Structuralism

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

Narrative Discourse

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

Narrative Order

- ❖ There are two forms of time in narrative:
- ✓ The time of the story: The time in which the story happens
- ✓ The time of the narrative: The time in which the story is told/narrated
- ❖ "Narrative Order" is the relation between the sequencing of events in the story and their arrangement in the narrative.
- ❖ A narrator may choose to present the events in the order they occurred, that is, chronologically, or he can recount them out of order. Example:

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

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

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

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Time Zero

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

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

The time of the narrative is not necessarily chronological:

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

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

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Anachronies

- ❖ Gennette calls all **irregularities** in the time of narration: Anachrobies.
- ❖ Anachronies happen whenever a narrative stops the chronological order in order to bring events or information from the past (of the time zero) or from the future (of the time zero).

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

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

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

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

Reach and Extent

"An anachrony can reach into the past or the future, either more or less far from the "present" moment (that is, from the moment in the story when the narrative was interrupted to make room for the anachrony): this temporal distance we will name the anachrony's reach. The anachrony itself can also cover a duration of story that is more or less long: we will call this its extent" (Gennette, *Narrative Discourse*, 1980, p. 48).

The Function of Anachronies

Anachronies can have several functions in a narrative:

- ❖ **Analepses** often take on an explanatory role, developing a character's psychology by relating events from his past
- ❖ **prolepses** can arouse the reader's curiosity by partially revealing facts that will surface later.
- ❖ These breaks in chronology may also be used to disrupt the classical novel's linear narrative.

Narrative Mood: Mimesis vs. Diegesis

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- ❖ Traditional criticism studied, under the category of mood, the question whether literature uses *mimesis* (showing) or *diegesis* (telling).
- ❖ Since the function of narrative is not to give an order, express a wish, state a condition, etc., but simply to tell a story and therefore to "report" facts (real or fictive), the indicative is its only mood.
- ❖ In that sense, Genette says, all narrative is necessarily ***diegesis*** (telling). It can only achieve an illusion of ***mimesis*** (showing) by making the story real, alive and vivid.
- ❖ No narrative can show or imitate the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner that can try to be detailed, precise, alive, and in that way give more or less the illusion of mimesis (showing). Narration (oral or written) is a fact of language and language signifies without imitating.
- ❖ Mimesis, for Gennete is only a form of diegesis, showing is only a form of telling.
- ❖ It is more accurate to study the relationship of the narrative to the information it presents under the headings of: Distance and Perspective

Narrative Distance

- ❖ The only imitation (mimesis) possible in literature is the imitation of words, where the exact words uttered can be repeated/reproduced/imitated. Otherwise, ALL narratives are narratives of events and here every narrative chooses to take a certain amount of **distance** from the information is narrates.
- ❖ **Narrative of Events**: Always a *diegesis*, that is, a transcription of the non-verbal into the verbal.
- ✓ *Mimesis*: maximum of information and a minimum of the informer.
- ✓ *Diegesis*: a minimum of information and a maximum presence of the informer.

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

- ✓ *Narrated speech:* is the most distant and reduced ("I informed my mother of my decision to marry Albertine" [exact uttered speech].
- ✓ *Transposed speech*: in indirect style ("I told my mother that I absolutely had to marry Albertine" [mixture of uttered and narrated speech].

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

Narrative Perspective

❖ **Perspective** is the second mode of regulating information.
❖ Traditional criticism, says Gennete, confuses two different issues (narrative voice and narrative perspective) under the question of "Point of View":
❖ Gennete argues that a distinction should be made between narrative voice (the question "Who speaks?") and narrative perspective (the question "Who sees?").
❖ The one who perceives the events is not necessarily the one who tells the story of those events, and vice versa.

Focalization: Who Sees ?

Genette distinguishes three kinds of focalization:

1. *Zero focalization*: The narrator knows more than the characters. He may know the facts about all of the protagonists, as well as their thoughts and gestures. This is the traditional "omniscient narrator".

2. *Internal focalization*: The narrator knows as much as the focal character. This character filters the information provided to the reader, and the narrator does not and cannot access or report the thoughts of other characters. Focalization means, primarily, a limitation, a limit on the capacity of the narrator to "see" and "report." If the narrator wants to be seen as reliable, then he/she has to recognize and respect that he cannot be everywhere and know everything.

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

Levels of narration: Who Speaks?

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

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

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

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

❖ From the point of view of time, there are four types of narrating:
❖ SUBSEQUENT: The classical (most frequent) position of the past-tense narrative.
❖ PRIOR: Predictive narrative, generally in the future tense (dreams, prophecies) [this type of narrating is done with less frequency than any other]
❖ SIMULTANEOUS: Narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action (this is the simplest form of narrating since the simultaneousness of the story and the narrating eliminates any sort of interference or temporal game).
❖ INTERPOLATED: Between the moments of the action (this is the most complex) [e.g., epistolary novels]

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

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

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

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

Sources

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Lecture 9
Author Critiques:
1. Roland Barthes: "The Death of the Author"

Structuralism

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

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

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

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

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

❖ It is not easy to distinguish Structuralism from Semiotics, the general science of signs, which traces its lineage to Saussure and Charles Sanders Pierce. Semiotics, though, is the general study of signs in behaviour and communication that avoids philosophical speculation and cultural critiques that marked Structuralism.

Roland Barthes 1915-1980

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

The Function of the Author

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

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

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

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

The Death of the Author

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

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

- ❖ The professional critics who claims to be the guardian of the text because he is best placed to understand the author's intentions and to explain the text, looses his position. All readings become equal.

- ❖ Roland Barthes questioned the traditional idea that the meaning of the literary text and the production of the literary text should be traced solely to a single author.

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

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

From 'Work' to 'Text'

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

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

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

From Author to Reader

- ❖ Barthes wants literature to move away from the idea of the author in prder to discover the reader, and more importantly, in order to discover writing. A text is not a message of an author; it is "a multidimensional space where a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, **but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.**

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

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

From Work to Text

- ❖ The text is plural, "a tissue of quotations," a woven fabric with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, that signify FAR MORE than any authorial intentions. It is this plurality that needs to be stressed

and it can only be stressed by eliminating the function of the author and the tyranny of the author from the reading process.

From Author to Scriptor

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

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

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

The Modern Scriptor

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

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

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LECTURE 10

Foucault's Title

❖ Even with his title, Foucault is being provocative, taking a given and turning it into a problem. His question ("What is an Author?") might even seem pointless at first, so accustomed have we all become to thinking about authors and authorship.

The idea of the Death of the Author

❖ Foucault questions the most basic assumptions about authorship. He reminds us that the concept of authorship hasn't always existed. It "came into being," he explains, at a particular moment in history, and it may pass out of being at some future moment.

❖ Foucault also questions our habit of thinking about authors as individuals, heroic figures who somehow transcend or exist outside history (Shakespeare as a genius for all times and all place).

❖ Why, he wonders, are we so strongly inclined to view authors in that way? Why are we often so resistant to the notion that authors are products of their times?

❖ According to Foucault, Barthes had urged critics to realize that they could "do without [the author] and study the work itself." This urging, Foucault implies, is not realistic.

❖ Foucault suggests that critics like Barthes and Derrida never really get rid of the author, but instead merely reassigns the author's powers and privileges to "writing" or to "language itself."

❖ Foucault doesn't want his readers to assume that the question of authorship that's already been solved by critics like Barthes and Derrida. He tries to show that neither Barthes nor Derrida has broken away from the question of the author--much less solved it.

The Author as a Classificatory Function

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

❖ Think about how the average bookstore is organized. When you go to the bookstore looking for Oliver Twist, most of the time you will search under the section: Charles Dickens, or you will ask for the novels of Charles Dickens. It probably wouldn't even occur to you to make your search in any other way. It's almost unconscious.

The "Author Function"

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

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

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

Four Characteristics of the "Author Function"

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

1. The "author function" is linked to the legal system and arises as a result of the need to punish those responsible for transgressive statements. There is the need here to have names attached to statements made in case there is a need to punish someone for transgressive things that get said.

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

3. The "author function" is more complex than it seems to be. This is one of the most difficult points in the essay. To illustrate, Foucault gives the example of the editorial problem of attribution-- the problem of deciding whether or not a given text should be attributed to a particular author.

This problem may seem rather trivial, since most of the literary texts that we study have already been reliably attributed to an author. Imagine, however, a case in which a scholar discovered a long-forgotten poem whose author was completely unknown. Imagine, furthermore, that the scholar had a hunch that the author of the poem was William Shakespeare. What would the scholar have to do, what rules would she have to observe, what standards would she have to meet, in order to convince everyone else that she was right?

4. The term "author" doesn't refer purely and simply to a real individual. The "author" is much like the "narrator," Foucault suggests, in that he or she can be an "alter ego" for the actual flesh-and-blood "writer."

"Author Function" Applies to Discourse

❖ Foucault then shows that the "author function" applies not just to individual works, but also to larger discourses. This, then, is the famous section on "founders of discursivity" – thinkers like Marx or Freud who produce their own texts (books), and "the possibilities or the rules for the formation of other texts."

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

❖ Remember that he began this essay by questioning our tendency to imagine "authors" as individuals isolated from the rest of society.

❖ Foucault, in the end, argues that the author is not a source of infinite meaning, but rather part of a system of beliefs that serve to limit and restrict meaning. For example: we often appeal to ideas of "authorial intention" to limit what someone might say about a text, or mark some interpretations and commentaries as illegitimate.

❖ At the very end, Foucault returns to Barthes and agrees that the "author function" may soon "disappear." He disagrees, though, that instead of the limiting and restrictive "author function," we will have some kind of absolute freedom. Most likely, one set of restrictions and limits (the author function) will give way to another set since, Foucault insists, there must and will always be some "system of constraint" working upon us.

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LECTURE 11

Greimas: The Actantial Model

Origins of the Actantial Model

❖ During the sixties, A. J. Greimas proposed the actantial model based on the theories of Vladimir Propp.

❖ The actantial model is a tool that can theoretically be used to analyze any real or thematized action, but particularly those depicted in literary texts or images.

❖ In the actantial model, an action may be broken down into six components, called actants. Actantial analysis consists of assigning each element of the action being described to one of the actantial classes.

The Actantial Model

Sender -----------------> Object -----------------> Receiver

↑

Helper -----------------> Subject <----------------- Opponent

1. **The subject**: the hero of the story, who undertakes the main action.

2. **The object**: what the subject is directed toward

3. **The helper**: helps the subject reach the desired object

4. **The opponent**: hinders the subject in his progression

5. **The sender**: initiates the relation between the subject and the object

6. **The receiver**: the element for which the object is desired.

Actant Vs. Character

The actants must not be confused with characters because

✓ An actant can be an abstraction (the city, Eros, God, liberty, peace, the nation, etc), a collective character (the soldiers of an army) or even a group of several characters.

✓ A character can simultaneously or successively assume different actantial functions

✓ An actant can be absent from the stage or the action and its presence can be limited to its presence in the discourse of other speakers

❖ An actant, says Greimas, is an extrapolation of the syntactic structure of a narrative. An actant is identified with what assumes a syntactic function in the narrative.

Six Actants, Three Axes

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

1. **The axis of desire - Subject – Object**: The subject wants the object. The relationship established between the subject and the object is called a junction. Depending on whether the object is conjoined with the subject (for example, the Prince wants the Princess) or disjoined (for example, a murderer succeeds in getting rid of his victim's body), it is called a conjunction or a disjunction.

2. **The axis of power – Helper – Opponent**: The helper assists in achieving the desired junction between the subject and object; the opponent tries to prevent this from happening (for example, the sword, the horse, courage, and the wise man help the Prince; the witch, the dragon, the far-off castle, and fear hinder him)

3. **The axis of transmission – Sender – Receiver:** The sender is the element requesting the establishment of the junction between subject and object (for example, the King asks the Prince to rescue the Princess). The receiver is the element for which the quest is being undertaken. To simplify, let us interpret the receiver (or beneficiary-receiver) as that which benefits from achieving the junction between subject and object (for example, the King, the kingdom, the Princess, the Prince, etc.) The Senders are often also Receivers.

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Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins, University of Toronto Press, 1999.

LECTURE 12

Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

Definition

- ❖ Poststructuralism is a broad historical description of intellectual developments in continental philosophy and critical theory
- ❖ An outcome of Twentieth-century French philosophy
- ❖ The prefix "post' means primarily that it is critical of structuralism
- ❖ Structuralism tried to deal with meaning as complex structures that are culturally independent
- ❖ Post-structuralism sees culture and history as integral to meaning

Definitions

- ❖ Poststructuralism was a 'rebellion against' structuralism
- ❖ It was a critical and comprehensive response to the basic assumptions of structuralism
- ❖ Poststructuralism studies the underlying structures inherent in cultural products (such as texts)
- ❖ It uses analytical concepts from linguistics, psychology, anthropology and other fields

The Poststructuralist Text

- ❖ To understand a text, Poststructuralism studies:
- ✓ The text itself
- ✓ the systems of knowledge which interacted and came into play to produce the text
- ❖ Post-structuralism: a study of how knowledge is produced, an analysis of the social, cultural and historical systems that interact with each other to produce a specific cultural product, like a text of literature, for example

Basic Assumptions in Postsctructuralism

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

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

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

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

Basic Assumptions

- ❖ "Authorial intentions" or the meaning that the author intends to "transmit" in a piece if literature, for Poststructuralism, is secondary to the meaning that the reader can generate from the text

- ❖ Rejects the idea of a literary text having one purpose, one meaning or one singular existence

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- ❖ To utilize a variety of perspectives to create a multifaceted (or conflicting) interpretation of a text. Poststructuralism like multiplicity of readings and interpretations, even if they are contradictory

- ❖ To analyze how the meanings of a text shift in relation to certain variables (usually the identity of the reader)

Poststructuralist Concepts

(1): Destabilized Meaning

- ❖ Poststructuralism displaces the writer/author and make the reader the primary subject of inquiry (instead of author / writer)

- ❖ They call such displacement: the "destabilizing" or "decentering" of the author

- ❖ Disregarding essentialist reading of the content that look for superficial readings or story lines

- ❖ Other sources are examined for meaning (e.g. readers, cultural norms, other literature, etc.)

- ❖ Such alternative sources promise no consistency, but might provide valuable clues and shed light on unusual corners of the text.

(2): Deconstruction

- ❖ Poststructuralism rejects that there is a consistent structure to texts, specifically the theory of binary opposition that structuralism made famous

- ❖ Post-structuralists advocate deconstruction

- ❖ Meanings of texts and concepts constantly shift in relation to many variables. The same text means different things from one era to another, from one person to another

- ❖ The only way to properly understand these meanings: deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge systems which produce the illusion of singular meaning

LECTURE 13

Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction

Post-structuralism is French

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

Deconstruction is American

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

Derrida's Central Works

❖ **Three Early Classics:**
✓ Of Grammatology (1967)
✓ Speech and Phenomena (1967)
✓ Writing and Difference (1967)
❖ Further Interests: Politics, Literature, Ethics, etc.
✓ Acts of Literature (1992)
✓ Spectres of Marx (1993)
✓ Of Hospitality (1997)
❖ Articles:
✓ • "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human
✓ Sciences" (1966) [also in Writing and Difference]
✓ • "Signature, Event, Context" (1977) [Derrida vs. Austin]

Derrida on Language: What Language Is Not

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

What Language Is

❖ For Derrida, language is unreliable
❖ There is no pre-discursive reality. Every reality is shaped and accessed by a discourse. "there is nothing outside of the text" (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)
❖ Texts always refer to other texts (cf. Fredric Jameson's The Prison-House of Language)
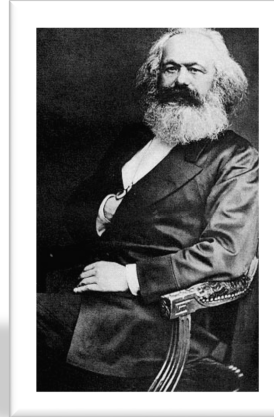❖ Language constructs/shapes the world
Note: Derrida has a very broad notion of 'text' that includes all types of sign
systems)

Marxist Literary Criticism

Karl Marx

❖ Karl Marx born 1818 in Rhineland.

❖ Known as "The Father of Communism."

❖ "Communist Correspondence League" – 1847

❖ "Communist Manifesto" published in 1848.

❖ The "League" was disbanded in 1852.

❖ Marx died in 1883.

Base-Superstructure

❖ This is one of the most important ideas of karl Marx
❖ The idea that history is made of two main forces:
❖ The Base: The material conditions of life, economic relations, labor, capital, etc
❖ The Superstructure: This is what today is called ideology or consciousness and includes, ideas, religion, politics, history, education, etc
❖ Marx said that it is people's material conditions that determines their consciousness. In other words, it is people's economic conditions that determines the ideas and ideologies that they hold.
❖ Note: Ibn Khaldoun says the same thing in the Muqaddimah

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Marxism & Literary Criticism

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

Important Marxist Ideas on Literature

❖ Literary products (novels, plays, etc) cannot be understood outside of the economic conditions, class relations and ideologies of their time.
❖ Truth is not eternal but is institutionally created (e.g.: "private property" is not a natural category but is the product of a certain historical development and a certain ideology at a certain time in history.
❖ Art and Literature are commodities (consumer products) just like other commodity forms.

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

The Main Schools of Marxism

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

1. Classical Marxism

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

2. Early Western Marxism

❖ **Georg Lukács** was perhaps the first Western Marxist.
❖ He denounced as mechanistic the "vulgar" Marxist version of criticism whereby the features of a cultural text were strictly determined by or interpreted in terms of the economic and social conditions of its production and by the class status of its author.
❖ However, he insisted, more than anybody else, on the traditional Marxist reflectionist theory (Superstructure as a reflection of the base), even when this theory was under severe attack from the formalists in the fifties.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin: Monologism vs. dialogism

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

Frankfurt School of Marxism

❖ Founded In 1923 at the "Institute of Social Research" in the University of Frankfurt, Germany
❖ Members and adherents have included:Max Hirkheimer, Thoedor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althussser, Raymond Williams and others.
❖ A distinctive feature of the Frankfurt School are independence of thought, interdisciplinarity and openness for opposing views.

3. Late Marxism

Raymond Williams says:

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

Fredric Jameson says:

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

"It is a mistake to equate concreteness with things. An individual object is the unique phenomenon it is because it is caught up in a mesh of relations with other objects. It is this web of relations and interactions, if you like, which is 'concrete', while the object considered in isolation is purely abstract. In his *Grundrisse*, Karl Marx sees the abstract not as a lofty, esoteric notion, but as a kind of rough sketch of a thing. The notion of money, for example, is abstract because it is no more than a bare, preliminary outline of the actual reality. It is only when we reinsert the idea of money into its complex social context, examining its relations to commodities, exchange, production and the like, that we can construct a 'concrete' concept of it, one which is adequate to its manifold substance. The Anglo-Saxon empiricist tradition, by contrast, makes the mistake of supposing that the concrete is simple and the abstract is complex…

In a similar way, a poem for Yury Lotman is concrete precisely because it is the product of many interacting systems. Like Imagist poetry, you can suppress a number of these systems (grammar, syntax, metre and so on) to leave the imagery standing proudly alone; but this is actually an abstraction of the imagery from its context, not the concretion it appears to be. In modern poetics, the word 'concrete' has done far more harm than good."

— Terry Eagleton, How to Read a Poem

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Best wishes for all

Designer Susan