Language is not for the purpose of communication." In other words, Knapp and Michaels seem to be completely right. What else is it for? That's what we use it for. We have refined it to a fare-thee-well as an efficient, flexible, sometimes even eloquent medium of communication. That's what language is for, that's what it exists for. As I'm saying, if we accept this idea--which seems simply to carry the day, because who could think anything else?--if we accept this idea, then there's a very strong case for Knapp and Michaels being right. Really there's no significant or important difference between language and speech.

But now suppose we approach the question from a--I don't say from an empirical point of view [laughs] but from a speculative anthropological point of view. Suppose we approach it with some rather commonsense remarks. Now we say language is for communication; the purpose of language is for communication. We say that. Especially if we think of the whole history of mankind, does that mean that the purpose of fire is for cooking? Or to bring it a little bit closer to home, does it mean that the purpose of the prehensile thumb is for grasping? Does it mean that the purpose of a cave, a hole in the rock, is for dwelling? No. In those cases, adaptation is what makes fire a good thing to cook with, the prehensile thumb a good thing to grasp with, and a cave a good thing to take shelter in, but they all in their various ways are just there. Plainly, all of them have other, well, not "purposes," because a purpose is, when you think about it, only something that we can impose on something; but they certainly are not there in any sense for us to do the thing that it turns out we've decided it's a good idea to do with it. Fire burns us but we can cook with it, and so on.

Now in the case of language, we have to suppose as a matter of fact that language, as it were, appeared among us in the same way that the prehensile thumb did. Of course we "discovered its use," but that's a funny way to put it. It might be more circumspect to say that we discovered it had a use for us which was to communicate, and so once we were able to put this--whatever it was, this weird capacity to make differential sounds--once we put this weird capacity to make differential sounds to work, henceforth for us and for our purposes language was there to communicate. Of course we made an enormous success of it, or a tower of Babel of it, whichever you prefer to think, but in any case we have it, and it has developed among us as a means of a medium of communication.

But by whatever mutancy language arose, supposing this to be the case--and I'm not making an argument that has anything to do with "intelligent design" one way or another--supposing that by whatever mutancy language appeared, then, of course, the next day there were an avalanche: then it might well be the case that this species consisting of all of us sitting in this room and I guess a few other people, [laughs] that this species might be mute. It might be communicating perhaps with incredible eloquence, perhaps even with literary genius, by means of signs or--who knows? Or for that matter it might have taken a detour in its development such that communication was not anything one could identify as specifically human. All sentient beings communicate, but it's possible that this particular species could have taken a turn in its development after which communication was much as it is among mice or ants or whatever.

All of this is possible, you see, when we think about language--a property that we have and manipulate and communicate with--anthropologically. It comes into being in such a way that it is, I would think, scarcely relevant to say that its purpose is for communication. It comes into being simply as an attribute, a property, something we happen to have, something someone happens to have for which a use is then discovered, as for fire, for the prehensile thumb and for the cave. The relationship between the cave and the house, it seems to me, is a particularly interesting way of thinking about the relationship between language as a set of differentials and language as speech.

Notice something about the signs of language--and here of course we also invoke Saussure. Saussure lays every stress on the idea that language is made up of differential and arbitrary signs. In other words, Saussure denies that there is such a thing in language as a natural sign. The Russian formalists do this as well. Both Saussure and the Russian formalists warn us against believing that onomatopoetic devices--for example, "peep, peep, peep"--devices like that, are actually natural signs, that they are derived, in other words, from the thing in the world that they seem through their sound to represent. Saussure reminds us that these are accidents of etymological history which can also be understood in adaptive terms. Onomatopoeia exists in language because it's good for communication and it's fun to communicate with, but it doesn't enter language as a natural sign. It only passes through moments--in the evolution of a given word--it only passes through moments in which the relationship between the sound and the thing represented seems to be natural.

This is a matter upon which great stress is laid both in Saussure and in the Russian formalists. When you read these passages in which such stress is laid on it you may have thought: well, that's overkill. Who cares about onomatopoeia? Well, it anchors the entire idea about language, which is precisely that it is something other than speech. When we speak, we not only endeavor to communicate; we endeavor to *refer*. In other words, we take language and we try to make it, as the philosophers say, hook on to the natural world. We take a set of signs, a code which is not in itself natural, which is arbitrary, and through the sheer force of will, we make those signs as best we can hook on to the natural, to the actual world. In doing so, we reinforce the idea that language is for communication*-*-whereas my argument is language isn't for communication; speech is.

When we speak, that is--entirely and exclusively and without any other motive--for communication, except for one thing that the Russian formalists in particular took note of. There are funny things going on in our speech--alliteration, unnecessary or uneconomical forms of repetition--weird things going on in our speech which don't seem to have the purpose of communication. As a matter of fact, they actually seem to impede communication. When I really start messing language up--for example, in Lewis Carroll's "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / did gyre and gimble in the wabe"--I am impeding communication because I am laying stress on elements of rhythm, pattern, and sound recurrence which cannot be said to have any direct bearing on communication.

This, of course, is what we've studied recurrently and, I have to say, empirically [laughs] because these are all empirical facts about language, as the Russian formalists insisted. What we have studied recurrently is the way in which language rears its ugly head in speech, the way in which, in other words, language won't be repressed as mere communication, the way in which speech entails elements that keep bubbling up to the surface and asserting themselves, which oddly enough really can't be said to conduce to communication. Those things, those elements that bubble up to the surface, are nothing other than evidence of the presence of language, precisely in the way that in Freud the Freudian slip--the fact that I can't get through a sentence without making some kind of blunder, very often an embarrassing blunder--is understood as the bubbling up into the conscious effort to speak of that which speech can't control, of that which Freud calls "the unconscious" and which, by the way, we would have no idea of the existence of if it weren't for the Freudian slip. In other words, as Freud said in the first handout that I gave you at the beginning of the semester, we infer the unconscious from the behavior of consciousness because, given the erratic nature of the behavior of consciousness, it seems necessary to do so.

By precisely the same token, we can and, I think we should say, we do infer language as something *else* from the composite or sum total of speech acts. We infer language from the erratic behavior of speech because it seems there is no other way to account for the erratic behavior of speech. That sense of language, which I'm going to be talking a lot more about on Thursday, sort of bubbling up and from below in speech, and proving its existence as something other than a composite record of all speeches, is what suggests to us that Knapp and Michaels are not quite right in saying there is really no difference between language and speech; that if there is a difference between language and speech, as I am claiming, and if the difference between language and speech is much as we have been taught to think of it by Saussure and his successors down through deconstruction--if there is such a difference, then guess what? We have literary theory back in the fold, alive and well, and we no longer have to say that it should be jettisoned from our thinking about literature. We have a real use for literary theory.

But that's exactly where Knapp and Michaels, supposing they were here and I'd convinced them--by the way, I know them both. You can't convince them of anything, but that's not unusual. You probably can't convince me of anything either--suppose we had them here and I had succeeded in convincing them. They would say, "Well, okay, but isn't it a pity? Because you have proved better than we did that literary theory has no purpose. Why on earth should we worry about all this bubbling up of stuff that has nothing to do with communication? After all, we're here to communicate, aren't we? We've begun by saying that our life world consists precisely in the deployment of language for communication, and here is this person saying there is this stuff bubbling up, which makes communication difficult. What use is that?" Knapp and Michaels might say. You see, they are pragmatists, aren't they? They are pragmatists, or they are concerned with practicality. Their interest, their reason for being interested in meaning and interpretation, is a practical reason entirely entailed in the understanding of communication and the furtherance of communication; whereas theory, which I have saved, I nevertheless seem to have saved at a pretty considerable cost because I have suggested that theory itself is completely impractical. I have suggested it, and we're going to get back to that next time. That's what the Thursday lecture is going to be about.

In the meantime you say to yourself, "Okay, fine. We've got theory, but we have also been shown that you can't really do anything with it, and so it might just as well suit us to suppose that Knapp and Michaels are right and to proceed as though theory could be jettisoned." One last quick point, going back to the distinction between meaning and intention: notice the two-pronged argument. On the one hand, there are people like E. D. Hirsch who believe that you can invoke an author's intention in order to pin down a meaning--on the one hand, you have people like that and, on the other hand, you have people doing deconstruction who say that *because* there is no inferable intention, texts themselves have no meaning. But that's not quite *right*, because that's not really what deconstruction says. Deconstruction doesn't say texts have no meaning. Deconstruction doesn't even say that you can't know what the meaning of a text is, exactly. What deconstruction says is that you can't *rope off* meaning in a text. Texts have too much meaning. Texts explode with meaning. You can't corral the way in which texts produce meaning. You can't corral it by inferring an intention. You can't corral it by taking a particular interpretive path. Meaning just explodes in texts.

That's not at all the same thing as to say, according to the claim of Knapp and Michaels, that in deconstructive thinking texts have no meaning--a very, very different proposition altogether. I think it might suggest to you that the relationship between intention and meaning isn't really what's at stake in deconstruction. A text is intended, or you can say, "Well, it may be intended, no doubt it's intended"--all sorts of ways of putting it, but is that really the point? The text is the *text* on my view, and the text, just as I say, fairly bristles with meaning, that being precisely the point. You can't rein it in. That's not really the flip side--as Knapp and Michaels would want to make you think–that's not really the flip side of the idea of the followers of Hirsch that in order to know a meaning, you have to be able to infer an authorial intention. There is *no* symmetry there and, as I say, I'm not sure that deconstruction, whatever its claims, whatever its perfections and imperfections--I am not sure that really deconstruction has the question of intention in relation to meaning very much at heart one way or another.

Sorry to have kept you. We'll see you Thursday.

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**Introduction to Theory of Literature: Lecture 26 Transcript**

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| April 23, 2009 | [<< back](javascript:history.go(-1);) |

**Professor Paul Fry:** Well, last time we saved theory from the clutches of Knapp and Michaels, and we did so by saying that there really is a difference between language and speech. That's a claim that I want to continue investigating in today's concluding lecture, but in the meantime when I say we saved theory, you may well be asking by this time, "Well, okay, so you saved it, but for what? Why?" We began to suggest last time that in a certain sense, especially in view of neo-pragmatists' claims about the agency of language and speech--understood to be one and the same thing--in view of claims of this kind, do we have to conclude that theory is impractical? That is, that it can't have anything to do with pragmatist objectives? That, too, is something I want to worry a little bit about today. Why do we bother to save literary theory? Well, it has something to do plainly with communication.

Speech, as we said last time, is unquestionably for--that is to say we have made it for--communication. So the old, frankly incredibly tired question, "How well do we communicate with each other?" is unfortunately, in a way, not irrelevant to what we're trying to get at here. I want to say a couple of things about what the French during the existentialist period called *la manque de la communication*. In a way, they're not really connected. First of all, I want to say that we actually communicate rather well. Congratulations to us, in other words! I think that many of the conventional ways in which people worry about whether or not we can understand each other--many of those ways of thinking about the problem are actually exaggerated. My own feeling is that perhaps a good deal of the time we understand each other all too well, and [laughs] that it might be better, in a way, if we didn't have quite such an acute sense of where each of us are coming from. It probably would improve human relations rather than otherwise, and this may have something to do with what I take to be a certain measure of bad faith in the ways in which we try to get together and raise each other's consciousness. Our supposition is that the whole problem is that we don't communicate well enough, and we don't understand each other's subject positions well enough.

As I say, I'm not completely convinced of that, so there's a certain sense in which I say, "Hey, speech is great. It's doing just fine. Don't worry. We're communicating perfectly well, possibly too well." So why on earth should theory come along and say, "Well, there's sort of a problem with communication"? The problem is this nagging entity called *language* which keeps poking up through the communication process, getting in its way, impeding communication, as the Russian formalists suggested--all for the better, as they saw it--that language does. Why should it matter? What's at stake? As Knapp and Michaels might say, what's at stake in calling attention to the way in which language does impede communication? In other words, we communicate fine, but what we really mean in saying that is, we communicate fine for everyday purposes. Speech has a rough and ready efficacy, and anybody who denies that, as I say, is simply exaggerating problems that may exist on grounds other than difficulty of communication. So speech is really fine up to a point.

Part of the function of theory is precisely to interrogate the degree to which speech in an unimpeded way communicates and the level of accuracy and detail at which speech can ever be expected to communicate. These are the sorts of questions that we might expect theory to ask, and if you say, "Well, I'm still not very convinced that that's an important aspect of one's intellectual life," I don't blame you. I hope to have convinced you over the next forty-five minutes or so that it's pretty important in a variety of ways and that it's worth keeping in mind.

In the meantime, just to start on this issue tentatively, we can understand theory--and of course, we began the semester by defining it, by trying to distinguish between theory and philosophy; theory and methodology; perhaps even those sorts of approaches to literature that Knapp and Michaels call "poetics"; maybe even to distinguish between theory and hermeneutics, because after all, the whole drive and function of hermeneutics is to discover meaning. There is a certain sense, as we have come sadly to realize, in which theory is more interested in the way in which meaning is impeded, so it may be--as we suggested, as I say, at the beginning of the course--that as to theory, if we're to get comfortable with it at all, we have to keep in mind that it's not philosophy.

That is to say, even though you're good at theory and you understand the purpose of theory, you can still be a system builder. That is to say, you can still have a sense of explaining the totality of things that philosophy needs if it's going to function as philosophy or as philosophy properly should. You can still, as Knapp and Michaels say, engage empirically with questions of literary data summarized in such a way as to amount to what we call "poetics." You can do all these things, and you don't really have to feel as though theory is somehow or another standing on the sidelines sort of shaking its fist at you and wagging its finger. Theory doesn't have to be understood as a watchdog. At least in my opinion, and not everyone agrees with me, theory really lets us go our own way and simply reminds us that there are certain limits or reservations that need to be kept in mind, that one is perhaps wisest to keep in mind, as we think through problems of interpretation and meaning.

So theory I would define as--and I've used this word "negation" a lot--I would define theory as a negative movement of thought mapping the ways in which it is legitimate--as opposed to the ways in which I have suggested it's perhaps not legitimate--but mapping the ways in which it is legitimate to be suspicious of communication. Theory is an antithetical counterforce to that which is commonly supposed to be true, posited as true, and--here of course one comes to the point--*spoken* as true: enounced, articulated, spoken as true. So if that's the case, why the fuss about language? Why do we so quickly narrow the issue down to language?

What I said last time about language and the relationship between language and speech may have seemed unconvincing to you because it was so narrow. I want to broaden today, considerably broaden, the sense of what I mean by "language." It seems to me that theory encourages a measure of suspicion about the efficacy of speech, that which is spoken as true, in three ways.

Last time I mentioned one, but now let me emphasize three. The first and the one I did mention last time is the way in which language obtrudes itself as sound. In other words, if we think of the efficiency or functionality of speech as a medium of communication, we're forced to ask ourselves, even as we engage in speech, how and why it is that speech is so much burdened in ways that are of no use whatsoever to us for the most part. Sometimes they are of use. One of the pre-freshmen asked me last time, "Well, isn't sound a reinforcement of meaning?" I told you when we did the New Criticism that all of you had done the New Criticism in high school. That's the way you learned literary interpretation. Well, this was a perfect embodiment of a bright person coming out of high school saying, "Interpretation just *is* the New Criticism and I've been taught that sound reinforces sense. That's what it says in Perrine's handbook about understanding poetry. Sound reinforces sense." Well, it often does, of course, and on those occasions we can revel in the complexity of an intentional meaning or intentional structure that is augmented by the way in which sound patterns are used.

At the same time, as the Russian formalists discovered, working through materials that weren't perhaps so much materials like John Donne's "The Canonization" or texts of the kind that lent themselves, to a degree, readily to the New Criticism; but rather alliterative verse, folklore and folk verse in the Russian tradition, verse embodying proverbs--what they noticed in studying these materials is that there is simply no way of grasping a semantic purpose, a purpose having to do with meaning, in the sound elements that are involved. I think that as we recognize the way in which there is a strange pull in our spontaneous speaking toward repetitiousness of sound, it's not *just* that we all speak iambic pentameter without knowing it--which, by the way, is by and large and true. It's not just that. It's that there is an extraordinary amount of alliteration and rhythmic determination in what we say.

Jakobson has an interesting point in "Linguistics and Poetics" about that moment when we're nearby and an accident takes place or something like that. He says in effect, "You could call a person in a situation like that anything, but we call that person an innocent bystander, and the reason we do so is metric." A person is an innocent bystander not because that expression has any particular meaning or semantic valence as over against other expressions but because it's catchy, because it sort of sticks in our mind, perhaps for mnemotechnical reasons, as catchy. Eisenhower won the election against Stevenson because "I like Ike" is a more efficient sort of way of engaging with the repetition of sound than "Madly for Adlai." Jakobson doesn't go into that, but I think an interesting political analysis could be made of, as I say, the greater efficacy of "I like Ike." All of these functions of sound or, I should say, appearances of sound in speech are what an economist might call irrational. They're there, they're doing a job, but it's not really a job of anything that we could call communication. The job they're doing is sort of free spirited on the part of language. It's just there in an arbitrary relation with the semantic pattern of speech.

So much then for sound, but it's not only that. If it were only that, if literary theory were only about the first two or three years' worth of research performed by the Russian formalists, we probably wouldn't be having an introductory survey course in the subject. Speech is impeded by language in two other ways. First of all-- second of all, I should say, I suppose--speech is disturbed by the way in which language produces in what's being said an uncontrollable semantic drift. That's what I want to call it. In other words, the language of an utterance is crafted to say some particular thing. Actually, it was Saussure, in a work of his that's less known than the *Course in General Linguistics*, who published a monograph on the way in which you can find acronyms of various kinds buried or embedded in Latin verse. In other words, there is meaning within meaning which can't possibly have been planted there and yet, miraculously enough, you can find there. You can recite a well-known poem--the one that we took up last time because it was the example given in Knapp and Michaels' "Against Theory*"*--you can recite a poem while reading this: [referring to what is written on the chalkboard:

Ah slum per dead, um, I spear'd seal,  
Eye add, know Hume, 'n fierce!  
Shah seam (duh!) thin; the tic wood-knot fee ill:  
Thud! A shover the lee ears.

No mo'! Shun hash e'en now, no fours,  
Shhh! Knee th'rears, Norse ease,  
Role drown, an' hurts, die, urn: all corpse,  
Whither oxen?--ssst!-onus entries.]

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears:  
She seem'd a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees;  
Roll'd 'round in earth's diurnal course  
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Now you can see that to write the poem in this way is to perform an exercise which is essentially what Joyce is doing in *Finnegan's Wake.* As a matter of fact, as I transcribed the poem out of my notes [gestures to board]--as you can see, I transcribed it--I kept saying to myself, "You know what? This could be in *Finnegan's Wake."* I was actually quite pleased with myself, as you can imagine. [laughter] [laughs] Notice that I have used *all words*. There's nothing in these eight lines which is not a word. I have certainly engaged in a certain amount of anachronism, but I have also used punctuation, and I have worked out ways in which this discourse makes sense. I could have just left it at nonsense--like Lewis Carroll's "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / did gyre and gimble in the wabe…"--which is another way in which language is affected by uncontrollable semantic drift. The point of Lewis Carroll's famous nonsense verse is that we all think we know what it means: "'Twas blusterous and the slimy toads did leap and frolic in the waves." We think that it means something like that, but semantic drift--which is what Lewis Carroll deliberately introduces to it--prevents us from in any secure way drawing any conclusions about that.

I, of course, am making no claims for this transcription of Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" at all, but maybe this can show us the ways in which there *is* semantic drift. Let's say that you were a person not really, as Stanley Fish would put it, in the interpretive community to which all the rest of us belong, and you don't really know what a poem is. Somebody recites in your presence what I just recited to you. Well, if you were quick at writing and you transcribed the thing, you might very well produce something like *that* [points to board]. In other words, it wouldn't just spontaneously occur to you that what Wordsworth wrote was what you were hearing, and that's because the kind of semantic drift that I'm talking about really is inescapably present in any utterance that we make.

The utterance is not often mistaken because we're really actually good at understanding context. That's one of the reasons why the so-called problem of communication isn't as great as people sometimes claim it is. We're really good at understanding context. Hence, we're not likely to go badly wrong, but certainly there are occasions on which we go badly wrong. As we all know, that's the irritating thing about spell check. You put on spell check, you write your term paper, you don't bother to edit it, and you turn it in. It's full of howlers because, of course, the language is full of homonyms, and spell check always gives the wrong word. You're in the soup, frankly because, of course, your teacher is just kind of slapping his knee and guffawing while reading it. [laughs] [laughter] In short, don't use spell check, but spell check is [laughter] a phenomenon that shows you the way in which semantic drift permeates language.

But it's not just that either. There's a third way in which language impedes speech. Saussure never says this in so many words, but this is definitely what he means by *langue*. Remember I said that language, *langue*, is a *virtual* entity because we could never actually encounter it written down in any codified form. Yes, it is: the dictionary, the lexicon, right? But that's only part of it. So far, notice that we've only been talking about the lexicon when we talk about semantic drift, but in addition to the lexicon, language, *langue*, is a set of rules--rules of grammar and syntax, rules by means of which, and only by means of which, speech can make sense. In other words, language has this sort of bearing on the choices that we can make while producing speech.

Unfortunately those rules can be a little bit slippery. When we talked about the innocuous expression "It is raining" as an illustration of Jakobson's six sets of the message, just as an example, we were brought up short by the meta-lingual function of "It is raining." We suddenly asked ourselves, "What on earth is ‘it'?" In other words, there is a kind of grammatical and syntactical permissibility, obviously, in the expression "It is raining," but at the same time we really have no idea. It can lead us in strange directions, this "it": Jupiter Pluvius, God, the cosmos, the clouds. Some of it is plausible but none of it is definite. We realize that "it" is a kind of placeholder in the sentence that is not doing its job and, believe me, it's not just in English. As I said before, it's a phenomenon that you can find in any language, even in the expression "It is raining"-- *il pleut*, *es regnet*, and so on. In all of those expressions, "it" is not doing its job, so that's another way in which, if we lean on a speech, we have to realize that we're in the presence of what the economists again would call irrationality.

That has to do with the way in which predication works in language. As I said before, an assertion, a statement of truth--an assertion of any kind is the utterance of a metaphor, because the deep structure of any assertion is that A is B. That is an assertion by definition; but--"A is B," and of course when that construction is grammatical--in other words, when it makes what the grammarians call a copula--when the construction is grammatical, well, that's fine because we understand that the relationship between A and B is not a relationship that's insistently one of identity; that a connection is being made--a connection which de Man, for example, would call metonymic--*in predication*. The problem is that any sentence which declares that A is B metonymically--that is to say, as a grammatical proposition--is at the same time, if we simply look at the sentence for what it is, which is a metaphor, an insistence that A *is* B in the sense that A is A--is a metaphor, in other words which doesn't stand on all fours. No metaphor does. It has an element of what's called catachresis in it, and therefore in a certain sense, as we read the sentence, necessarily undermines the sentence's grammatical structure.

This is the point that de Man is making in "Semiology and Rhetoric," that there is a perpetual tension in any utterance between grammar and rhetoric. There is no utterance that's not grammatical, there's no utterance that's not rhetorical, but unfortunately grammar and rhetoric are always rather openly or subtly at odds with each other, just in the way that metaphor and predication really have to be at odds with each other. In other words, there isn't a sentence in which the rules of grammar and syntax are not subtly interfering with what you might call the rules of rhetoric--the ways in which tropes, in other words, deploy themselves, ways which can be distilled in an understanding of what we call metaphor.

So every sentence, as I say, is shadowed not just by the vagaries of sound, not just by semantic drift, but by the incompatibility of grammar and rhetoric, and all of that is implicit in what Saussure and his tradition call language. Those are the ways, in other words, in which language, if I can put it this way, speaks through speech, the ways in which anything that we say on any occasion is shadowed by another voice. We've understood this in social terms as Bakhtinian polyglossia. We have understood this in psychoanalytic terms as the discourse of the otherness of the unconscious. We have understood this in purely linguistic terms as language, but we can, I think, metaphorically speaking, understand it now as well as a kind of speech. *Language is an unintentional speech*. Language is just that speech which, we recognize--having gone through the sort of analysis that I've been attempting--is not governed by intention.

Keep in mind: nobody--no theorist, nobody in his right mind--would ever try to resist the claim that speech is intentional, that we intend what we say. That's the way in which Knapp and Michaels are right and give us a bracing reminder about things where our skepticism is misplaced. The idea that speech is somehow not intended--what could that mean? Speech just *is* intention, but I've been trying to argue that there is a speech, the "speech of language," which is unintentional, which is just there. It can't be factored out. It can be bracketed, but it can't be set aside as though it were not there. It will always come back. It will always confront us at some point if we take the arts of interpretation seriously enough--if, in other words, we really do bring some pressure to bear on the things that people say: not just a pragmatic pressure, which I think works just fine for most of us, but a pressure that goes beyond the pragmatic and notices what's really in a sentence, what's really in anybody's utterance.

Language speaks through speech partly as its origin. In other words, the way language gets into something that you or I might say is a reminder to us that what we say comes from someplace. It has an origin and its origin is precisely language. Language keeps saying, "Oh, oh, here I am," your origin, right? The birth of what you're doing, in other words, way back before you discovered that language was useful for something. Remember what we said about that last time: you have to discover that fire is useful for cooking. Fire is not "for" cooking. A cave is not for dwelling. A prehensile thumb is not for grasping. You have to discover the ways in which this is the case. Language is there in what we say to remind us that it wasn't always the case, to remind us that it's just the origin of a history of conscious expression during the course of which we began the never-ending process of trying to master language. That's, of course, what it is to be a writer. You try to wrestle language into submission. That's the ambition of all of us, whether we're writing the great American novel or revising a term paper. We're wrestling language into submission, and we all know it's not easy. I'm just trying to explain some of the reasons why it's not easy.

So language speaks through us as the origin of speech, but it also speaks as the death of speech. It speaks, in other words, as the moment in which the purposeful agency of speech is finally called into question, in a certain sense undermined. I think it's appropriate, I think it's fair, to call language--again metaphorically--the epitaph of speech, the way in which in any given speech the end of its own agency is inscribed even as that agency is going forward.

Now I want to test this example and also show you a little bit more about the way semantic drift--but even more than that about the way the perilous relationship between grammar and syntax and rhetoric works. I want to actually try out on you a couple of epitaphs. If language is the epitaph of speech, why not talk for a little bit about epitaphs?

Now my favorite epitaph by far: probably--well, we won't speculate about where such an epitaph might be found, but if and when you come across it walking through a cemetery, it'll probably elicit a chuckle. On the gravestone it says, "I told you I was sick." [laughter] Now this is a very interesting expression for a number of reasons. For one thing, and one should pause over this, one *can* infer speakers speaking efficaciously, not just one but many. There's plenty of precedent for this in Emily Dickinson and in other writers. The most obvious speaker is the dead person speaking from the grave: "there I was, sitting in the corner all those years telling you I had a headache. You never listened to me" and so on.

That is the most obvious identification of a speaker, but of course the speaker could be somebody else, and I'm *not* introducing a measure of skepticism in saying this. When we posit an intention, we just decide which of these speakers it is. The speaker could be an apologetic relative, someone acknowledging that they hadn't listened, but with a sense of humor, and so putting in the voice of the dead person the complaint, "I told you I was sick" as a form of apology: "Yes, I know you did, and unfortunately I had to go to the grocery store." [laughter] That, too, can be the speaker.

Well, on the other hand, it could be someone simply moralizing over the grave, which is a frequent habit of the eighteenth century--one of my periods, so I'm familiar with it. It could be a philosopher--right?--saying, "Well, this is the human condition, [laughs] as I kept telling you. I published thirteen books, the whole purport of which was 'I am sick.' I'm Dostoevsky's Underground Man. I am a sick man. I am a very sick man. Well, let it get worse." It could be in this mode that a philosopher is moralizing over the grave, or again it could be a cultural critic. It could be someone in a kind of an allegorical mood inscribing on the gravestone the death of culture. Civilization has been in a bad way for a long time and here finally it lies. The way to communicate this would then be, "I told you I was sick: civilization has ways of letting us know that all is not well with it: we didn't pay any attention, and here is the result."

I would say that all of those ways of reading the epitaph are consistent with hermeneutics. They are consistent with the way in which we can try to come to terms with the intention of a speaker; but suppose we say that "language" must be obtruding itself in this utterance like any other. What would that be? You see, that isn't just a question of sound. It isn't even a question of semantic drift, in this case. It's a question of our suddenly coming to understand the sentence in a way that perhaps no individual speaker would want to give it. It's an allegory, precisely, cleverly introduced by *language*, about the inefficacy of speech. That's just the problem with speech, isn't it? "Again and again and again I tell you something and you don't listen"--that's the problem with being a lecturer, [laughs] that sort of "I told you I was sick and you--" "Oh, well. He's just joking."

So it is--according to the allegory introduced by language at the expense of speech--with speech in general. It's an allegory about the limits of communication because that's, after all, what the speaker--insofar as there is a speaker inscribing this expression on the gravestone--is concerned about. This person sitting in the corner, complaining bitterly about nobody ever listening to her or to him, is actually an allegorist telling us that that's the way speech is. Speech, in other words, has its limits. In a sense then, when I say language is the epitaph of speech, we realize that if we understand this utterance as an allegory, it is precisely speech that's lying here--the end, as I suggested, of speech's powers of communication as announced or declared by language.

Well, let's try another one: "Here lies John Doe," probably the *Ur*-epitaph. Supply your own name: "Here lies John Doe." Well, let's not even pause over the speaker there. Let's get immediately to the problems posed by language. In the first place, John Doe obviously does not lie precisely "here," right? In fact, if you think about it, it's altogether possible that John Doe could be absolutely anywhere except precisely "here," because where the sentence is we know John Doe not to be. He could be anyplace else, as I say. So any epitaph is therefore a self-declared cenotaph, an inscription on a place where the body isn't, which of course tells us a lot, too, about the arbitrary nature of language. Language does not hook on to the real world. It doesn't hook on to the body. The one place where language is *not* is on the body. The one place where language is *not* is on things. Speech is on things. Speech can be inscribed on a piece of rock.

So "Here lies John Doe," except not here, anyplace but here--which is why, of course, the interest of the word "lies" is so interesting. [laughs] The utterance is a lie, but it's not John Doe who lies. Poor John Doe is just lying someplace. John Doe is not lying, right? It's language [laughs] that's making speech lie, and it's doing it on any number of levels, as we've seen. It's a funny thing about epitaphs, and this has been noted by certain authors writing in the tradition of what we loosely call "deconstruction": the epitaph is a particularly fruitful locus for the study of the ways in which language challenges, undermines, and displaces speech, and as I say, these two examples show more or less the way that works.

So speech lies everywhere except here--I don't mean *here*!--speech lies because it can never stop being language, and therefore we can never really possibly mean exactly what we say. We can mean what we say, but we can't mean exactly what we say. That's probably the most commonsensical way of putting the matter. When Stanley Cavell poses the question in the title of one of his books, *Must We Mean What We Say?* [laughter] he is actually offering us the possibility that maybe that's not the be all and end all of speaking, [laughs] that the speech-act situation is more complicated than that. Sure, we all have it at heart as an objective to mean what we say, but at the same time in speaking we are performing, we're acting, as the neo-pragmatist would suggest, and we're doing all kinds of things besides meaning. That really needs to be taken into account, even in understanding what speech *can* do, let alone in understanding what speech can't do. So it's plausible to say that yes, we can mean what we say; but it's a question--indeed, it's a very insistent question--whether we can mean exactly what we say.

Now you ask--you must ask, because after all it's been our constant guide--you ask, "Does language speak in *Tony the Tow Truck*?" I know this has been on your mind, and so of course we have to address it. I think there are a few interesting things to be said about that. I spoke earlier in the semester about the parade on the vertical axis, of that vertical axis, called "I." As you read the text, there it is, [laughs] sort of out of Lacan, out of Lacanian feminism, however you look: the phallogocenter right there, *I*. But now *I* is never the first word spoken by an infant. That's another lesson of Lacan. *I* is what you have to learn how to be--maybe to put it in Judith Butler's terms--so that *I*, insofar as it is this incredible upright pillar starting one sentence after another in *Tony the Tow Truck,* is a promise of, precisely, agency: the promise of the kind of identity which stands upright, which is a successful simulacrum of what is seen in the mirror, and which then develops into what Freud called, referring to the way in which infants begin to get their way in the world, "his majesty the ego."

So the *I* has that function, but as I've said, it's a story about friendship, and the *I* disappears. This, too, I think, can be communicated as relevant to the infant in ways that at the functional level of language can't really be called speech. For example, the friendship exists between Bumpy [pron. BUM-py] and Tony [pron.TO-ny], *uh*-*oh*: long before the baby says "I," it says "uh-oh," and that "uh-oh" resonates in the friendship of Bumpy and Tony. Why "uh-oh?" Because Tony is stuck and Tony's natural response to being stuck would be, "Uh-oh." Along comes Bumpy and--"uh-oh"--not only recognizes the problem but takes care of the problem.

Now on the other hand, the problem of self, the problem that's caught up in this vertical *I*, comes into focus for the infant as the awareness of otherness or that which is alien. That which is irreducible to the self begins to come into focus, and a way of expressing this is to say, "e-e-e-e," which is perhaps in some way or another a mask or a simulacrum of "he-he-he-he." I think it's for that reason that the two antagonists of the story, the unassimilable others who do not help, are called Speedy [pron. SPEE-dee] and Neato [pron. NEE-to]. In other words, that sense of otherness--of that which is intractable, that which cannot be reduced effectively to self--is I think articulated in "e-e-e." In other words, what the infant speaks is not speech, is it? It's language. If you want to hear language in speech, just listen to a baby. That's why nonsense verse has such appeal to young children. They're still hearing language. It's a way of putting Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode." They're still hearing the mighty waters rolling evermore. They're hearing "ohm" where we're all hearing speech.

As I say, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The history of the human species is a history of coming to terms with speech, mastering speech--or, I should say, perhaps, mastering language. Well, so it is in the individual. The individual who is hard wired--isn't he?--for language must somehow or another wrestle that hard wiring in to what we call speech. So the first thing we hear in an infant, and maybe what is most predominant in stories for toddlers and in nonsense verse, is language, which you don't reduce semantically, you don't parse it semantically. Sure, I've just interpreted it into a kind of meaning, but it's a meaning which comes simply from the observation of feelings and noticing what children actually say on actual occasions, which can't really be called speech but is rather a kind of experimentation with language dragging itself toward speech. It's not anything that one would ever really confuse with speech, yet partly an imitation of what is heard in the adult world. That's where you get "uh-oh." But when the adult occasionally says, "Uh-oh," there's nothing like the investment in it that there is in the child for whom it is very often the first articulate sound. It is the encounter with otherness and the attempt to master otherness, as in Freud's story of *fort*/*da*, that this "uh-oh" seems to be expressing.

All right. So much for *Tony.* I'd just like to confuse--I'd like to conclude with three theses. Well, you have to speak very carefully or language obtrudes. I had to say *very* carefully "three theses," right? And of course I made a mistake just before. I didn't want to say "confuse," did I? [laughter] Notice that "confuse" was not just anything getting in the way of communication. It was *precisely* what I did not want to say [laughter]--precisely. I could have said anything else, but I said "confuse." That is the Freudian slip that I've been talking about.

Well, anyway, [laughter] three theses about language. First, *it never makes sense*. Language does not make sense. It's arbitrary. It is a system of arbitrary signs that are not natural signs. *You* make sense, not language. You make sense by invoking an intention--that is to say, by having an intention--and wrestling language into speech: that is, commandeering language for your purposes. Language doesn't make sense; you make sense.

Language in itself, secondly, says nothing about reality just because it is a system, a code, a system of arbitrary signs. I want to put it two different ways to show you what's going on. You come to terms, as we say, with reality. That is to say, you find the words for reality as you grasp it. Another way to put it is you figure it out. In other words, you come to understand what language is, "I figured it out," but of course in rhetorical theory, "figure" is precisely a *figure of speech*. You bring to bear figures just as you come to terms. You bring to bear figures on reality. You figure it out.

Finally, to adapt an expression with which you're probably familiar, I'll conclude simply by saying that the road to reality is paved with *your* intentions, be they good or bad. Thank you very much.

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[back to top](file:///C:\WINDOWS\Temp\Rar$EXa0.512\ENGL300%20with%202012%20Watermark\content\transcripts\transcript26.html#top)