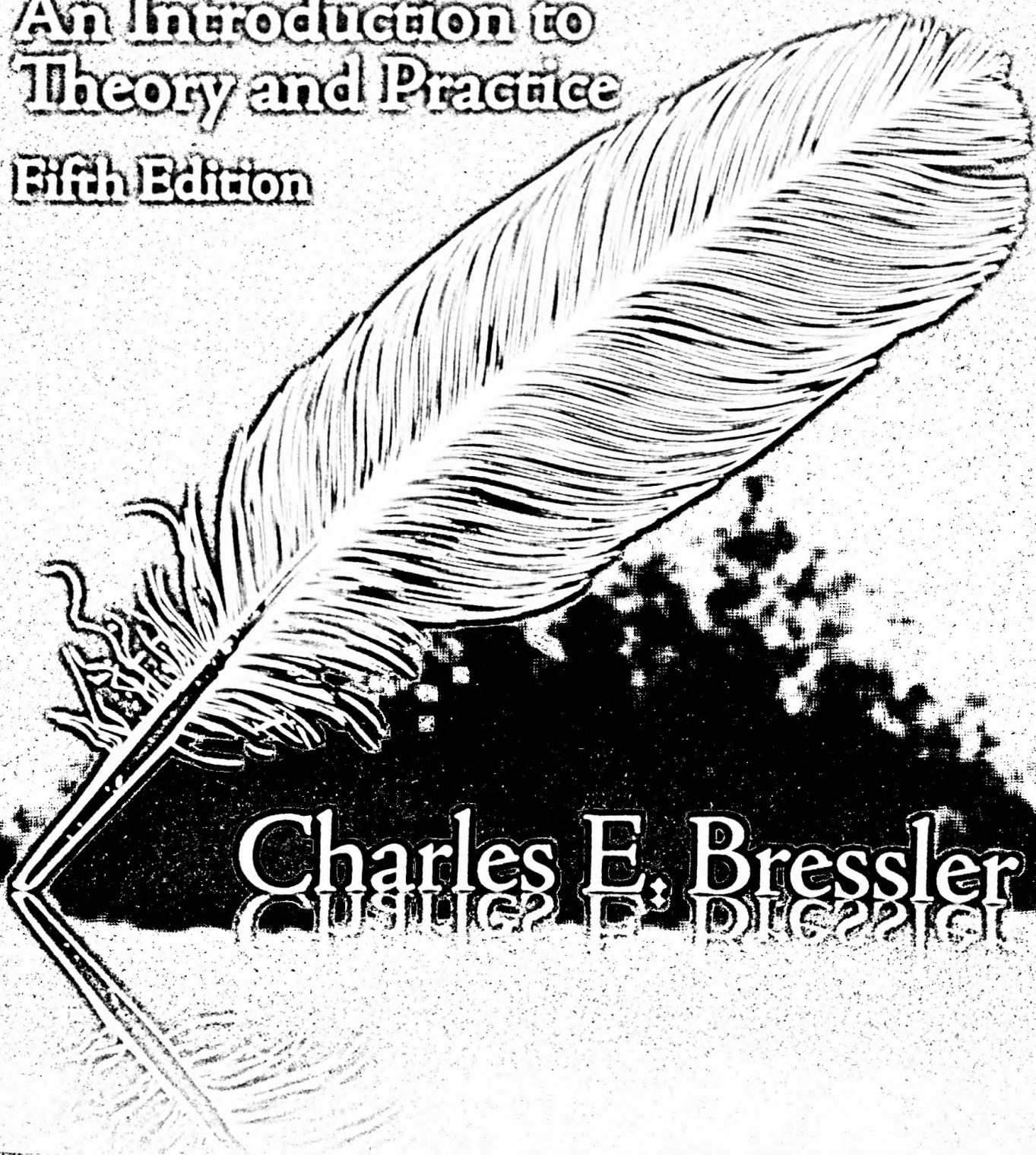


LITERARY CRITICISM

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**An Introduction to
Theory and Practice**

Fifth Edition



Charles E. Bressler
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An Introduction
to Theory and Practice

FIFTH EDITION

Charles E. Bressler
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MIKHAIL BAKHTIN (1895–1975)

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

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

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

His most renowned academic writings include his first work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929, 2nd ed., 1963); his doctoral dissertation, *Rabelais*

and His World, that was successfully defended in 1946 but not published until 1968; and *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (edited, translated, and published in 1981). Since Bakhtin's death in 1975, many other speeches and essays have been translated and published, but the core of his linguistic and literary theories can be discovered in the earlier works.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MODERN LITERARY CRITICISM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RUSSIAN FORMALISM AND NEW CRITICISM

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

APPLYING RUSSIAN FORMALISM TO A LITERARY TEXT

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

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

Early Spring Aubade

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ASSUMPTIONS

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

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

CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

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

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

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

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

The Structure of Language

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

texts and of literary analysis. Unlike the New Critics, who believe that the language of literature is somehow different from the language of science and everyday conversation, these postmodernists insist that the language of texts is not distinct from the language used to analyze such writings. For them, language is a discourse. In other words, the discourse or culturally bound language of ideas used in literary analysis helps shape and form the text being analyzed. We cannot separate, they maintain, the text and the language used to critique it. For these critics, language helps create and shape what we call "objective reality."

Believing that objective reality can be created by language, many postmodernists assert that all reality is a social construct. From this point of view, no single or primary objective reality exists; instead, many realities exist. In disavowing a universal, objective reality, these critics believe that reality is perspectival, with each individual creating his or her subjective understanding of the nature of reality itself. How, then, do we come to agree upon public and social concerns, such as values, ethics, and the common good, if reality is different for each individual? The answer for these postmodern thinkers is that each society or culture contains within itself a dominant cultural group who determines that culture's ideology or, using the Marxist term, its hegemony—that is, its dominant values, its sense of right and wrong, and its sense of personal self-worth. All people in a given culture are consciously and unconsciously asked to conform to the prescribed hegemony.

What happens, however, when one's ideas, one's thinking, or one's personal background does not conform? What happens, for example, when the dominant culture consists of white, Anglo-Saxon males and one is a black female? Or how does one respond to a culture dominated by white males if one is a Native American? For people of color living in Africa or in the Americas, for Native Americans, for females, and for gays and lesbians, and a host of others, the traditional answer already has been articulated by the dominant class and its accompanying hegemony: *silence*. Live quietly, work quietly, think quietly. The message sent to these "Others" by the dominant culture has been clear and consistent—conform and be quiet; deny yourself, and all will be well.

But many have not been quiet. Writers and thinkers, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Judith Butler, to name a few, have dared to speak out and challenge the dominant cultures and the dictates these cultures decree. They continue to refuse silence and choose defiance, if necessary. They believe that an individual's view of life, of values, and of ethics really matters. They assert a different perspective, a vantage point not of the dominant culture, but one from which to view the world and its peoples: They speak for not one culture, but many; not one cultural perspective, but a host; not one interpretation of life, but countless.

Speaking for the oppressed, suppressed, and silenced, these critical scholars—African, Australian, Native American, female, gay and lesbian,

(It could no doubt be demonstrated that this *ration supplémentaire* of signification is the origin of the *ratio* itself.) The word reappears a little further on, after Lévi-Strauss has mentioned 'this floating signifier, which is the servitude of all finite thought':

In other words—and taking as our guide Mauss's precept that all social phenomena can be assimilated to language—we see in *mana*, *Wakau*, *oranda* and other notions of the same type, the conscious expression of a semantic function, whose role it is to permit symbolic thought to operate in spite of the contradiction which is proper to it. In this way are explained the apparently insoluble antinomies attached to this notion. . . . At one and the same time force and action, quality and state, noun and verb, abstract and concrete, omnipresent and localized—*mana* is in effect all these things. But is it not precisely because it is none of these things that *mana* is a simple form, or more exactly, a symbol in the pure state, and therefore capable of becoming charged with any sort of symbolic content whatever? In the system of symbols constituted by all cosmologies, *mana* would simply be a zero symbolic value, that is to say, a sign marking the necessity of a symbolic content *supplementary* [my italics] to that with which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required, provided only that this value still remains part of the available reserve and is not, as phonologists put it, a group-term.

Lévi-Strauss adds the note:

'Linguists have already been led to formulate hypotheses of this type. For example: "A zero phoneme is opposed to all the other phonemes in French in that it entails no differential characters and no constant phonetic value. On the contrary, the proper function of the zero phoneme is to be opposed to phoneme absence." (R. Jakobson and J. Lutz, 'Notes on the French Phonemic Pattern', *Word* 5, no. 2 [August 1949]:155). Similarly, if we schematize the conception I am proposing here, it could almost be said that the function of notions like *mana* is to be opposed to the absence of signification, without entailing by itself any particular signification.'^{xiv}

The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented*.

It can now be understood why the concept of play is important in Lévi-Strauss. His references to all sorts of games, notably to roulette, are very frequent, especially in his *Conversations*,^{xv} in *Race and History*,^{xvi} and in *The Savage Mind*. Further, the reference to play is always caught up in tension.

Tension with history, first of all. This is a classical problem, objections to which are now well worn. I shall simply indicate what seems to me the formality of the problem: by reducing history, Lévi-Strauss has treated as it deserves a concept which has always been in complicity with a teleological and eschatological metaphysics, in other words, paradoxically, in complicity

Veys⁶ in West Africa, a little thing of mauve and purple quiet, lying content and shining in the sun; a black and velvet room where on a throne rests, in old and yellowing marble; the broken curves of the Venus of Milo;⁷ a single phrase of music in the Southern South—utter melody, haunting and appealing, suddenly arising out of night and eternity, beneath the moon.

Such is Beauty. Its variety is infinite, its possibility is endless. In normal life all may have it and have it yet again. The world is full of it; and yet today the mass of human beings are choked away from it, and their lives distorted and made ugly. This is not only wrong, it is silly. Who shall right this well-nigh universal failing? Who shall let this world be beautiful? Who shall restore to men the glory of sunsets and the peace of quiet sleep?

We black folk may help for we have within us as a race new stirrings, stirrings of the beginning of a new appreciation of joy, of a new desire to create, of a new will to be; as though in this morning of group life we had awakened from some sleep that at once dimly mourns the past and dreams a splendid future; and there has come the conviction that the Youth that is here today, the Negro Youth, is a different kind of Youth, because in some new way it bears this mighty prophecy on its breast, with a new realization of itself, with new determination for all mankind.

What has this Beauty to do with the world? What has Beauty to do with Truth and Goodness—with the facts of the world and the right actions of men? "Nothing," the artists rush to answer. They may be right. I am but an humble disciple of art and cannot presume to say. I am one who tells the truth and exposes evil and seeks with Beauty and for Beauty to set the world right. That somehow, somewhere eternal and perfect Beauty sits above Truth and Right I can conceive, but here and now and in the world in which I work they are for me unseparated and inseparable.

This is brought to us peculiarly when as artists we face our own past as a people. There has come to us—and it has come especially through the man we are going to honor tonight⁸—a realization of that past, of which for long years we have been ashamed, for which we have apologized. We thought nothing could come out of that past which we wanted to remember; which we wanted to hand down to our children. Suddenly, this same past is taking on form, color and reality, and in a half shamefaced way we are beginning to be proud of it. We are remembering that the romance of the world did not die and lie forgotten in the Middle Age; that if you want romance to deal with you must have it here and now and in your own hands.

⁶One of the Mandingo peoples of Senegal, West Africa.

⁷Famous classical statue of Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love (2d c. B.C.E. copy of a 4th c. original), now armless.

⁸Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), to whom the NAACP in 1926 awarded the Spingarn Medal for African American achievement, was an African American educator and historian who in 1916 founded the *Journal of Negro History*.

Another instance is the self-chosen inscription on Keats's tomb, which states,

Here lies one whose name was writ in water.

These are some of the comments that the proponents of Deconstruction cannot identify with Keats's idealism, and will principally capitalise on to substantiate their contention that Keats's ironic and self-contradictory character makes him a Deconstructionist.

The argument here is that these remarks, within the context of becoming, should not be taken to represent Keats's ironic and paradoxical consciousness in the strict rhetorical implications of the words, nor his contradictory stance in life. They positively point to the fact that he was conscious of poetic expression as an aesthetic process rather than a final achievement. By 1820, he had no doubt written mature poetry, but his sense of aesthetic and philosophic vision was not satisfactory. Nature plays a vital role in the understanding of his aesthetic ambitions and achievements.

The major question is, how does Keats's eco-consciousness engender his aesthetic and philosophical expression and speculations? Nature is apprehended by Coleridge, for example, from a pantheistic and monistic dimension as a universal force which sheds light on man's spirituality. This means, in other words, that the question is examined from an eco-metaphysical dimension. Becoming can be seen critically as a constructive deferral of spiritual idealism, the argument being that the visionary experiences encapsulated in texts are an indicator of supra-textual readings and therefore not closures but dynamic open-endedness. Is this the case with Keats?

Though there are a number of characteristic features in Keats's poetry which affiliate with Coleridge and Wordsworth, his nature-consciousness will be seen to take a slightly different turn. Keats's poetry and prose show proof of certain monistic traits common in the two elder poets, justifying the assertion that he can be discussed within the mainstream of Romantic idealism with regard to nature, even if he does not handle the matter in a like manner.

It can be argued equally that his poetry lends credence to apprehend nature from an organicist viewpoint. Yet, his eco-poetics, as we intend to analyse, does not place priority on the visionary and transcendental and, therefore, the dominant spiritual dimension of nature is not like that of his elder colleagues, for it tends to reduce nature primarily within the confines of his aesthetic quest rather than brood over it fundamentally as a universal force or the basis of his spiritual longings.

Keats saw the secret of creative genius as an exquisitely purged sympathy with nature. Apprehending nature and aesthetic creativity as an ever-increasing and progressive moment of life that was shaping itself, Keats infused most of his poetry with this apprehension. Equally evident in his epistolary self-consciousness, were important philosophical remarks

The Romantic symbol of the breeze and its impact on the creative imagination, common in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, is here evoked. One also notices that Keats is obviously expressing sensitivity to the way air affects bodily health. It therefore connects with physio- and psycho-pathology, which Keats had studied in his medical training, and points to the therapeutic or pharmaceutical importance of nature to the body and soul. This eco-therapeutic perspective is not just a Coleridgean connection, but brings to mind post-Novalian philosophy.

Novalis (Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenburg 1772–1801) was very preoccupied with the pharmaceutical operations of nature in human life, a celebration of both the psychic and somatic nature of man. He adopted a homeopathic tradition to explain his metaphysics of nature and human consciousness, stressing that nature is a pharmaceutical principle, a poison and a healer. He saw illness as a positive prerequisite for wholeness and the soul as the embodiment of the ambivalence of the pharmaceutical principle.

There is a connection between Novalis and Keats in this phenomenon. [2] In fact, Keats's broodings over nature actually point to a number of concerns that are intricately related to his study of medical sciences and his philosophy of the imagination. The nature of the Romantic imagination here is its aesthetic implications and how it connects inextricably with his progressive philosophy of life. The concern here is not unrelated to Keats's imaginative view of art, expressed in a letter to George and Thomas Keats, dated December 21, 1817.

The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth (John Keats: Letters, 370)

Keats's notion of beauty and truth is highly inclusive. That is, it blends all life's experiences or apprehensions, negative or positive, into a holistic vision. Art and nature, therefore, are seen as therapeutic in function.

Keats's views on nature are not to be found only in his poetry but also in his letters. Writing to Tom (1818), he associates nature with poetic inspiration and expression. In other letters to George and Thomas Keats (1817), he talks of the negative capability of the poet that calls for a synaesthetic and empathic vision in life, to Reynolds (1818), he asserts the conviction that all departments of knowledge are to be seen as excellence and calculated towards a great whole, to John Taylor (1818), he outlines certain axioms of poetry among which is the notion that if poetry comes not naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. All these connect the imagination with nature-consciousness and demonstrate an affinity with the Plotinist or Spinozist monism inherent in Wordsworth and Coleridge. But the major issue lies in apprehending nature as part of the creative process rather than the poet's adherence to nature's spirituality.

in 'To Autumn.' So another argument on the Autumn poem can contend to see it as a subtle imaginative and philosophical rendition of Keats's premonition about death, a death into life. Suffice here to say that he compounds ecological phenomenon with death, which to him is a welcome relief rather than a negative moment of existence, since he undoubtedly believes in a blissful post-corporeal existence.

To put it differently, Keats is attempting to de-centre the traditional notion of the cycle of the seasons to which particular characteristic features have been ascribed. Not only is Autumn a season of ripeness and fruitfulness. All the other seasons can philosophically or metaphorically serve the same capacity of one another from a creative and aesthetic perspective. That is, they can be artistically inspiring while engendering deep philosophical and spiritual matters of life and death, each season can be spring as well as death. The critical stance taken here is that ecology has a mutually enriching and rewarding relationship with ethics and psychology. Dissociating any realm of human activity from ecological diversity seems impossible.

'On the Grasshopper and Cricket' and 'Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art' are two of Keats's sonnets that necessitate critical investigation with reference to the present debate on nature. In the former poem, Keats advances statements that go beyond the deceptive simplicity of the poem's title:

The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In Summer's luxury,—he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant heed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never.
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

The poet's ecological assertion that the poetry of earth cannot be exhausted is a reverberation of the Spinozist idea that we cannot have enough of the great treasures of nature. Poetic composition can be inspired by any season, given the apprehension that any season can be a generative and creative spring. This current thematic issue, already mentioned above, takes a seemingly simplistic dimension in this poem. The grasshopper and cricket are nature's elements that signal and convey different time axes in terms of the changing seasons. In comparison to the nightingale poem, one sees the blend of aesthetics and nature, and at the same time an insight to philosophical and spiritual dispositions.