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Structuralism and Post-structuralism - WILLY MALEY

STRUCTURALISM

Definitions and Criticism

"Structuralism as a concept is grand, controversial and elusive. For our purposes it is to be understood at two levels of generality: first, as a broad intellectual movement, one of the most significant ways of theorizing in the human sciences in the twentieth century; second, as a particular set of approaches to literature (and other arts and aspects of culture) flourishing especially in France in the 1960s but with older roots and continuing repercussions. The basic premiss of structuralism is that human activity and its products, even perception and thought itself, are *constructed* and not *natural*. Structure is the principle of construction and the object of analysis, to be understood by its intimate reference to the concepts of *system* and *value* as defined in SEMIOTICS ... Structuralist students of literature linked semiotic assumptions with ideas from other sources, principally Russian FORMALISM; Prague School structuralism ... ; the narrative analysis of Vladimir Propp; structuralist anthropology as blended from linguistics and Propp in the cooking-pot of Claude Lévi-Strauss; the new generative linguistics of Chomsky ... More successful has been *the analysis of narrative structure*. The inspiration came from Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk-Tale* (1928), which appeared in French translation in 1957 and in English in 1958. Propp noted that, though the individual characters in Russian tales were very diverse, their *functions* (villain, helper, etc.) could be described in a limited number of terms (he suggested thirty-one, falling into seven superordinate categories). By reference to these elements, the narrative ordering of any tale could be recognised as a sequence of 'functions of the *dramatis personae* and associated actions. This is in fact a generative grammar of narrative: a finite system (paradigm) of abstract units generates an infinite set of narrative sequences (syntagms). The linguistic analogy was seized on by Lévi-Strauss ... It became a standard assumption in narratology that the structure of a story was homologous with the structure of a sentence; this assumption allowed the apparatus of sentence-linguistics to be applied to the development of a metalanguage for describing narrative structure ... Anglo-Saxon reaction to structuralism has been almost universally hostile, deploring its mechanistic and reductive style and suspecting its exponents of a kind of left-wing philistinism. Fortunately, the response in France has been more subtle and more positively critical, confronting problems of what is neglected in the structuralist approach: reader, author, discourse as communicative practice and as ideology" (Roger Fowler, "Structuralism", in Roger Fowler (ed.), *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (Routledge: London, 1973; 1987), pp. 232-35).

"Structuralism rose to prominence in France through the application by the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, of Saussurian structural linguistics to the study of such phenomena as myths, rituals, kinship relations, eating conventions ... Literature seemed especially appropriate to a structuralist approach as it was wholly made up of language" (Newton, 'French Structuralism', in Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, pp. 131-35; 131).

" ... structuralism is bound up with the general movement away from positivism,

'historicizing history' and the 'biographical illusion', a movement represented in various ways by the critical writings of a Proust, an Eliot, a Valéry, Russian Formalism, French 'thematic criticism' or Anglo-American New Criticism ... Structuralism, then, would appear to be a refuge for all immanent criticism against the danger of fragmentation that threatens thematic analysis: the means of reconstituting the unit of a work, its principle of coherence ... Structural criticism is untainted by any of the transcendent reductions of psychoanalysis, for example, or Marxist explanation, but it exerts, in its own way, a sort of internal reduction, traversing the substance of the work in order to reach its bone-structure: certainly not a superficial examination, but a sort of radiosopic penetration, and all the more external in that it is more penetrating" (Gérard Genette, "Structuralism and Literary Criticism", in Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, pp. 135-40; 136).

"Structuralism has emerged from linguistics and in literature it finds an object which has itself emerged from language. We can understand then why structuralism should want to found a science of literature or, to be more exact, a linguistics of discourse, whose object is the 'language' of literary forms, grasped on many levels ... In short, structuralism will be just one more 'science' (several are born each century, some of them only ephemeral) if it does not manage to place the actual subversion of scientific language at the centre of its programme ... (Roland Barthes, "Science versus Literature", in Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, pp. 140-44; 142).

"Structuralism has been in fashion in Anglo-American intellectual circles since the late sixties, as is demonstrated by the number of critical anthologies and books which have appeared in the last decade. The critical excitement generated by structuralism reached its peak in America in the mid-seventies: the label became then the product, with the predictable result that any thinker, past or present, who was anyone fit under the 'structuralist umbrella". (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fiction", in Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies*, pp. 1717-72; p. 17).

"Eugenio Donato [has questioned] 'whether the concept of structuralism has any validity and whether such a thing as structuralism ever existed'. And yet there was an intellectual movement comparable to previous '-isms', something that we will call, for want of a more precise term, the structuralist 'tendency of thought'. That structuralism eventually became a fashion and an ideology is not my concern here ... I shall therefore concentrate on two areas: ethnology, using Claude Lévi-Strauss - whose ethnological work has been at the origin of structuralism's success - and literary criticism, using the work of Roland Barthes. Lévi-Strauss attempts first of all an interpretation of the most pronounced social phenomenon - kinship - which he elaborates on the basis of the Jakobsonian linguistic model, having transposed the latter onto the ethnological plane" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fiction", p. 18).

On the methodological level, Lévi-Straussian structuralism asserts itself as a method of scientific knowledge and even lays claim to the rigor of the exact sciences. Therefore, it is opposed to all exclusively phenomenological approaches to knowledge, which pretend to gain immediate access to meaning through a descriptive analysis of what we experience or perceive (Lévi-Strauss's *réel* and *vécu*). In opposition to phenomenology, which 'postulates a kind of continuity between experience and reality', Lévi-Strauss affirms that 'the transition between one order and the other is discontinuous; that to reach reality, one has to first reject experience, if only to reintegrate it into an objective synthesis devoid of any sentimentality'. For Lévi-Strauss, intelligibility is therefore not

given at the level of perception or of daily experience. It is rather the result of a *praxis* based on the construction of models which alone permit access to the hidden meaning of phenomena, a meaning which is formulated in terms of structure. Lévi-Strauss's goal is *not* to change our perception of the concrete, but to reveal the concrete's true nature which, precisely, escapes perception" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", pp. 20-21).

"For Lévi-Strauss, as for structuralism in general, it is important to emphasise that the structure is not directly observable, since access is gained to it only at the end of a progressive 'reduction' which permits one to distinguish the pertinent oppositions (the constitutive units of the system) that alone have signifying value" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 21, n. 10).

"Lévi-Straussian structuralism must not be confused with formalism. In contrast to proponents of formalism, Lévi-Strauss refuses to oppose ... the concrete to the abstract, and to ascribe to the latter a privileged value: 'For [formalism], the two domains must be absolutely separate, since form alone is intelligible, and content is only a residual deprived of any significant value. For structuralism, this opposition does not exist. There is not something abstract on one side and something concrete on the other. Form and content are of the same nature, susceptible [to] the same analysis'. Unlike formalism, which Lévi-Strauss denounces for misjudging 'the complementarity of signifier and signified, which has been recognised since Saussure in all linguistic systems', his structural analysis places itself resolutely at the level of form *and* of content, that is, *at the level of signification*" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 22).

"The task of literary structuralism is not to discover the meaning of a work, but to reconstitute the rules governing the production of meaning" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 22).

"Structural analysis ... bypasses the problems associated with the figure of the author as well as other criteria exterior to the text, and instead focuses its attention on the text, understood as a construct whose mode of function must be described" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 23).

"Both the strengths and shortcomings of the structuralist approach in its application to the literary domain are most apparent in the work done on narrative ... At first, structural analysis sought to reconstitute a common language for all narratives, in other words, a model which would their multiplicity" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 23-4).

"It might be useful to recall here, as they have been vastly overstated, the precise characteristics and aims of structural analysis.

(1) Structural analysis describes and explains a text as a system of narrative transformations. It presents a picture of possible narrative discourses, such that all existing narratives appear particular instances of a general - although variable - hypothetical model.

(2) A structuralist narrative model is never either exhaustive or definitive. It cannot explain *all* the articulations of narrative discourse.

(3) Structural analysis does not explain the meaning(s) of a text. To study the grammar of narrative is to attempt to specify the possibilities of meaning and not to fulfill them. "What is in question in structural analysis is not the truth of a text, but its plurality" [Barthes].

(4) Literary 'science' that is a product of structural analysis remains mostly at the level of description, unless and until it opens up onto a broader problematic that can account for the production of meaning. This is the precise juncture at which we begin to treat the 'work' as a 'text' (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 26).

"Does there exist, in the end, a philosophy or a method that can be qualified as genuinely structuralist? Or are there only certain structural subjects common to the work of theorists that fit under the convenient unifying structuralist label? The reality of the situation is that various combinations of answers might all be valid, although we would be inclined to choose the second alternative. In our terms, the list of common denominators would then read: (1) the rejection of the concept of the 'full subject' to the benefit of that of structure; (2) the loss of pertinence of the traditional 'form/content' division insofar as for all structuralist theorists content derives its reality from its structure; and (3) at the methodological level, a stress on codification and systematisation ... First, there is no unified view of structuralism, and second, structuralism as a movement is most clearly defined on the basis of the transformation it has wrought in the disciplines it has affected (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", pp. 26-7).

"Historically, structuralism was born of linguistics, and all the fields it covers have to do with signs. All the disciplines encompassed by structuralism - linguistics, poetics, ethnology, psychoanalysis and, clearly in the background but still related, philosophy - are grouped under the sciences of the sign, or of sign-systems" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 28).

"We could also mention Lacan's well-known formulas: 'The unconscious is structured like a language', and 'Dreams have the structure of a sentence'" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 28).

"In any society, communication operates on three different levels: communication of women, communication of goods and services, communication of messages. Therefore kinship studies, economics and linguistics approach the same kinds of problems on different strategic levels and really pertain to the same field" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology I* (Basic Books: New York, 1963), p. 296).

"We know how incest prohibitions function in primitive societies. By casting sisters and daughters out of the consanguineal group, so to speak, and by assigning them to husbands who belong to other groups, the prohibition of incest creates bonds of alliance between these biological groups, the first such bonds which one can call social. The incest prohibition is thus the basis of human society: in a sense it is the society. We did

not proceed inductively to justify this interpretation. How could we have done, with phenomena which are universally correlated, but among which different societies have posited all sorts of curious connections? Moreover, this is not a matter of facts but of meanings. The question we asked ourselves was that of the *meaning* of the incest prohibition ... not the meaning of its *results*, real or imaginary. It was necessary, then, to establish the systematic nature of each kinship terminology and its corresponding set of marriage rules. And this was made possible only by the additional effort of elaborating the system of these systems and of putting them into transformational relationship. From then on what had been merely a huge and disordered relationship became organized in grammatical terms involving a coercive charter of conceivable ways of setting up and maintaining a reciprocity system ... It could be that we remain attached to it for very different reasons, such as the relatively recent discovery of the harmful consequences of consanguineal unions ... Or, is it not rather the case that our society, a particular instance in a much vaster family of societies, depends, like all others, for its coherence and its very existence on a network - grown infinitely unstable and complicated among us - of ties between consanguineal families? If so, do we admit that the network is homogeneous in all its parts, or must we recognise therein types of structures differing according to environment or region and variable as a function of local historical conditions?" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology* (1967), cited in David Lodge (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (Longman: London, 1972; 1986), pp. 546-47).

"It is hopeless to expect a structural analysis to change our way of perceiving concrete social relations. It will only explain them better ... But if a distinction is made between the level of observation and symbols to be substituted for it, I fail to see why an algebraic treatment of, let us say symbols for marriage rules, would not teach us, when aptly manipulated, something about the way a given marriage system actually works and bring out properties not immediately apparent to the empirical observer" (Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology II* (Basic Books: New York, 1976), p. 80).

"Structuralism is a philosophical view according to which the reality of the objects of the human or social sciences is relational rather than substantial. It generates a critical method that consists of inquiring into and specifying the sets of relations (or structures) that constitute these objects or into which they enter, and of identifying and analyzing groups of such objects whose members are structural transformations of one another" Peter Caws, *Structuralism: The Art of the Intelligible* (Humanities Press International, Inc.: Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1988), p. 1).

"We may ... understand the Structuralist enterprise as a study of superstructures, or, in a more limited way, of ideology" (Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1972), p. 101).

"The academic scene is fraught with mortality; the *-isms* of its trade have a way of dying a violent death ... naming a name is not equal to saying what the name names: if what we are witness to now is 'post-structuralism', it is valid to ask what that structuralism is which this post-structuralism is 'post' to" (Ruqaiya Hasan, "Directions from Structuralism", in Nigel Fabb *et al* (eds.), *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*, pp. 103-22; p. 103).

"In the current state of research, it seems reasonable that the structural analysis of narrative be given linguistics itself as a founding model" (Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Fontana: London, 1977), p. 82).

"Structuralism insists on the difference between signifier and signified: indeed, the radical difference and then arbitrary association of signifier and signified is the basis of its account of the sign. Deconstruction, on the other hand, demonstrates that any signified is itself a signifier and that the signifier is already a signified, so that signs cannot be authoritatively identified and isolated. However, by approaching the problem in terms of form and content rather than signifier and signified, one can see these movements as part of the larger 'question of formalism' and one can explicate, in part, an apparently anomalous situation: structuralism and deconstruction seem in various ways opposed to one another; each of them is opposed to the New Criticism (whose faults are usually said to involve excessive formalism); nevertheless both can be identified with the impossibility of going beyond formalism" (Jonathan Culler, "Structuralism and Grammatology", in William V. Spanos, Paul A. Bové and Daniel O'Hara (eds.), *The Question of Textuality: Strategies of Reading in Contemporary American Criticism* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Indiana, 1982), pp. 75-85; p. 78).

"Structuralism was philosophically opposed to the subject and as part of this opposition reduced the roles of the author and reader to mere epiphenomena of writing and reading as activities, thus denying that they existed as independent forces ... Structuralism had relatively little influence on criticism in the English-speaking world: in America in particular, few critics showed any interest in it. Its anti-humanism and the fact that it tended to concentrate on forms and genres rather than the close reading of texts made it difficult to accommodate" (Ken Newton, "Formalism, Dialogism, Structuralism", in Newton (ed.), *Theory Into Practice: A Reader in Modern Literary Criticism*, pp. 39-43; 42).

"Literary criticism asks *what* texts mean. Semiotics and structuralism are among the theories that first ask *how* language and literature convey meaning ... Structuralism and semiotics recognise that communities that share a textual history reach a consensus about meaning because they share codes and conventions of expression" (Lori Hope Lefkowitz, "Creating the World: Structuralism and Semiotics", in Atkins and Morrow (eds.), *Contemporary Literary Theory*, pp. 60-80; 61).

"Moving beyond the level of sentences to larger units of speech and writing, structuralism identifies the *underlying* structures shared by the individual *surface* manifestations of a system. It provides methods of analysis. Structural anthropology, particularly Claude Lévi-Strauss's work with myth, was an important application and extension of structuralism. Discovering the structural similarities among myths rewarded analysts with discoveries about the larger social functions of mythmaking. Working from Saussure's perception that meaning is relational, structural anthropology identifies the binary oppositions in a culture as they are manifested in story and ritual. Insofar as stories mediate between irreconcilable oppositions, mythmaking is a survival strategy" (Lefkowitz, "Creating the World: Structuralism and Semiotics", in Atkins and Morrow (eds.), *Contemporary Literary Theory*, pp. 60-80; 62-3).

"Ironically, structuralism has had to sustain the opposing charges that it (1) lacks humanity because it subjects literature to scientific analysis and (2) is overidealistic because it searches for universals and gives greater privilege to synchronic systems than to historical change" (Lefkowitz, p. 69).

"Structuralism and semiotic studies have gone in several directions as critiques have developed into independent but related literary theories. Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism develops from the notion that the subject is constituted in language; the reader-response theories of Iser or Fish develop from notions of communal consensus and the subjectivity of the message's receiver; feminist theory has been able to use the idea of coding to explain how the female body has been negatively inscribed in a culture that creates binary oppositions and hierarchies that have consistently worked to oppress women in work and in life; Derrida's deconstruction finds in texts not one but several competing signifying systems that are often in contradiction with each other, so that texts undercut their own meanings. The recognition that discourse is a matter of codes has revitalized genre criticism, exemplified in Tzvetan Todorov's work on the fantastic or Scholes's work on science fiction. The structural Marxism of Althusser and Jameson also departs from, but therefore acknowledges the contribution of, semiotic and structuralist principles" (Lefkowitz, p. 71).

"The stress in linguistics, though at first not given this name, represents a shift from historical and comparative to analytic studies, made necessary especially by the problems of understanding languages which were outside the traditional groups in which earlier methods had been developed. Especially in the case of the American Indians, it was found necessary to discard presuppositions drawn from historical and comparative studies of Indo-European languages, and to study each language 'from the inside' or, as it was later put, **structurally**" (Williams, *Keywords*, p. 254).

"In France, certain half-witted 'commentators persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts or key terms that characterize structural analysis. I should be grateful if a more serious public would free me from a connection that certainly does me honour, but that I have not deserved. There may well be certain similarities between the works of the structuralists and my own work. It would hardly behove me, of all people, to claim that my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today. But it is only too easy to avoid the trouble of analysing such work by giving it an admittedly impressive-sounding, but inaccurate, label" (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Tavistock: London, 1970), p. xiv).

"'Structuralism' as a proper name includes a number of diverse practices across different disciplines in the human sciences. What they all have in common is a Saussurian linguistics. The possibility of this was posited by Lévi-Strauss in 1945, in his essay, - Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology-:

Although they belong to *another order of reality*, kinship phenomena are *of the same type* as linguistic phenomena. Can the anthropologist, using a method analogous *in form* (if not content) to the method used in structural linguistics, achieve the same kind of progress in his own science as that which has taken place in linguistics?" (Cited Young, *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (Routledge: London, 1981), p. 1).

"In the 'Cours de linguistique générale' (given between 1906 and 1911), Saussure suggested that language could only be made the object of a science if it was limited to a discernible object. To study language in general is an impossible enterprise, given the vagueness of the term and the diffuseness of its possible attributes. Saussure therefore proposed the following taxonomic delimitations: firstly, a distinction between synchronic analysis - that is, of language as a functioning totality at any given period, and diachronic analysis - that is, of the change of specific elements of language through historical periods. Secondly, a fundamental elemental distinction between 'langue' - the system of any particular language (its social codes, rules, norms) which give meaning to individual communications, and 'parole' - the act of utilisation of the system, the individual act of language as executed by a particular speaker. The object of linguistics, should be the first in each case: a synchronic analysis of 'langue'" (Young, *Untying the Text*, p. 2).

"Semiology (or, in the USA, after C.S. Peirce, semiotics) is not easy to distinguish from structuralism. Strictly, semiology is a science of signs, whereas structuralism is a method of analysis. The structuralist method, then, assumes that meaning is made possible by the existence of underlying systems of conventions which enable elements to function individually as signs. Structuralist analysis addresses itself to the system of rules and relations underlying each signifying practice: its activity more often than not consists in producing a model of this system" (Young, *Untying the Text*, p. 3).

"A significant critique of the assumptions implicit in structuralist literary criticism was made by [Pierre] Macherey as early as 1965. In his essay, '-Literary Analysis: the Tomb of Structures-', Macherey as might have been expected of a contributor to Althusser's 'Reading Capital', attacks structuralism for its ahistoricism. But the essay's formulations go much further than this, particularly in their development of certain remarks made by Foucault at the beginning of 'The Birth of the Clinic'. Macherey's critique is made on four grounds. First, he questions the status of the use of linguistics in literary criticism and the unproblematised transference of knowledge from one discipline to another. This, he argues, disallows the claim for scientific status: 'scientific borrowing is not just a colonization, a new world founded from a fragment of the mother country.' The use of the concept of structure as defined in linguistics may in the end enable the resolution of critical problems, but it would have been unable to pose them in the first place. Second, Macherey argues that the appropriation of the idea of structure from linguistics to literature is in fact a misappropriation. It goes back, he suggests, to 'the entirely unscientific

hypothesis that the work has an intrinsic meaning' ... In other words, Macherey argues that both traditional and structuralist criticism seek an interpretation from 'within' the work. They both hold that the work will reveal its secret, its 'myth of interiority' and its nebulous origins. This assumption is pursued in Macherey's third criticism, that, for structuralists, analysis is the discovery of rationality, the secret coherence of an object ... Lastly, developing from this, Macherey argues that structuralism presupposes the traditional and metaphysical notion of harmony and unity: a work only exists in so far as it realises a totality. Hence structuralism presupposes a 'theology of creation'" (Young, *Untying the Text*, pp. 4-5).

"Saussure viewed language as a system of signs, which was to be studied 'synchronically' - that is to say, studied as a complete system at a given point in time - rather than 'diachronically', in its historical development. Each sign was to be seen as being made up of a 'signifier' (a sound-image, or its graphic equivalent), and a 'signified' (the concept or meaning). The three black marks *c - a - t* are a signifier which evoke the signified 'cat' in an English mind. The relation between signifier and signified is an arbitrary one: there is no inherent reason why these three marks should mean 'cat', other than cultural and historical convention ... The relation between the whole sign and what it refers to (what Saussure calls the 'referent', the real furry four-legged creature) is therefore also arbitrary. Each sign in the system has meaning by virtue only of its difference from the others. 'Cat' has meaning not 'in itself', but because it is not 'cap' or 'cad' or 'bat'" (Terry Eagleton, 'Structuralism and Semiotics', in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1983), pp. 91-126; pp. 96-7).

"What are the gains of structuralism? To begin with, it represents a remorseless *demythification* of literature. It is less easy after Greimas and Genette to hear the cut and thrust of the rapiers in line three, or feel that you know just what it feels like to be a scarecrow after reading *The Hollow Men* ... Moreover, the structuralist method implicitly questioned literature's claim to be a unique form of discourse: since deep structures could be dug out of Mickey Spillane as well as Sir Philip Sidney, and no doubt the same ones at that, it was no longer easy to assign literature an ontologically privileged status" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, pp. 106-7).

"The structuralist emphasis on the 'constructedness' of human meaning represented a major advance. Meaning was neither a private experience nor a divinely ordained occurrence: it was the product of certain shared systems of signification. The confident bourgeois belief that the isolated individual subject was the fount and origin of all meaning took a sharp knock: language pre-dated the individual, and was much less his or her product than he or she was the product of it" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 107).

"Structuralism is a modern inheritor of [the] belief that reality, and our experience of it, are discontinuous with each other; as such, it threatens the ideological security of those who wish the world to be within their control, to carry its singular meaning on its face and yield it up to them in the unblemished mirror of their language" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 108-9).

"Structuralism, in a word, was hair-raisingly unhistorical: the laws of the mind it claimed to isolate - parallelisms, oppositions, inversions and the rest - moved at a level of generality quite remote from the concrete differences of human history" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 109).

"The history of a system is itself a system ... diachrony can be studied synchronically" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 111).

"The shift away from structuralism has been in part, to use the terms of the French linguist Emile Benveniste, a move from 'language' to 'discourse'. 'Language' is speech or writing viewed 'objectively, as a chain of signs without a subject. 'Discourse' means language grasped as *utterance*, as involving speaking and writing subjects and therefore also, at least potentially, readers or listeners. This is not simply a return to the pre-structuralist days when we thought that language belonged to us individually as our eyebrows did; it does not revert to the classical 'contractual' model of language, according to which language is just a sort of instrument essentially isolated individuals use to exchange their pre-linguistic experiences(Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 115).

"The ideal reader or 'super-reader' posited by structuralism was in effect a transcendental subject absolved from all limiting social determinants. It owed much as a concept to the American linguist Noam Chomsky's notion of linguistic 'competence', by which was meant the innate capacities which allowed us to master the underlying rules of language. But not even Lévi-Strauss was able to read texts as would the Almighty himself. Indeed it has been plausibly suggested that Lévi-Strauss's initial engagements with structuralism had much to do with his political views about the reconstruction of post-war France about which there was nothing divinely assured" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 121).

"Conventional English literary criticism has tended to divide into two camps over structuralism. On the one hand there are those who see in it the end of civilization as we have known it. On the other hand, there are those erstwhile or essentially conventional critics who have scrambled with varying degrees of dignity on a bandwagon which in Paris at least has been disappearing down the road for some time. The fact that structuralism was effectively over as an intellectual movement in Europe some years ago has not seemed to deter them: a decade or so is perhaps the customary time-lapse for ideas in transit across the Channel" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, pp. 122-23).

"Structuralism is a way of refurbishing the literary institution, providing it with a *raison d'être* more respectable and compelling than gush about sunsets" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 124).

"[In Cambridge] The controversy over 'structuralism' (used as the preferred shorthand for 'modern literary theory') was a rather aggressive expression of resistance,

articulated - when it achieved articulateness - in terms of 'principles not theory' (dedication to principles in 'a grounded choice' as against literary theory defined by its abstraction, its systematisation, precisely its anti-literariness) and of true respect for the canon ('it is our job to teach and uphold the canon of English literature'). A much-favoured quotation at the time was from T. S. Eliot: 'to theorise demands vast ingenuity, and to avoid theorising demands vast honesty'" (Stephen Heath, "Modern Literary Theory", *Critical Quarterly* 31, 2 (1989), pp. 35-49; p. 35).

POST-STRUCTURALISM

Definitions and Criticism

"Poststructuralism as a general term for recent developments in literary theory and criticism, became common the 1970s. Is the relation to STRUCTURALISM one of succession or supercession? - that is, do we see poststructuralism as simply later than its predecessor, or is it in some sense an advance? Both usages can be found; and poststructuralism covers so many practices that it is impossible to define. But it can be approached as a working through, in various fields of inquiry, of some implications of DECONSTRUCTION. Derrida's influential lecture on 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences' (*Writing and Difference*, 1967, trans. 1978) proposed a disruption in the very concept of structure as a stable system, mischievously quoting Lévi-Strauss against himself. The effects of deconstruction, though, were not confined to a critique of structuralism. They rather emphasized a methodological shift, a move away from explanation by origin, order by opposition, fixed or closed signification, and the person as a unified subject. Recent PSYCHOANALYSIS, notably that of Jacques Lacan, encouraged the latter move, and psychoanalytic criticism is one variety of poststructuralism. It can also be traced in cultural and ideological analysis like that of Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze, and in the feminism of Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray. Divergent accounts of the READER, like Bloom's 'misreading', can be cited; so, of course, can the literary studies listed under DECONSTRUCTION. Roland Barthes's career shows the poststructural shift with particular emphasis, as in the sardonic opening of *S/Z* (1970, trans. 1974): 'There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean.' Such tidy encapsulation had been Barthes's own ambition in the mid-1960s, and it is precisely what poststructuralism rejects" (Ellman Crasnow, "Poststructuralism", in Fowler (ed.), *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, p. 190).

"'Post-structuralist' is a non- or even anti-name ... the name pins the writer down, makes it possible to speak species, and offers a bootstrap by which talk about the new theory can raise itself above talk about the old. But this name also begs the question of another, previous name: ...'structuralism' ... Structuralism offered criticism its last chance to make a science out of theorizing literature. Fortunately enough, it resulted in a cross-fertilization of disciplines this latest and spectacularly impotent offspring. Criticism after structuralism is impotent in so far as it is unable to produce further and

greater structuralisms. There's not much science of the kind favoured by structuralism to be found nowadays. It is as though the literary structuralists represented the culmination and the grand finale of all previous attempts to produce a scientific theory of literature; in this case, no 'new structuralism' was possible. Perhaps 'fitz-structuralism' more usefully describes what happened next; it hints, among other things, at both the dangerously over-productive parent and the contentiously illegitimate offspring. But even this seems too closely to confine, or even to exclude its subject. In the event we have the equally graphic 'post-structuralism', a term that seems not to name what we do in the present at all, but rather to re-name structuralism itself, as what we used to do in the past. It provides a post to which structuralism is then hitched, confining it by means of the shortest tether the language has to offer" (Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (eds.), "Introduction", *Post-structuralist Readings of English Poetry* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1-2).

"... it is often when post-structuralism attempts to shift our attention away from 'primary' literary texts, and toward the 'secondary' works of the critics themselves, that it meets most resistance. Resistance, in this case, often entails fear - fear that something important will be lost, or replaced by an inferior product" (Machin and Norris, p. 5).

"Post-structuralism rejects the whole system of assumptions - the implied metaphysics or ontology of form - that lay behind [New Criticism]. It poetry up to a practice of intertextual reading that can take in philosophy, history or psychoanalysis, *not* on the reckoning that these are 'meta-languages' or ultimate sources of truth, but in order to see how texts relate and produce new dimensions of sense" (Machin and Norris, p. 18).

"... instead of treating pseudo-identities, labels, or slogans as little wooden horses on a merry-go-round where New Criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism, new socio-historicism, and then again formalism, nonformalism, and so on would follow one another, instead of these merry-go-round effects it would be much more urgent, interesting and exciting too, at least less boring, to *read* and to *elaborate* theoretical configurations whose structure, writing, conceptual and institutional modes, and social and historical inscription were irreducible, precisely because of a certain force of transplant, to the dialectic of the merry-go-round or to the merry-go-round of the parody of dialectics in 'post' and 'new'. In view of the rise of journalistic and doxographic discourses from those who, within and outside the university, think that they are witnessing a series of theoretical rounds, their hand on the gong, it is urgent to take interest in what, in the most inventive 'theoretical' work, cannot be confined to these boxing rings, merry-go-rounds and round-tables. It is urgent to analyze, for example, in the assumptions and assertions of discourse which is taken to be Marxist or claims that it is, what is usually attributed to poststructuralism or New Criticism, or else to recognise that there is more concern and respect for the so-called socio-historical 'reality' in certain texts identified as poststructuralist than in certain 'Marxist' or 'new sociohistoricism' text ..." (Jacques Derrida, "Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms", trans. Anne Tomiche, in David Carroll (ed.), *The States of "Theory": History, Art, and Critical*

Discourse (Columbia University Press: New York, 1990), pp. 62-94; p. 78).

"It is a normal monstrosity to say that everything the word 'poststructuralism' embraces is formalist, aestheticist, apolitical, little concerned with history or with socioeconomic reality. It is a normal monstrosity to say of a thinking which started out by putting logocentrism into question that it confines itself to language and language games. It is a normal monstrosity to think that to get back finally to reality, history, society, politics, it suffices to leave behind these plays on words. It is a normal monstrosity to go on setting the textual - as this notion has been re-elaborated in the last twenty years - against the social, the political, and the historical, as if the text were still the book on the bookshelf in the library" (Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms', p. 79).

"Post-structuralism is not 'post' in the sense of having killed Structuralism off , it is 'post' only in the sense of coming after and of seeking to extend Structuralism in its rightful direction" (John Sturrock, *Structuralism* (Paladin: London, 1986), p. 137).

"[Both structuralism and post-structuralism entail] ... *a critique of the human subject ... a critique of historicism ... a critique of meaning ... a critique of philosophy ...*" (Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism* (Harvester: Hemel Hempstead, 1988; 1993), pp. 1-3).

"While structuralism sees the truth as being 'behind' or 'within' a text, post-structuralism stresses the interaction of reader and text as a productivity. In other words, reading has lost its status as a passive consumption of a product to become performance. Post-structuralism is highly critical of the unity of the stable sign (the Saussurian view). The new movement implies a shift from the signified to the signifier: and so there is a perpetual detour on the way to a truth that has lost any status or finality. Post-structuralists have produced critiques of the classical Cartesian conception of the unitary subject - the subject/author as originating consciousness, authority for meaning and truth. It is argued that the human subject does not have a unified consciousness but is structured by language. Post-structuralism, in short, involves a critique of metaphysics, of the concepts of causality, of identity, of the subject, and of truth" (Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, p. 3).

"The name 'post-structuralism' is useful in so far as it is an umbrella word, significantly defining itself only in terms of a temporal, spatial relationship to structuralism. This need not imply the organicist fiction of a development, for it involves, rather, a displacement. It is more a question of an interrogation of structuralism's methods and assumptions, of transforming structuralist concepts by turning one against another. But the name 'post-structuralism' is not useful if it recalls that other spatio-temporal metaphor, the Fall. For the notion of the Fall, and its complement (the concept of

origin), is precisely what post-structuralism denies. Structuralism as an origin never existed in a pre-lapsarian purity or ontological fulness; post-structuralism traces the trace of structuralism's difference from itself" (Young, *Untying the Text*, p. 1).

"In brief, it may be said that post-structuralism fractures the serene unity of the stable sign and the unified subject. In this respect, the 'theoretical' reference points of post-structuralism can be best mapped via the work of Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, who in different ways have pushed structuralism to its limits and shown how its most radical premises open it up to its own deconstruction" (Young, *Untying the Text*, p. 8).

"Structuralism, and post-structuralism also, are dead traditions of thought. Notwithstanding the promise they held in the fresh bloom of youth, they have ultimately failed to generate the revolution in philosophical understanding and social theory that was once their pledge ... Of course, many have doubted that there ever was a coherent enough body of thought to be designated by the name 'structuralism', let alone the even vaguer appellation 'post-structuralism' ... After all, most of the leading figures ordinarily lumped under these labels have rejected these terms as applying meaningfully to their own endeavours" (Anthony Giddens, "Structuralism, Post-structuralism and the Production of Culture", in Anthony Giddens and Jonathan H. Turner (eds.), *Social Theory Today* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 195-223; p. 195).

"If structuralism divided the sign from the referent ... 'post-structuralism' - goes a step further: it divides the signifier from the signified" (Eagleton, "Post-structuralism", *Literary Theory*, pp. 127-50; p. 128).

"We have moved ... from the era of structuralism to the reign of post-structuralism, a style of thought which embraces the deconstructive operations of Derrida, the work of the French historian Michel Foucault, the writings of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and of the feminist philosopher and critic Julia Kristeva" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 134).

"There is no clear division for post-structuralism between 'criticism' and 'creation': both modes are subsumed into 'writing' as such" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 139).

"With the advent of post-structuralism, what seemed reactionary about structuralism was not this refusal of history, but nothing less than the very concept of structure itself" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 141).

"Post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 142).

"Such a position ... was born of a specific political defeat and disillusion. The 'total structure' which it identified as the enemy was an historically particular one: the armed, repressive state of late monopoly capitalism, and the Stalinist politics which pretended to confront it but were deeply complicit with its rule. Long before the emergence of post-structuralism, generations of socialists had been fighting both of these monoliths. But they had overlooked the possibility that the erotic *frissons* of reading, or even work confined to those labelled criminally insane, were an adequate solution, and so had the guerrilla fighters of Guatemala" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 143).

"As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, as the carnivalesque memories of 1968 faded and world capitalism stumbled into economic crisis, some of the French post-structuralists originally associated with the avant-garde literary journal *Tel-Quel* moved from a militant Maoism to a strident anti-Communism. Post-structuralism in 1970s' France has been able with good conscience to praise the Iranian mullahs, celebrate the USA as the one remaining oasis of freedom and pluralism in a regimented world, and recommended various brands of portentous mysticism as the solution to human ills. If Saussure could have foreseen what he started he might well have stuck to the genitive case in Sanskrit" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 147).

"Within post-structuralism as a 'whole', real conflicts and differences exist whose future history cannot be predicted. There are forms of post-structuralism which represent a hedonistic withdrawal from history, a cult of ambiguity or irresponsible anarchism; there are other forms, as with the formidably rich researches of the French historian Michel Foucault, which while not without their severe problems point in a more positive direction" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 150).

"One could argue that many of the volumes under the heading of structuralism touch already on post-structuralist issues. This is inevitably true to a certain extent. Since post-structuralism as a movement cannot be clearly bracketed, it is just as hard to find anthologies or critical works that deal solely with post-structuralist problematics" (Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies*, pp. 445-46).

"[W]hat is post-structuralism? The question is less ambitious than it might appear; it does not seek a clear or unified answer, but only tentative answer that may perhaps be reduced, in the end, to nothing more than a panorama only slightly different from that

offered by structuralism. For this reason, among others, post-structuralism - like structuralism - invites a plural spelling, even if such a spelling is not commonly used ... What, then, is post-structuralism? At the heart of the matter is a double problematic, both geographic and philosophical. First, *the problem of delimitation*: where does structuralism end and post-structuralism begin? What is the relationship of these two movements of thought? Which disciplines are grouped under the structuralist and which under the post-structuralist aegis? Second, *an epistemological problematic*, with all its related questions: what is the difference between structuralism and post-structuralism in the field of knowledge? Is there a simple transformation, a mutation, or a radical break? " (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", pp. 27-8).

"... even if the structuralist and post-structuralist enterprises are radically opposed to each other, they exhibit a certain complementarity. The denunciation of the concept of representation is *necessarily* based on the structuralist institution of the sign; it relies on structuralist premises in order, paradoxically, to show that structuralism has not fully pursued the implications of those premises. The post-structuralist attitude is therefore literally unthinkable without structuralism" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 30).

"A definition of post-structuralism and a full reply to the questions it poses will finally come - as has been the case for all previous movements of thought - only from the results afforded us by post-structuralist theoretical practices. These, then, will be answers, furnished not on the basis of an a priori definition of post-structuralism, but (1) by showing that post-structuralism has wrought transformations in various disciplines, (2) by measuring the scope as well as the limits of these transformations, (3) by showing that in each instance these transformations reveal what one might call a post-structuralist thrust, and (4) by determining the changes - advances and retrenchments - which have occurred in our critical concepts and practices as a result of these transformations. On this basis, one will be able retrospectively to understand better and perhaps redefine the breadth and the import of post-structuralism" (Harari, "Critical Factions/Critical Fictions", p. 31).

"The self-sustaining objective structure of the text requires and must correspond to an equally self-sustaining subject. Structuralism becomes transformed into post-structuralism when the structures of the text are seen to be always structures in and for a subject (reader *and* critic). The text of structuralism is intransitive, that of post-structuralism transitive" (Antony Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism: Since 1968*, p. 33).

"... British post-structuralism was sponsored by Marxism and shows no signs of surrendering its engagement with politics" (Easthope, *British Post-structuralism*, p. 219).

"The prefix 'post-' is serious not casual for post-structuralism gets its intellectual force by being both *after* structuralism and *because* of it, because of the limitations discovered in structuralism's project" (Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism*, p. 23).

"Derridean deconstruction emerged out of a critique of structuralism. Whereas Saussurean linguistics and the semiology derived from it emphasised the synchronic - the play of differences that define any system seen as existing at one point in time - at the expense of the diachronic or the changes that take place in any signifying system over time, Derrida questioned this synchronic model on the grounds that it assumes the existence of a centre which holds the structure together, a centre which is itself outside structurality" (Ken Newton, "Post-structuralism", in Newton (ed.), *Theory Into Practice*, pp. 122-26; 122).

"Structuralism was founded on the Saussurian principle that language as a system of signs must be considered synchronically, that is, within a single temporal plane. The diachronic aspect of language, how it develops and changes over time, was seen as being of secondary importance. In post-structuralist thinking temporality again becomes central. The major influence on post-structuralist literary theory is the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, though the work of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the cultural theorist Michel Foucault is also important in the emergence of post-structuralism ... Roland Barthes' essay, 'The Death of the Author', first published in 1968, adopts a radically textual view of language and meaning and clearly shows his shift towards a post-structuralist position. It has close connections with his *S/Z*, first published in 1970, generally regarded as the first important work of post-structuralist literary criticism" (Newton, "Post-structuralism", in Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, p. 147-8).

"Where and how does this decentering, this notion of the structurality of structure, occur ... I would probably cite the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics ... the Freudian critique of self presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of ontotheology, of the determination of being as presence" (Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, pp. 149-54; 151).

"We can therefore say that the great theoretical advantage of the Marxist topography, i.e. of the spatial metaphor of the edifice (base and superstructure) is simultaneously that it reveals that questions of determination (or of index or effectivity) are crucial; that it reveals that it is the base which in the last instance determines the whole edifice; and that, as a consequence, it obliges us to pose the theoretical problem of the types of 'derivatory' effectivity peculiar to the superstructure, i.e. it obliges us to think what the Marxist tradition calls conjointly the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base. The greatest disadvantage

of this representation of the structure of every society by the spatial metaphor of an edifice, is obviously the fact that it is metaphorical: i.e. it remains *descriptive*" (Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)", p. 130).

"There are ... two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics and ontotheology - in other words, through the history of all of his history - has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche showed us the way, does not seek in ethnography, as Lévi-Strauss wished, the 'inspiration of a new humanism'" (Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in Newton (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, pp. 149-54; 153).

"[seven propositions concerning 'text'] (1) The Text must not be thought of as a defined object ... (2) ... the text does not come to a stop with 'good' literature. (3) Whereas the Text is approached and experienced in relation to the sign, the work closes itself on a signified ... (4) The Text is plural ... (6) The work is caught up in a process of filiation ... (7) The work is ordinarily an object of consumption ... (7) ... one final approach to the Text, that of pleasure" (Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies*, pp. 74-80).
