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Literary and Critical Theory II

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

Prof. Pona Mahanta, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Former Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University

Prof. Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinators : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Associate Professor, Department of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1-2	**Dr. Manab Medhi** Department of English, Bodoland University
3-5	**Indrajit Kalita** Department of English, Chaiduar College, Gohpur

Editorial Team

Content: Units 1-5: Inhouse Editing

Structure, Format & Graphics: Dr. Prasenjit Das

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SEMESTER 4

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 2: LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY II

BLOCK 1: FROM SAUSSURE TO BAKHTIN

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

In the previous Course—**Literary and Critical Theory I**, we have discussed many of the important theoretical approaches and concepts. Although Literary and Critical Theory contain various concepts, which are of course not so easy to comprehend, they are also quite fashionable, interesting, exciting and liberating in many ways. We, as students of literature must realise that literary and critical theory usually help us to discuss different kinds of writing as well as literary texts in newer ways. Besides, we must also note that such theories propose unexpected questions to be answered. In many ways, literary and critical theories have become one of those disciplines making English literary studies a part of fresh interdisciplinary area. We should therefore, 'apply' these theories if at all we want to understand them.

In this course—**Literary and Critical Theory II**, we have tried to bring to you some of the very basic theoretical essays written at various time periods of the 20th century. The important fact is that the spread of 'theory' has led to a lot of new critical and theoritical works. Many of the major theorists, whose essays we have prescribed in this course, may not be living now. But, the applications of their respective theorists have continued. However, due to the lack of space, we have not been able to include some other theoretical texts. We shall find that the prescribed essays and texts include areas like history of ideas, Linguistics and Poetics, Reader Response Theory, Psychoanalysis, Structuralism and Post structuralism, Gender-studies, Anthropology, Postcolonialism and Postcolonial historiography and so on. The attempt has been to examine how 'theory' shows itself to be the case of the 'literary' world responding to the changes in the larger environment of the 20th century

We shall however note that the units of this course cannot be read as the substitutes for the actual texts of theory. Therefore, despite the difficulties, we should try to read the original texts of the prescribed essays and follow up with the further reading submitted at the end of each unit. For instance, we can read the units on Barthes and Lacan with reference to their entries in different anthologies cited. However, we do believe that the different units of this course shall make necessary connections between us and the theories we shall read. To that extent, we should find these SLMs useful as we have adapted from important books about literary and critical theory.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with five literary texts written by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Stanley Fish and Mikhail Bakhtin. **Block 2** shall deal with five literary texts written by Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foiucault, Hayden White and Walter Benjamin. **Block 3** shall deal with five other theoretical texts written by Toril Moi, Elaine Shwoalter, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said.

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

As stated in the Course Introduction, Block 1 of the course **Literary and Critical Theory II** contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 1: This unit introduces us to Ferdinand de Saussure and his essay "The Object of Study", taken from his famous book *The Courses in General Linguistics.* Saussure is one of the most prominent modern linguist and a founder of the Structuralist approach in the human sciences. The prescribed essay "The Object of Study" offers certain vital points regarding the study of languages. Before Saussure, the language study or 'philology' was dominated by a historical approach, where the chief concern was to trace the change and development in phonology and semantics within and between languages or groups of languages. Saussure pointed out that a scientific study of any language is not possible through such historical or 'diachronic' study.

Unit 2: This unit introduces us to Roman Jakobson, another most powerful mind in the 20th century and a founding member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the founder of Prague Linguistic Circle. The prescribed essay "Linguistics and Poetics" discusses the relationship between linguistics and poetics, and in this unit, we shall try to examine how this essay has inspired a generation of thinkers of different human sciences. Besides, it will be also relevant to relate the ideas of Jakobson to his predecessors like Saussure and Baudouin de Courtenay as well as to his contemporaries such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin etc.

Unit 3: In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "The Death of the Author" by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes. Roland Barthes is often considered one of the leading names in French structuralism. In the essay "The Death of the Author", Barthes argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in the interpretation of a text. Barthes boldly argues that the work and creator are not related.

Unit 4: In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "Interpretive Community" which is a part of his longer essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*" by Stanley Fish. One of the most controversial figures in contemporary literary theory, Stanley Fish has been pivotal to the development of literary theory in America. A leading critic and an inventor of reader-response theory, Fish is perhaps best known for his intellectual style and eruditeness. Debunking standard notions of interpretation, Fish's essay "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976; rev. 1980) introduces his seminal concept, "Interpretive Communities", which radically revises interpretive theory by locating meaning not in texts but in readers, not in individual response but in the communities.

Unit 5: In this unit, we shall read Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" which is taken from his book *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Bakhtin, who is hailed as one of the greatest 20th century theorist of literature, not only discusses in this essay the origin and nature of the novel but also sensitises the readers regarding the elements that distinguishe the novel from other genres.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE: "THE OBJECT OF STUDY"

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Saussure: Life and Works

1.4 Reading the Text: "The Object of Study"

1.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

1.6 Reception of Saussure and His Ideas

1.7 Let us Sum up

1.8 Further Reading

1.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.10 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- know what the object of studies in Linguistics should be
- identify the key ideas about language that Saussure brought into the arena of linguistic studies
- discuss linguistics as a branch of Semiology
- analyse the similarities and differences between language and other social institutions
- situate Ferdinand de Saussure in the history of linguistic studies as well as literary and cultural studies

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces us to Ferdinand de Saussure—one of the most important thinkers of modern linguistic studies and a founder of the structuralist approach to literary and cultural studies as well as other human sciences. The famous book *The Courses in General Linguistics,* which goes under Saussure's name, but is in fact a compilation of his lectures documented by his students and colleagues, is a pioneering text in the

structuralist approach to the studies of language as well as other disciplines in humanities. The essay "The Object of Study" is taken from this book and it offers us certain vital points to take care of while studying languages. Before Saussure, the study of languages or 'philology' was dominated by a historical approach, where the chief concern was to trace the change and development in phonology and semantics within and between languages or groups of languages. Saussure pointed out that a scientific study of any language is not possible through such historical or 'diachronic' study; he suggested that language should be approached as a 'synchronic' system where all the elements and rules are simultaneously available to the users of the language. Another important aspect of the essay is that Saussure has clearly defined language as a system of signs. As such, language can be studied as any other discipline, studied under the purview of Semiology. As we read through this unit on "The Object of Study", we must keep in mind the fact that this seminal text has inspired a generation of thinkers of different human sciences. As students of literature, we must take care to notice how Saussure, and particularly this essay, has influenced the scenario of literary criticism in the early 20th century Europe.

1.3 SAUSSURE: LIFE AND WORKS

Ferdinand de Saussure was born to the noble Calvinist family of Henri de Saussure and Countess Louise de Pourtalès in Geneva on November 26, 1857. He was the first of the nine children. The Saussures were well-known for their expertise in modern science and education. Henri, in due course, sent his first two sons, Ferdinand and Horace, to the same school. Here Ferdinand had got an initial grounding in the classical languages, German and English. At the age of twelve, he was brought back to École Martine in Geneva in 1870 and then he went to the public Collège de Genève in 1872. Then, he further went to the Gymnase de Genève and finally to the Université de Genève and started his formal study of linguistics under the guidance of Louis Morel, a researcher at the University of Leipzig. Ferdinand soon headed to Leipzig in 1876. With teachers like Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann, studies in linguistics at Leipzig were at a great height at the time.

Saussure took membership of the Société de Linguistique de Paris and published his first articles in *Mémoires* published by this society in 1877–1878. In some of these articles, he made certain radical observations on the vowel systems of the Indo-European languages, which brought him considerable reputation just at the age of 20. He left for Berlin during 1878–1879 in order to study Celtic and Sanskrit. He was awarded PhD by Leipzig University in 1880 for his doctoral thesis analysing the genitive absolute construction in Sanskrit. In 1880, he went to Paris with the purpose of doing a second doctorate. He, already being well known there because of his publications in the *Mémoires*, was hired within months to give lectures on the historical linguistics of Gothic and Old High German at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Soon, he had to take up the position of the Adjunct Secretary of the Société de Linguistique. Saussure taught at the École Pratique des Hautes Études till 1889.

Then, he returned to Geneva on leave for a year. This leave at Geneva was academically not fruitful and he had to meet with some personal crises too. He returned to Paris for the academic year 1890–1891 but decided to go back permanently to the Université de Genève to teach Sanskrit and the history and comparison of the Indo-European languages. In 1894, Saussure was one of the main organisers of the Tenth International Congress of Orientalists in Geneva, where he gave a paper, which would later be known as Saussure's Law. His other important works include his articles on Lithuanian language.

Saussure married Marie Faesch in 1892 and by 1895, they had three sons: Jacques, Raymond and André of which André died of cholera at infancy. Saussure was suffering from chronic arteriosclerosis and on February 22, 1913, he breathed his last.

Now let us discuss some of his key works.

The *Mémoire*:

The *Mémoire,* published in December 1878, offers a path breaking discussion on the vowel system of the indo-European languages. Here, Saussure proposes that there was just one vowel in stressed syllables in

the original Indo-European mother language, an *a* which raised to be pronounced as /e/. He symbolised it as a_1. Subsequently, in some linguistic environments, a_1 shifted phonetically to /o/. He symbolised this variant as a_2. At first, the raising and backing were not noticed by speakers, they were perceived as what Saussure called colourings, or what would later be called allophonic variants. Over time, however, they came to signal nuances in meaning, such as different tenses of the same verb. Saussure argued that the primitive Indo-European syllable could have had one of four possible nuclei: a_1 or a_2 on their own, or forming a diphthong with another sound, which he termed the *coefficient sonantique* 'sonant coefficient' because of its co-effect with the vowel on later developments of the sound system. It had to be a sonant, capable of functioning as either a semi-consonant or a vowel because one eventual development was for the a_1 or a_2 to disappear, leaving the sonant coefficient as the lone vowel of the syllable. Alternatively, the sonant coefficient might disappear, leaving a trace on the preceding vowel such as lengthening or a change in quality or stress.

Soon after the *Mémoire* was published, the Danish linguist Herman Möller proposed that these three sounds might correspond to the laryngeal consonants which he had recently posited for Proto-Indo-European. Saussure neither accepted nor rejected this possibility, and he would later accept Brugmann's (1886) identification of ^{A} with the Hebrew *schwa*. Both Möller's and Brugmann's suggestions provided evidence for the earlier unity of the Indo-European and Hamito-Semitic language families, which Möller was so keen to prove.

***The Courses in General Linguistics*:**

Saussure became most famous with the book *The Courses in General Linguistics,* or *Cours de linguistique générale*. This work was put together by his colleagues Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye mainly using the notes of students along with some manuscript notes from Saussure from the general linguistics courses he gave in Geneva. Saussure had to accidentally take up the responsibility of giving the course in general linguistics at the University of Geneva in 1907. He, being a person interested in Sanskrit and Latin, had to struggle hard with the course he had little

interest in. However, in course of his classes, he could develop his ideas clearly. He had to start from questioning the meaning of such basic terms like *langue*, *language*, *parole*, which are used more or less interchangeably in colloquial French to indicate language in general, a particular language, a text, an utterance, a word etc. Towards the end of his third and final course, he could finally describe language as a system whose every element is attached to every other element, and where the content of an element is purely a value generated by its difference vis-à-vis every other element. The book offers explanations of the key concepts like langue and parole, nature of linguistic signs, language as a system of signs, signifier and signified, diachrony and synchrony etc. that Saussure discussed and developed in his lectures.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention the significance of *The Courses in General Linguistics.*

1.4 READING THE TEXT: "THE OBJECT OF STUDY"

Saussure divides the essay "The Object of Study" into three sections. The first section tries to define language while the second section tries to address different facts of language in terms of linguistic structure and the third section tries to explore the scope of languages in human affairs.

The first section starts with a few questions that seek to problematise the question of knowing what exactly the object of linguistic studies is. There is a sharp difference between linguistics and other sciences: in case of other sciences, the object of study is already given, defined properly while, in the case of linguistics, the object is not properly defined. In linguistic studies, there may be multiple objects depending on the viewpoint adopted. Again, whatever viewpoint may be adopted, there is always a series of dualities accompanying each viewpoint. For example,

a. The ear perceives articulated syllables as auditory impressions. But, these auditory impressions cannot exist without the presence of vocal

organs. As such, one cannot divorce what is heard from the oral articulation. Both the oral and the auditory aspect of language are interdependent.

b. Language is not simply reducible to phonetic facts. The speech sounds are only instruments of thought and they have no independent existence. A sound is a complex auditory-articulatory unit that, in turn, combines with an idea to form another complex unit, both psychologically and physiologically.

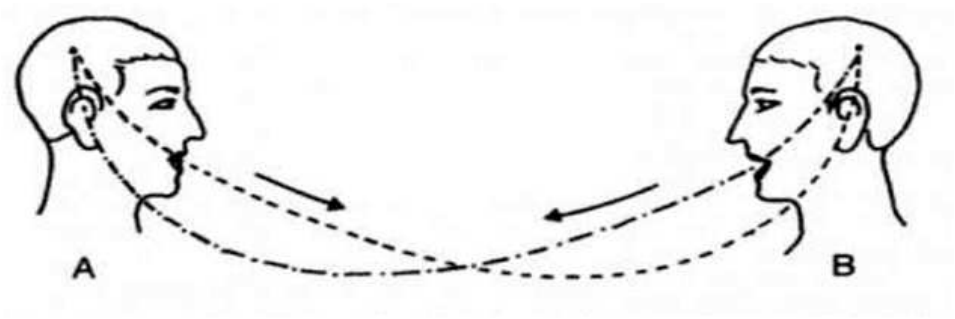
c. Language has both social and individual aspects; neither is conceivable without the other.

d. Language, at any point of time, involves an established system as well as an evolution. It is always an institution at the present and a product of the past. As such the state of language at any particular point is not fixed but in a constant process of evolution.

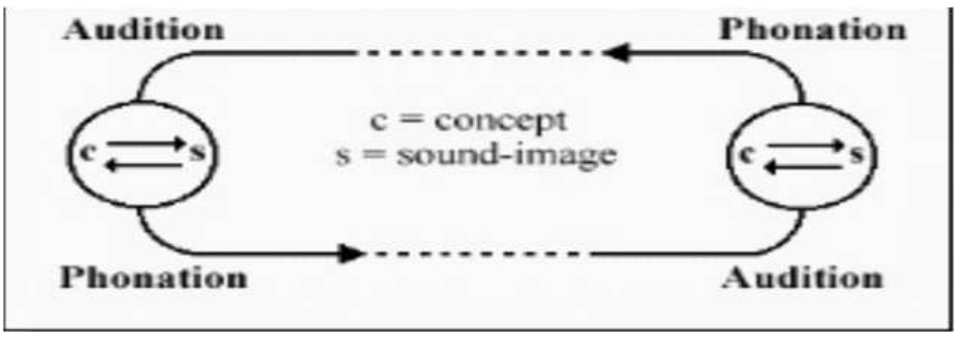
So the linguist is confronted with these multiple series of dualities from which there is no way out. Now the linguist is left with two options: either to take one aspect separately and risk failing to address the dualities or to study language in several ways simultaneously. In the second choice, the object of study will become a muddle of disparate, unconnected things that open up the doors to various sciences – psychology, anthropology, grammar, philology and so on. These sciences may claim language as part of their study but the methodologies applied in these sciences are not applicable in linguistic studies. At last, Saussure concludes that the linguistic must take the study of 'linguistic structure' as his primary concern, and relate all other manifestations of language to it. In fact, Saussure claims that amid so many dualities, it is only the linguistic structure that seems to be completely and independently definable.

Here comes the next question – what linguistic structure is? Saussure clarifies that linguistic structure is one essential part of language. The structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty. At the same time, it is a body of conventions adopted by the society to enable the members to exercise their language faculty.

Hereafter Saussure moves to the second section of the essay that evaluates the place of linguistic structure among the facts of language. In order to identify what role the linguistic structure plays within the totality of language, Saussure first takes the example of the individual act of speech. The act of speech requires a minimum of two persons: one who speaks and the other who listens. Suppose two persons A and B are talking to one another.



The starting point of the circuit of speech is at the brain of the first speaker, say A, where facts of consciousness or concepts are associated with representations of linguistic signs or sound patters through which expressions are made. The moment the brain associates the concepts with the linguistic signs, the process becomes a psychological one. The next step is physiological process where the brain signals the vocal organs to produce the necessary sound. The sounds are then transmitted from A's mouth to B's ear through a physical process. When B speaks, the same processes repeat from B's side.



This is how the circuit of speech becomes complete. However, this circuit can further be divided into different types:

a. External (the sound waves travelling from mouth to ear) and Internal (rest of the phenomenon).
b. Psychological (the brain associating concepts with sounds) and non-psychological (the physiological facts of the vocal organs and the external facts outside the speaker)
c. Active part (everything that goes from the associative center of the speaker to the ear of the listener) and passive part (everything that goes from the listener's ear to the associative center).

In the psychological part, which is localised in the brain, everything that is active can be called 'executive' (c'!s) and everything that is passive can be called 'receptive' (s'!c). Apart from this, there must be taken care of the faculty of association and co-ordination as soon as one goes beyond the individual signs in isolation. This faculty plays a vital role in the organisation of language as a system. This is where one must start considering the social dimension of language. All individuals linguistically linked with the sharing of same signs will form within themselves a kind of mean and all of them will reproduce the same signs, approximately if not exactly, to link them to the same concepts. It is important to note that the external part of the circuit shown above, the process of the sound travelling from the mouth to the ear, does not have any significant role in this process. When we hear an unknown language being spoken, we hear only the sounds but we fail to enter into the social reality of what is happening because of our failure to comprehend. It is the internal part of the circuit (s'!c) where actually the process of comprehension takes place. The psychological part of the circuit is not fully involved here; the executive side plays no part as execution is never carried out by the collective but by the individual only. The individual is always the master of it; Saussure designates this by the term 'speech'. The individual's receptive and coordinating faculties build up a stock of imprints, which turn out to be for all practical purpose the same as the next person's. If we can collect all word patterns, association and coordination methods, stored in all individuals, what we shall in our hand will be the

social bond that constitutes their language. It is an accumulation of signs and rules that associate and coordinate signs–the grammatical system, founded by the practice of 'speech' by all individuals or, more precisely, groups of individuals. Though this grammatical system is produced by every individual, the language is never complete in any individual. Language exists only in collectivity.

Here, with the distinction between language and 'speech', Saussure comes to distinguish between (i) what is social from what is individual, and (ii) what is essential from what is ancillary or more or less accidental.

Language is not the function of the individual speaker. It is 'speech', which an individual act. While language is passively registered by the individual, 'speech' is the individual act of the will and intelligence of the speaker. Within the process of speech, there are two distinctions: a. the combinations through the speaker uses the code provided by language to express himself/herself and b. the psycho-physical mechanism which enables the speaker to externalise these combinations of codes.

After this prolonged discussion on language as a structured system, Saussure comes to the following conclusion:

a. Despite having numerous disparate facts, language comes out to be a well-defined entity, which can be localised in the process where the brain associates the concepts with the sound patterns (c'!s, s'!c). The individual is powerless to modify or create the social part of the language, which is external to him. This social part of the language exists as a kind of contract agreed by the members of the community. The individual is required to get acquainted to these norms in order to use the language.
b. A language system, which is different from 'speech', can be studied independently. A scientific study of linguistic structure is possible only if the other connected elements are kept aside.
c. While language is heterogeneous in general, linguistic structure is homogenous in nature. This sign system is conditioned by an essential union of ideas and sound patterns. Here, both parts of the sign – the sound pattern and the idea – are psychological in nature.

d. Linguistic structure is as real as speech. Similarly, despite being essentially psychological, linguistic signs are not abstractions. The associations of sound patterns and ideas, which make up the language after being collectively agreed, are realities localised in the brain.

Thus, Saussure proves that language can be studied as scientifically as any other system of signs can be.

The third section of the essay tries to locate place of languages in the field of human affairs. First of all, Saussure declared that language is a social institution. However, it is distinct from other social, political, or judicial institutions because of the different facts involved with it. As language is a system of signs for expressing ideas, it can be compared to deaf and dumb alphabets, traffic signals, symbolic rites, military signals etc. however, the importance and scope of language is much wider.

This is where Saussure finds the importance of Semiology in the study of languages. Semiology studies the role of signs as part of the social life as well as the nature of signs and the laws governing them. As such, it is part of social psychology, and hence general psychology. Saussure claims that linguistics should be a branch of Semiology and should be governed by all laws that govern Semiology. Thus, Saussure believes that, linguistics will have an assured place in the field of human knowledge. If someone wishes to discover the true nature of language systems, one must first consider what they have in common with all other systems of the same kind. In order to make linguistics fit in the science of Semiology, all the other factors of languages that differentiate languages from other sign systems must simply be ignored. This will not only help linguistics being viewed through the lens of Semiology but even other human areas like rites, customs will also be brought under the same scanner. This will further the scope of semiotics to a higher extent.

1.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

Language as a System of Signs:

Saussure observes that language or *langue* is a system of signs in which each sign consists of two elements or values – a concept and an

acoustic image. It has to be clarified that here the images are not visual images, but acoustic or oral-auditory. While other linguists of his time generally conceived of languages as a way of denoting things and actions, Saussure argued that it is not things, but our conception of things, actions, and ideas, that are part of our language; not names, but certain psychological schemas being evoked in the brain by certain combinations of sounds.

Saussure later developed the ideas of these two components of the linguistic and explained *signifiant* or 'signifier' as the acoustic image and *signifié* or 'signified' as the concept. What happens here is that the association between the signifier (sound pattern) and the signified (concept) cannot be simply created by an individual; it has to be sanctioned by the community. In fact, all the signs in a language are part of a social contract to which the community agrees and an individual cannot tamper with it.

Language as a Social Phenomenon:

Language is the product of the community, which is external to the individual users. A language consists of numerous signs, which every user has to reproduce in order to create meaning. The association of the 'signifier' and the 'signified' within a sign has to be established in the social or external domain. Here, an individual has no authority to change the associations. As such, what an individual has to do is but to fit into an already existing system of signs in order to express himself. As such, language is a social institution, which is external to the individual who use it.

Psychological Nature of the Linguistic Sign:

Language is a system of signs where a sign consist of a signifier and a signified. What happens in language system is that certain sound patterns are associated with certain ideas or concepts. These associations can be localised in the brain of the individual speakers. When an individual starts a conversation, he has to convert his concept or ideas (c) into an acoustic or auditory image (s). This process of linking the idea with the acoustic image is a psychological process. Then that auditory image is reproduced through the vocal organs and the sound is created. The sound eventually travels through the external media and reaches the ear of the

listener. The sound (s) received by the ear then travels to the brain as the acoustic image which eventually gets translated into the idea or concept (c). This process of linking the sound to the concept (s'!c) is also a psychological process. Thus, the process of expressing meaning through language is a psychological phenomenon.

Langue and Parole:

Saussure claimed that a language, *langue*, is the virtual system possessed by all those who form part of the same speech community that makes it possible for them to understand and be understood by other members of that community. *Parole* is the utterances, the texts, that individuals produce and understand making use of the system, ie. *langue*. *Langue* pre-exists and is independent of individual users. On the other hand, *parole* is dependent on individual user's capacity and is the concrete instance of the use of the system of *langue.*

In order to explain the difference between *langue* and *parole*, Saussure takes the example of the game of chess. Here, *langue* consists of the rules of the game and *parole* consists of the moves an individual player makes while playing the game. Apart from it, Saussure also talks about *faculté de langage*—the language faculty that all people possess, as distinct from the particular *langues* they speak. However, he does not make a consistent three-way division of *langue-parole-langage*, particularly because he sometimes uses *langue* to mean language generally, as a pan-human attribute. So very often, *langue* and *langage* are often seen synonymous to one another in Saussure's writings.

Value:

Now we know that a linguistic sign consists of a signifier and a signified. Each signifier and each signified is a value produced by the difference between it and all the other signifiers and signifieds in the system. It is not the sound as such that signifies; there is, after all, much variation in the pronunciation of all speech sounds. The French /r/, for example, exhibits wide phonetic variation; indeed, analysis of speech sample recordings shows subtle differences in every utterance of the "same" sound. But if

when saying the word *roi* 'king' a speaker produces Standard French /•wa/ , or /rwa/ with a rolled r, or /Rwa/ with the Parisian working-class guttural r (as on records by Édith Piaf), the same signifier is perceived, so long as it is distinct from *moi* 'me', *doigt* 'finger' or any other word.

Likewise, if an animal of a certain species comes into view a French speaker would exclaim *Un mouton!*, and an English speaker *A sheep!*. But, the linguistic values of *mouton* and *sheep* are different. The signified of *mouton* includes the whole animal or some of its meat, whereas the signified of *sheep* covers only the animal on the hoof. Its meat is *mutton*, an entirely different sign. This means that the signified belongs to a particular language just as much as does the signifier. The world we experience with its categories of animals, things, colours and so on—does not exist before language. The signifier and the signified are created together, with the particular segmentations that distinguish one language from another, one culture from another. Every word or term or unit within the system is connected to an entourage of other units, related to it either syntagmatically (i.e., the units that can come before or after it in an utterance) or associatively (i.e., the units with which it has something in common in form or meaning). The relationships of difference in these two domains generate the value of the unit. So, ultimately, is becomes clear that no linguistic sign exists in isolation.

The Arbitrariness of the Linguistic Sign

For Saussure, the first principle of the linguistic sign is that the link between a signifier and a signified is radically arbitrary. An ancient doctrine was that linguistic signifiers are mimetic in nature, given the existence of apparently mimetic signifiers such as French *fouet* and its English counterpart *whip*, in each of which can be heard the crack of a whip. However, it is a matter of interpretation: for someone who hears the sound, the mimetic link is real, despite the French word's etymological derivation from Latin *fagus* or 'beech'. The Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness of the sign maintains that, whether or not there is such a mimetic link, the sign operates in the same way: *fouet* and *whip* are no more "true" for those who hear the crack of a whip in the word than for those of us who do not

hear it. Nor are they more or less true than a word such as *livre* or *book*, in which a mimetic link between sound and idea seems far-fetched. However, this principle of arbitrariness does not necessarily apply in the relationships among signs; even if the linguistic sign is arbitrary, it is impossible for anyone to change it. However, a sign may get change over the course of time, specifically by bringing about a shift in the relationship between the signified and signifier.

Linearity of the Signifier and the Associative and Syntagmatic Axes:

In the linguistic system, the signs unfold in a single dimension, a linear one. This frame has a fundamental implication for a language: it has two axes. Each element of a language occupies an associative axis, which determines its value vis-à-vis other elements, and a syntagmatic axis, which specifies which elements can and cannot precede it and follow it in an utterance, sometimes inflecting its meaning. The associative axis is also known as the "paradigmatic" axis. Whereas the paradigmatic axis draws the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the syntagmatic axis is concerned with drawing the relationships between different signifiers in order to construct meaningful sentences.

Mutability and Immutability:

It is agreed by every scholar that every element of a language is subject to change, to evolution. No language is in the same state as it was one hundred years ago. Even then, paradoxically, a language is immutable in the sense that no speaker can change it on his or her own. One can introduce an innovation into *parole*, which is confined to the level of the individual utterance; but for this innovation to enter into the language requires it to be accepted by the entire speech community. Because, the value of each element derives from its relation to all the other elements, any change in the system affects the inter-relationships among the signs and, thus, produces a new system, a new *langue*. Here lies the immutability of *langue*: no individual can change it; the mass of speakers have to accept a change, for it to become part of the language. In so doing, they do not make a change *within* the language. Rather, they move the whole language forward into a new state of language.

This mutability and the immutability of language result from the arbitrariness of the sign. Were there some rational connection between signified and signifier, it would allow speakers of the language to intervene either to prevent inevitable change, or to initiate changes of their own. Saussure did not deny the validity of the usual explanation given in his day for immutability, namely the historical transmission of language. It excludes any possibility of sudden or general change because generations always overlap and because of the amount of imitative effort involved in mastering our mother tongue. However, Saussure insisted that the essential explanation lies with the arbitrary nature of the sign, which protects the language from any attempt at modifying it, because the general populace would be unable to discuss the matter, even if they were more conscious of language than they are. For something to be put into question, it must rest on a norm that is reasonable. Immutability has a social dimension as well. The fact that the language is an integral part of everyone's life creates a collective resistance to change initiated by any individual. In addition, it has a historical dimension: the language being situated in time, solidarity with the past checks the freedom to choose.

Synchrony and Diachrony:

A language has both its social and historical dimensions. The reality of a language cannot be fully comprehended without taking account of both these dimensions, in conjunction with the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. The state of a language at a particular point of time is the result of both social and historical forces working on it. Our attention to one dimension without attending the other will always restrict us from a complete understanding of the language system. A language develops with the passage of time i.e., in the course of history; at every point of history, different social forces are at work in affecting the language thereby asserting importance of the social dimension of the linguistic system. Therefore, a language is not free from these two dimensions.

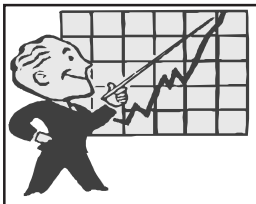
Having considered the importance of these two dimensions, it has to be understood that the study of a language must be both synchronic and

diachronic. Synchronic analysis is aimed at identifying the elements of a system and their values at a given point in time. Diachronic analysis is the comparison of two or more states of a language, as they exist at different times. It has to mentioned here that the so-called 'historical' linguistics of Saussure's day was not diachronic; it claimed instead to trace the development of isolate elements, like a vowel, or an inflection, across the centuries as if this element had a history, a life, independent of the system of which it was a part at each particular moment. It was Saussure who invented diachronic linguistics and differentiated it from the so-called historical linguistics. However, it must be noted that his diachronic approach of language was inseparable from the synchronic approach.



LET US KNOW

It will be a fruitful exercise on your part to relate the ideas of Saussure with thinkers of later periods like Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin etc. For your greater understanding of the concepts in this unit, references have been drawn from other texts of Saussure too because Saussure developed most of his key concepts in some other essays compiled in the aforementioned book.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Discuss how Saussure establishes language as a system of signs.

Q 3: What do you mean by *Synchrony and Diachrony*? Why is it important to do synchronic and diachronic study of language?

Q 4: Explore the nature of the linguistic sign.

1.6 RECEPTION OF SAUSSURE AND HIS IDEAS

Ferdinand de Saussure's "The Object of Study" can be termed as the foundation stone of Structuralism, about which you have already studied in the previous course. The idea of Structuralist theory has achieved the

status largely on the account of Saussure's "Object of Study" which made it the major linguistic theme of the later years after his death. Every later linguist was some way or the other got influenced by the ideas of Saussure regarding the system of languages. The essay forms the basis of a concept of language as a vast network of structures and systems. Saussure's essay and specially his book *Course on General Linguistics* had diverse kinds of influence on Humanities scholarship in the last century.

Other thinkers have tried to establish correlations between linguistic structures and cultural structures because of the belief that it is language that determines our cultural and social experience. As such, every other social and cultural institution can be understood with the use of Structuralism. The principles and methods employed by Structuralism were later adapted in diverse fields like Literary studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis etc by intellectuals like Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. These scholars took inspiration from Saussure's ideas on language; but extended them to diverse levels.



1.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt that Saussure has successfully defined language as a system of signs. Language consists of words and the words are nothing but certain signs. So apparently, there is not much difference between the linguistic system and any other system of signs like dumb and deaf alphabets or street signs or military signals. It is also mentioned that language is a social product. The signs in a language have to be sanctioned by the community and the individual has no power to change the associations within the signs. We have learnt that Linguistic structure involves both psychological and physiological process. The process of signification where a sound pattern is associated with an idea is a psychological process. On the other hand, the sound pattern being transformed into a real sound with the application of the vocal organs is a physiological process. We have learnt that Language is a social institution;

but it is different from political, judicial and other social institutions. Language, being a system of signs, can and should be studied as a branch of Semiology. Such a step would expand the scope of linguistic studies and transcend the barriers of cultural studies and other human sciences.



1.8 FURTHER READING

Barry, Peter. (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

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Harris, R. (1987). *Reading Saussure*. London: Duckworth.

Holdcroft, D. (1991). *Saussure: Signs, System, and Arbitrariness*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds). (2005). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson.

Sanders, Carol. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*. London: Cambridge University Press.

1.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *The Courses in General Linguistics is* based on the class notes of Saussure… …in course of his classes, he developed his ideas clearly… …he had to start from questioning the meaning of such basic terms like *langue*, *language*, *parole… …*in the third and final course, he could finally describe language as a system whose every element is attached to every other element… …the book offers explanations of the key concepts like langue and parole, nature of linguistic signs, language as a system of signs, signifier and signified, diachrony and synchrony etc.

Ans to Q 2: language or *langue* is a system of… …sign consists of two elements… …a concept and an acoustic image… …the images are not visual but acoustic or oral-auditory… … our conception of things, actions, and ideas that are part of our language… …certain psychological schemas evoked in the brain by certain combinations of sounds… …two components of sign: 'signifier' and 'signified'… …the association between the signifier and the signified cannot be simply created by an individual… …it has to be sanctioned by the community.

Ans to Q 3: Language has both social and historical dimensions… …language at a particular point of time is the result of both social and historical forces… …language develops in the course of history… …at every point of history different social forces affect the language providing the social dimension… …Synchronic analysis identifies elements of a system and their values at a given point in time… …Diachronic analysis compares two or more states of a language at different times… …diachronic is not historical… …'historical' linguistics was not diachronic… …Saussure's diachronic approach of language was inseparable from synchronic approach.

Ans to Q 4: A language consists of numerous signs… …sign consists of 'signifier' and 'signified'… …certain sound patterns are associated with certain ideas or concepts… …these associations can be localised in the brain of the speakers… …converting concept (c) into an acoustic or auditory image (s)… …psychological process… …auditory image is reproduced through the vocal organs … …physiological… …sign is arbitrary… …the society must sanction the relations between signifier and signified.



1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss, after Saussure, the problematics in the scientific study of any language.

Q 2: On what grounds, do you consider Saussure's "The Object of Study" a pioneering text of Structuralist literary studies and modern linguistics? Explain.

Q 3: Explain with illustrations how Saussure establishes the psychological and physiological nature of the process of language articulation and speech.

Q 4: How does Saussure claim a place for linguistics within the purview of Semiotics? Explain.

Q 5: How does Saussure establish the importance of society in the existence and functioning of a language? How does the scope and role of an individual differ from that of the society in relation to the use of a language? Discuss.

Q 6: In what way, did Saussure's ideas of language, inspire the future scholars of literary, cultural studies and other human sciences?

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UNIT 2: ROMAN JAKOBSON: "LINGUISTICS AND POETICS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Roman Jakobson: Life and Works

2.4 Reading the Text: "Linguistics and Poetics"

2.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

2.6 Reception of Jakobson and His Ideas

2.7 Let us Sum up

2.8 Further Reading

2.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.10 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the relationship linguistics and poetics
- locate "Linguistics and Poetics" in the history of modern linguistics and Structuralism
- realise the necessity of studying Poetics as part of Linguistics
- understand different factors affecting verbal communication and different functions of language
- explore the relationship between poetry and other verbal acts from a linguistic point of view

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces us to Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), one of the most powerful minds in the 20th century intellectual history. As a founding member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and, later, a founder of Prague Linguistic Circle, most of Jakobson's works comprise highly technical writings on grammar and phonology. However, his works often crossed the boundaries of linguistics and indulged in the domain of topics of universal

interest and importance. Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French structuralist, declared how the works of Jakobson had been instrumental in developing his own critical ideas on language and literature. Jakobson's works had immense contribution in defining modern linguistics and gaining its recognition as an independent science. He expanded the borders of linguistics to incorporate such areas as Phonetics, Semantics, Poetics, Slavic studies, Language Acquisition and Pathology and Mythology. He was influenced by the works of earlier linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure and Baudouin de Courtenay; but his concept of linguistics and his introduction of structural methods were original and influenced linguists all over the world. A prolific writer, his works include books and articles on linguistic subjects, mythology, and epic poetry and metrics. Often referred to as the father of modern structural linguistics, Jakobson developed sophisticated theories of language and communication that had significant effects on other disciplines like anthropology, art criticism, and brain research also. Among his ideas and theories on languages and communications, two ideas deserve special mention because of their influence over literary studies. The first is his identification of the metaphor and the metonymy as models for two fundamental ways of organising discourse that can be seen in any kind of cultural production. The other idea is connected to his attempt to understand 'literariness' or to define in linguistics terms what makes a verbal message a work of art. It is an attempt to establish a relationship between linguistics and poetics, which is later proven an immense contribution to modern linguistics and literary studies. The essay that we are going to read in this unit deals with this issue: the relationship between linguistics and poetics. As we read this unit on "Linguistics and Poetics", we should also try to examine how this essay has inspired a generation of thinkers of different human sciences. It will be a fruitful exercise on our part to relate the ideas of Jakobson to his predecessors like Saussure and Baudouin de Courtenay as well as to his contemporaries such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin etc.

2.3 ROMAN JAKOBSON: LIFE AND WORKS

Roman Osipovich Jakobson was born in Moscow to a prominent industrialist Osip Abramoviè Jakobson and chemist Anna Jakovlevna Jakobson on 11th October 1896. They were of Jewish descent. Showing keen interest in the study of languages at a tender age, Jakobson went to the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, Moscow to study languages. Thereafter he went to study at the Historical-Philological Faculty of University of Moscow. Among the students of languages, he soon became a leading figure and with the help of other students, he founded the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1914, and remained its president till 1920. This Circle took active part in avant-garde art and poetry in Moscow. He organised intensive fieldwork in Russian dialectology and folklore during the summer vacations of 1915 and 1916. He was awarded a Master's degree by Moscow University in 1918. During the period between 1918 and 1920, he worked as a Research Associate at Moscow University.

Jakobson was initially an ardent supporter of the Bolshevik revolution but soon became disillusioned with it because of the increasing of state conservatism and hostility that came on the way of poetic activities. He went to Prague in 1920 to work as a translator for the first Soviet Red Cross Mission to Czechoslovakia. He officially became a Czech citizen in 1937 and remained in Czechoslovakia until the Nazi occupation in 1939. Jakobson was the founding Vice-president of the Prague Linguistic Circle, which was founded on 6th October 1926. He attended the First International Congress of Linguists held in The Hague in April 1928. In October 1929, Jakobson attended the First International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague and took the responsibility of the head of the East Slavic section (Ostslavisches Referat) of the journal *Slavische Rundschau*, edited by F. Spina and G. Gesemann and published by Walter de Gruyter and Co., Berlin, from 1929 until 1939.

In the year of 1930, Jakobson received his Ph.D from German University in Prague for his dissertation *Über den Versbau der Serbokroatischen Volksepen*. In December 1930, he attended the

International Phonological Conference held in Prague. He became a professor at Masaryk University in Brno in 1933. During these days, he developed a close relationship with the noted Czech linguists and literary figures like Nikolai Trubetzkoy, René Wellek and Jan Mukaøovský. At the same time, during this period, he made remarkable contribution to Czech academics with his studies of Czech verse.

Towards the end of 1931, Jakobson moved to Brno and in 1933, he took up a post of an Assistant Professor at Masaryk University, Brno. He remained a visiting professor at the same university during the period from 1934 to 1937. From 1937 to 1939, he worked as an Associate Professor of Russian Philology and Old Czech Literature at the same university. He attended the International Congress of Phonetic Sciences held in Amsterdam in July 1932. In September 1933, he attended the Third International Congress of Linguists held on Rome. During the months of July and August in 1935, he visited Bulgaria. In August-September 1936, he attended the Fourth International Congress of Linguists held in Copenhagen on 21 March 1938, and lectured on the fundamentals of phonological analysis at Prague Linguistic Circle.

In the month of July in 1938, he attended the Third International Congress of Phonetic Sciences held at the University of Ghent. After Czechoslovakia, was occupied by the Nazis, he left Brno 1939 and in the month of April fled to Denmark via Berlin. There he got associated with the University of Copenhagen as a visiting Professor. There he got the opportunity to work with the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle, and such intellectuals as Louis Hjelmslev. He left Denmark for Norway in early September and started working as a visiting professor at the University of Oslo. In 1940, following the Nazi invasion of Norway on April 9, he walked across the border to Sweden, where he continued his work at the Karolinska Hospital on topics like aphasia and language competence. Here he joined the University of Uppsala as a visiting professor.

Following the speculation of a Nazi invasion of Sweden, he left for the United States in 1941 and reached New York on June 4. In the year of 1942, he got appointed to the Faculté des Lettres, École Libre des Hautes

Études, New York, as Professor of General Linguistics, and to the Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientale et Slave as Professor of Slavic Philology. He continued these jobs during the period from 1942 to 1946. From 1943 to 1946, he served as a Visiting Professor of Linguistics at Columbia University. He became one of the founding members of the Linguistic Circle of New York and its journal *Word* in 1944. In the year of 1946, he got appointed to newly formed Thomas G. Masaryk Chair of Czechoslovak Studies at Columbia University He occupied this post until 1949. In 1949, he was appointed the Samuel Hazzard Cross Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and of General Linguistics at Harvard University where he remained until his retirement in 1967. In April 1957, he was concurrently appointed to Massachusetts Institute of Technology as visiting Professor. He continued in his role at MIT until becoming emeritus in 1970. He became emeritus at Harvard University in 1965.

Roman Jakobson died in Cambridge, Massachusetts on 18 July 1982.

2.4 READING THE TEXT : LINGUISTICS AND POETICS

Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics" is almost a kind of summery of what he had been developing through numerous research papers about language and linguistics. This essay deals with the relationship between linguistics and poetics. He begins the essay by explaining a chief characteristic of 'poetics' that poetics deals primarily with the question, *What makes a verbal message a work of art?* Because the main subject of poetics is the specific differences of verbal art in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behaviour, poetics is entitled to the leading place in literary studies. To explain it further, he takes the example of other forms of art. Poetics deals with the problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure. As linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics can also be called as an integral part of linguistics.

However, there must be diverse types of arguments against this claim that poetics should be part of linguistics. It is evident that many devices

studied by poetics are not confined to verbal art. There is every possibility of transposing a novel like *Wuthering Heights* into a motion picture, or medieval legends into frescoes and miniatures, or any tale into music, ballet, and graphic art. Even epics like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can also be represented through comics, by preserving certain structural features of their plot despite the disappearance of their verbal shape. Blake's illustrations to the *Divina Commedia* are proof that different arts are compatible and translatable to one another. Therefore, it is evident that many poetic features belong not just to the science of language but to the whole theory of signs, that is, to general semiotics. This observation can be applied not only to verbal art but also to all varieties of language because language shares many properties with some other systems of signs.

There can be a second objection, which is not specific to literature alone: the question of the relations between the word and the world concerns not only verbal art but actually all kinds of discourse. It is expected from linguistics to explore all possible problems of relation between discourse and the 'universe of discourse': what of this universe is verbalised by a given discourse and how is it verbalised. However, the truth-values are always found to be extra-linguistic entities that apparently go beyond the bounds of poetics and of linguistics in general.

Jakobson refers to a current conception that, in comparison to linguistics, poetics always is concerned with evaluation. Jakobson asserts that this differentiation between the two fields is based on a fallacious interpretation of the contrast between the structure of poetry and other types of verbal structure. The wrong conception is that verbal structures are 'casual', designless in nature compared to the 'noncasual', purposeful character of poetic language. Actually, as Jakobson argues, any verbal behaviour is goal-oriented, but the aims may be different. It is the conformity of the means used to the effect aimed at which remains the main problem that preoccupies inquirers into the diverse kinds of verbal communication. There is a close correspondence between the question of linguistic phenomena expanding in space and time and the spatial and temporal spread of literary models.

Jakobson, here, moves towards explaining another common yet fallacious trend of terminological confusion between 'literary studies' and 'criticism' which, as result, tempts the students of literature to replace the description of the intrinsic values of a literary work by a subjective, censorious verdict. The label 'literary critic' applied to an investigator of literature is as erroneous as 'grammatical (or lexical) critic' would be applied to a linguist. As syntactic and morphologic research cannot be supplanted by a normative grammar, in the similar manner, no writing expressing a critic's own tastes and opinions on literature can be treated as an objective scholarly analysis of verbal art. That is why; Jakobson asserts that, there must be a clear-cut distinction between literary studies and criticism.

Jakobson equates literary studies with linguistics on the basis that both consist of two sets of problems: synchrony and diachrony. Here, poetics remains the focal point of literary studies. The synchronic description envisages not only the literary production of any given stage but also that part of the literary tradition, which for the stage in question has remained vital or has been revived. The selection of classics and their reinterpretation by a novel trend is a substantial problem of synchronic literary studies. It has to be noted here that synchronic poetics, like synchronic linguistics, is not to be confused with statics; any stage discriminates between more conservative and more innovatory forms. Any contemporary stage is experienced in its temporal dynamics, and, on the other hand, the historical approach both in poetics and in linguistics is concerned not only with changes but also with continuous, enduring, static factors. A thoroughly comprehensive historical poetics or history of language is a superstructure to be built on a series of successive synchronic descriptions.

A separation of poetics from linguistics can be allowed only when the field of linguistics appears to be unnecessarily restricted, for example, when the sentence is viewed by some linguists as the highest analyzable construction or when the scope of linguistics is confined to grammar alone or uniquely to non-semantic questions of external form or to the inventory of denotative devices with no reference to free variations. It has clearly been pointed out by Voegelin that the two most important and related

problems which face structural linguistics, namely, a revision of 'the monolithic hypothesis of language' and a concern with 'the interdependence of diverse structures within one language'. For any speech community or for any speaker, there exists a unity of language, but this over-all code represents a system of interconnected sub-codes. Each language encompasses several concurrent patterns, which are each characterised by a different function. That is why, language must be examined taking into consideration all the variety of its functions.

Jakobson, thus, before discussing the poetic function of language, tries to define its place among the other functions of language. To draw an outline of these functions, a concise survey of the constitutive factors in any speech event, in any act of verbal communication is required. In a speech event, the ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative, the message requires a CONTEXT, which can be understood by the addressee and either verbal or capable of being verbalised. There has to be a CODE, which is fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (the encoder and decoder). Finally, there must be a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. All these factors that constitute the verbal communication can be schematised as below:

CONTEXT

ADDRESSER MESSAGE ADDRESSEE

CONTACT

CODE

Now, of these six factors, each determines a function of language different from the others. Though these six basic aspects of language are easily distinguishable, Jakobson claims that there can hardly be any verbal message that fulfils only one function. This diversity is caused by a hierarchical order of functions. The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function among all the six functions.

Messages with an orientation towards the CONTEXT are often called REFERENTIAL and they serve the denotative or cognitive function. All imperative sentences, political speeches and odes make use of conative function of language. Second person pronouns frequently occur in this function. Commands and prayers also employ this function.

The EMOTIVE or 'expressive' function is focused on the ADDRESSER, and it aims at the direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned. Therefore, the term 'emotive' is used to designate its function. The purely emotive stratum in language is presented by the interjections. They differ from the means of referential language both by their sound pattern (peculiar sound sequences or even sounds elsewhere unusual) and by their syntactic role (they are not components but equivalents of sentences). If we analyse language from the standpoint of the information it carries, we cannot restrict the notion of information to the cognitive aspect of language. A man, using expressive features to indicate his angry or ironic attitude, conveys ostensible information, and evidently, this verbal behaviour cannot be likened to such nonsemiotic, nutritive activities as 'eating grapefruit'. The difference between [big] and the emphatic prolongation of the vowel [bi:g] is a conventional, coded, linguistic feature like the difference between the short and long vowel in such Czech pairs as [vi] 'you' and [vi:] 'knows', but in the latter pair the differential information is phonemic and in the former emotive. As long as we are interested in phonemic invariants, the English /i/ and /I: / appear to be mere variants of one and the same phoneme, but if we are concerned with emotive units, the relation between the invariant and the variants is reversed: length and shortness are invariants implemented by variable phonemes. To explain this emotive function, Jakobson gives the example of how an actor of Stanislavsky's Moscow Theatre was asked to make forty different messages from the phrase *Segodnja vecerom* 'This evening,' by diversifying its expressive tint. He made a list of some forty emotional situations, and then emitted the given phrase in accordance with each of these situations, which his audience had to recognise only from the changes

in the sound shape of the same two words. Stanislavsky wrote down some fifty situations framing the same elliptic sentence and made of it fifty corresponding messages for a tape record. Most of the messages were correctly and circumstantially decoded by the listeners.

The third important function is the CONATIVE function, which is conditioned by the orientation toward the ADDRESSEE. It finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative, which syntactically, morphologically, and often even phonemically deviate from other nominal and verbal categories.

Jakobson here refers to the traditional model of language as elucidated particularly by Bühler. He claimed that language is confined to the three functions as we have discussed above — emotive, conative, and referential. The three apexes of this model are the first person of the addresser, the second person of the addressee, and the 'third person' or the–'someone or something' spoken of. However, Jakobson observes that there are three more constitutive factors of verbal communication and three corresponding functions of language in existence.

Thereafter, Jakobson comes to discuss the PHATIC function of language, which corresponds to CONTACT. There are messages that primarily serve to establish, to retain, or to discontinue communication, or to check whether the channel works ('Hello, do you hear me?'), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm attention ('Are you listening?' or 'Lend me your ears!'). Words like 'well', 'bye', an infant's sounds to his mother and expressions like "Nice weather for this time of the year!", "How do you do?", "Hello, is that Bob?" belong to the phatic function of language. It is a very useful social function of language.

A distinction has been made in modem logic between two levels of language, 'object language' speaking of objects and 'metalanguage' speaking of language. However, metalanguage is not only a necessary scientific tool utilised by logicians and linguists; it plays also an important role in our everyday language. We practice metalanguage without realising the metalingual character of our operations. Whenever the addresser and/ or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech

is focused on the CODE: it performs a METALINGUAL function. It can be seen in case of children learning the meanings of words during the process of language learning. Meaning or message is conveyed when the addresser and the addressee share the same code. The lack of understanding the code results in expressions like "I did not understand" or "What do you mean?" Jakobson gives an interesting dialogue to convey the metalingual function of language. Any process of language learning, in particular, child acquisition of the mother tongue, makes wide use of such metalingual operations. Similarly, and aphasia may often be defined as a loss of ability for metalingual operations.

After all these factors, what is left is the message itself. The POETIC function of language focuses on the message for its own sake. A verbal act performs poetic function when it draws the attention of the reader to its own diction, sound patterns and syntax. The verbal acts, which perform poetic function, focus on the aesthetic features of language like metaphor, simile, paradox, irony, assonance, consonance etc. After listing the six compulsory elements in each utterance namely sender, receiver, context, message, contact, code and the six corresponding functions of each utterance namely emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual, Jakobson asserts that all instances of language fulfil at least one of these six functions. It means that in each speech act, one function is predominant but others may be a little suppressed. Thus in a poetic utterance, the poetic function will be predominant but it will be accompanied by other functions at a lower level. Poetic function does not operate in literature exclusively. It is just predominant over other functions. Jakobson gives a beautiful example to prove that even ordinary conversation may contain the poetic function of language. Anyone who says, "She sells sea shells at the sea shore" is making a plain statement in poetic language. Jakobson refers to a girl who was always heard saying 'Horrible Harry'. She never said Dreadful Harry or Frightful Harry. Though horrible, dreadful, frightful mean the same thing. When asked why she said only horrible, she said, "Because horrible suits better." Here, she was unconsciously using a literary, poetic device called, paronomasia, similarly, one would always say Joan & Margery and not Margery & Joan because the first combination is smoother.

It is important to note that this Poetic function of language cannot be productively studied out of touch with the general problems of language. Again, on the other hand, the scrutiny of a language requires a thorough consideration of its poetic function. To reduce the sphere of poetic function only to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be an unwise oversimplification. In any kind of verbal art, Poetic function is not the sole function but only a dominant, determining function. On the other hand, in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, with the assertion on the playfulness of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. That is why; linguistics cannot simply limit poetic function to the field of poetry only. Jakobson further claims that the linguistic study of the poetic function must overstep the limits of poetry, and, on the other hand, the linguistic scrutiny of poetry cannot limit itself to the poetic function. The differences among the diverse poetic genres implicate participation of the other verbal functions at different levels along with the dominant poetic function. For example, in epic poetry, which is focused on the third person, there is strong involvement of the referential function of language. Similarly, lyric poetry, which is oriented toward the first person, is intimately linked with the emotive function of language.

Thus, after the cursory discussion of the basic functions of verbal communication, Jakobson draws a scheme of the function corresponding to the factors of verbal communication:

REFERENTIAL

EMOTIVE POETIC CONATIVE

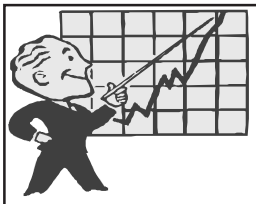
PHATIC

METALINGUAL

Here, now, comes a series of important questions: what will be the empirical linguistic criterion of the poetic function? What is the indispensable feature inherent in any piece of poetry? To find an answer to these questions, Jakobson recalls the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour: *selection* and *combination.* If 'child' is the topic of the message,

the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, doses, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalence: similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity. On the other hand, the combination, or the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.* In poetry one syllable is equalised with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress. Similarly, prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary, no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause.

Jakobson clarifies that poetics may be defined as that part of linguistics, which treats the poetic function in its relationship to the other functions of language. Poetics in the wider sense of the word deals with the poetic function not only in poetry, where this function is superimposed upon the other functions of language, but also outside of poetry, when some other function is superimposed upon the poetic function.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does Jakobson prove the similarities between poetics and linguistics?

Q 2: What do you mean by the 'function' of language? On what basis are these functions categorised?

Q 3: What do you mean by 'literariness'? How is it formed?

2.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

Factors of Communication and the Corresponding Functions of Language:

Jakobson argues that any act of verbal communication comprises of six elements or factors: a. a context, b. an addresser, c. an addressee,

d. a contact between an addresser and addressee, e. a common code and f. a message. Each factor is the focal point of an oriented relation, or function that operates between the message and the factor. Thus, there are six functions corresponding to the six factors. These factors are: a. Referential, b. Emotive, c. Conative, d. Phatic, f. Metalingual and g. Poetic. The referential function is oriented toward the context while the emotive function is oriented toward the addresser. The conative function is oriented toward the addressee while the phatic function serves to establish, prolong or discontinue communication. The metalingual function is used to establish mutual agreement on the code and the poetic function puts the focus on the message for its own sake.

The Functions of Language – Hierarchy and Ranking:

In any verbal act, each factor of communication must be present and concordant to make the communication possible. Relations have to be established between all of the factors, particularly between the message and the other factors. The function of the verbal act depends on the factor to which it is oriented. Where more than one function is present, they may exist in a kind of relationship based on hierarchy of their importance. Various criteria can be used to establish the functional hierarchy. There can be an intention-based criterion where the dominant function is the one that answers the question, 'With what intention was this message transmitted?' and the secondary functions are there to support it. Since the intention can be hidden, the function that is dominant in terms of overt degree of presence may not be dominant in terms of intention. There can be distinction between direct and indirect manifestations of intention, which correlate to the opposition between actual and overt functions. In addition, we need to distinguish between cause and effect functions, as well as ends and means functions. For example, when the phatic function is overactivated, it can trigger the poetic function; over activation can be used for aesthetic ends, and in this case the poetic function is an end and the phatic function is a means.

Relationship between Function and Genres:

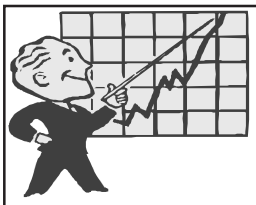
The presence or absence of the functions and their hierarchical positioning or structure can be used to describe the classes or types of

units of verbal act. Jakobson claims that, what characterises poetry and distinguishes it from other genres is not so much the presence of the poetic function as its dominance. By identifying the functional hierarchical configuration or by specifying the secondary dominant function, we can create a typology. Thus, Jakobson recognises that epic poetry focuses on the third person while lyric poetry focuses on the first-person. Similarly, poetry of the second person strongly involves the referential function of language.

The strength of a function in a particular configuration (the target configuration) may be interpreted dynamically as resulting from an upward or downward "thrust" applied to the function as it appeared in a configuration (the source configuration) considered as the source of this particular configuration. If we are going to analyse changes in the functional balance, this implies a comparison between two models, a source and a target. For example, in epic poetry (or narrative poetry) the referential function is intensified as compared to lyric poetry, while the emotive function is diminished. This dynamic model seems useful from a descriptive standpoint. Certain works and certain genres appear to be based on emphasising and/ or deemphasising one or more functions. For example, hyper-realism in painting is an exaggeration of the referential function.

Poetic Function and the Axes of Selection and Combination:

Jakobson asserts that in case of Poetic function, the intrinsic linguistic criterion can be the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour: *selection* and *combination.* If someone has to speak on 'child' as the topic of the message, the speaker may select one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect. Then, in order to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, doses, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the base of equivalence: similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity. On the other hand, the combination, or the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. Thus, the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How are different functions of language interrelated?

Q 5: What do you mean by the poetic function?

2.6 RECEPTION OF JAKOBSON AND HIS IDEAS

Despite being highly original and innovative in his formulation of linguistic ideas, Jakobson did not come into prominence in terms of popularity and recognition until the late period of his life. However, within Russia, Jakobson's influence can be seen far palpable in the development of Formalism. One of the early motives of Formalism was cantered on what Jakobson had been trying to develop by the term called 'literariness'. While the Russian Formalists tries to understand 'literariness' in terms of the 'defamiliarising' aspect of verbal art, the Prague school of Formalists adopted Jakobson's idea of 'function' of languages. His discussion of the poetic function of language in terms of the construction of the 'literariness' is further more influential in the history of literary and cultural criticism. He claimed that the formation of 'literariness' or the poetic function takes place on the basis of two axes: selection and combination. This idea of the two axes was later applied in the study of all forms of cultural structures. This process further paved the way for structuralism.

Structuralists like Claude Lévi-Strauss openly admitted the influence that Jakobson had on his formative periods. He met Jakobson in America in 1940 and this meeting had lot of influence on Lévi-Strauss. In his definition of the structure of primitive thinking of men as binary, with the involvement of a presence and an absence, Lévi-Strauss developed the concept from Jakobson's idea that the smallest sound elements in any language (the phonemes) are developed as binary opposites.

Three principal ideas put by Jakobson in the field of linguistics have remained highly influential even today. They are: linguistic typology, markedness, and linguistic universals. These three concepts are deeply interconnected to one another. Typology is the classification of

languages in terms of shared grammatical features. Markedness is a study of how certain forms of grammatical organisation are more "optimised" than others. 'Linguistic universals' is the study of the general features of languages in the world. Besides, he has also influenced Nicolas Ruwet's paradigmatic analysis of languages. Jakobson has also influenced Friedemann Schulz von Thun's 'four sides model', as well as Michael Silverstein's metapragmatics, Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication and ethnopoetics. Besides, the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan and philosophy of Giorgio Agamben also bear traces of influences from the works of Jakobson. Most of Jakobson's works were centered round the study of Slavic languages. As such, for researchers specialising in Slavics and Slavic linguistics in North America, the value of Jakobson's works is enormous.



2.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt that Jakobson's model of the functions of language distinguishes six elements, or factors of communication, that are necessary for communication to occur: context, addresser, addressee, contact, common code and message. Each factor is the focal point of a relation or function that operates between the message and the factor. The functions are: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual and poetic. A verbal message performs emotive function when it is directed towards or aimed at the speaker / addresser / sender. It indicates the sender's attitude towards what he is speaking / writing about. It expresses emotions. A verbal act, which is oriented towards the addressee/ listener/receiver, is said to perform the conative function. When verbal message is oriented towards the context, then the corresponding function of language is called referential or denotative. When messages are used to establish or prolong contact, the function they serve is called phatic function. When messages are oriented to the code itself, the function is called metalingual. A verbal act performs poetic function when it draws the attention

of the reader to its own diction, sound patterns and syntax. The poetic function constitutes the 'literariness' of verbal act and it takes place on the basis of two axes: selection and combination.



2.8 FURTHER READING

Armstrong, Daniel & Cornelis H. Van Schooneveld. (Eds.). (1977). *Roman Jakobson: Echoes of His Scholarship*.

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Bertens, Hans. (2003). *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London: Rutledge.

Culler, Jonathan D. (2000). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford.

Holenstein, E. (1975). *Roman Jakobson's Approach to Language: Phenomenological Structuralism*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press,

Jakobson, Roman. (1985). *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time*. ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2005). *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson.

2.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Both deal with verbal messages and their structure… …both literature and language are part of the theory of signs i.e. semiotics and semiology… …being sign-systems, both are concerned with meaning generation… …both deal with their data (literature and language) objectively and in a non judgmental way… …synchronic and diachronic approaches are equally applicable and used in linguistics and poetics.

Ans to Q 2: Factors of verbal communication… …Addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, code… …centrality of a particular factor

corresponds to a particular function… …emotive, conative, referential, poetic, Phatic, metalingual.

Ans to Q 3: 'literariness' makes verbal act a work of art… …poetics… …poetic function of language… …dominance of the factor of the message… …formed through the axes of selection and combination… …metaphorical and metonymical.

Ans to Q 4: All six functions may be present in a verbal act… …they remain in hierarchical structure… …dominance of a particular function decides the nature of the verbal act… …poetic function dominates 'literariness' or verbal art… …within verbal art, hierarchy of function decides the genre of the verbal artwork.

Ans to Q 5: Poetic function focuses on the message for its own sake… …draws the attention of the reader to its own diction, sound patterns and syntax… …metaphor, simile, paradox, irony, assonance, consonance… …in a poetic utterance, the poetic function is predominant… …it will be accompanied by other functions at a lower level.



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Roman Jakobson establish that 'literariness' should be studied within the scope of linguistic studies? Explain in detail.

Q 2: Discuss, after Roman Jakobson, the similarities and differences between linguistics and poetics.

Q 3: How does Jakobson analyse the relationship between literary studies and linguistic studies? Discuss with reference to the essay.

Q 4: On what basis does Jakobson categorise different factors of verbal communication? How are they connected to different functions of language? Discuss.

Q 5: What is the 'function' of language? How do the functions differ from one another? How do the interrelations among the functions decide the nature of a message?

Q 6: What is poetic function? How do different genres of verbal are or poetry differ from one another? Discuss.

Q 7: Contextualise Roman Jakobson in the history of the development of Russian Formalism.

Q 8: Estimate the contribution of Jakobson in the development of Structuralism.

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UNIT 3: ROLAND BARTHES: "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Roland Barthes: Life and Works

3.4 Reading the Text: "The Death of the Author"

3.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

3.6 Reception of Barthes and His Ideas

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the structuralist critic Roland Barthes
- explain the important points raised by Barthes in the essay "The Death of the Author"
- state the role a reader plays in interpreting a text
- discuss the reception of Barthes as a critic/theorist

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "The Death of the Author" by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes (1915–80). Roland Barthes is often considered one of the leading names in French structuralism. Critic Jonathan Culler calls him "famous for contradictory reasons." On the one hand, Barthes sought to develop a universal grammar of narrative in his essay "Introduction to the Structural Study of Narrative" (1966), by exploring Ferdinand De Saussure's notion of Semiology-a broad science of signs in human culture. On the other hand, Barthes also wrote playfully and allusively about pleasure in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973)

and in *A Lover's Discourse* (1977). Regarding his literary tastes, he promoted avant-garde writers such as Robbe-Grillet, Brecht, Sollers, but on the other, he also loved and wrote about the most traditional of French authors such as Racine, Chateaubriand, Balzac, and Proust. In "The Death of the Author" Barthes argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in the interpretation of a text. Barthes was of the view that the work and creator are not related. The first English translation of the essay was in the American journal *Aspen*, no. 5–6 in 1967. The essay later appeared in an anthology of Barthes' essays *Image-Music-Text* (1977), which also included his other important essay "From Work To Text". The point Barthes raises in this essay is that the author has no control over his own words (or images, sounds, etc.) as they belong to the reader who interprets them. As we finish reading thus unit, we shall be able to discuss the significance of the essay in 20th century literary criticism.

3.3 ROLAND BARTHES: LIFE AND WORKS

Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg. His father was a naval officer who was killed within a year of his birth. Then, his mother moved to the paternal family home in Bayonne in Northern France. In 1924, along with his mother, Barthes moved to Paris, where he joined the Parisian schools and then began studying for entrance into the prestigious Ecole Normale. However, his promising academic journey was interrupted by the attacks of tuberculosis. From 1934 to 1950, Barthes' life alternated between tuberculosis sanitoria, academic institutions where he studied, and teaching jobs in Biarritz and abroad in Bucharest and Alexandria.

Despite all odds, he read avidly, founded a theatrical troupe, and began to write. From the very beginning, his writings reflect both his idiosyncratic creativity and his inclination towards the intellectual milieu in which he found himself. His first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), initially published as articles in Albert Camus' journal *Combat,* analyzes the history of literary styles in terms derived from Marx and from Sartre. In this book, Barthes looks at the relations between Literature with a capital L and the

various modern forms of its demystification, from Stephane Mallarme to Albert Camus. Subsequently, Barthes undertook an extensive study of the imagery used by the 19th century historian Jules Michelet. His next project was a series of short occasional pieces later published as *Mythologies* (1957). In this work, Barthes does makes a study of mass culture and everyday life. His object was to show how mass culture is saturated with ideological propositions ("myths") presented as if they were natural and self-evident; the result in many ways anticipates what is today called "cultural studies."

As a researcher in Paris for ten years at the National Centre for Scientific Research, Barthes like many others in Paris during that time, such as Claude Levi Strauss in Anthropology, Jacques Lacan in Psychoanalysis, and Tzvetan Todorov and Gerard Genette in Literary Studies, continued his exploration of the possibilities of Saussure's synchronic linguistic analysis. In 1962, Barthes was appointed in a tenured post in "the sociology of signs, symbols, and representations" at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes (School for Advanced Study), where his seminar became legendary. His book *On Racine* (1963) raised animosity among the traditional academic community for its concentration on the structures of Racine's *textual* world rather than his biographical or historical world. Raymond Picard, a Racine scholar countered Barthes with *New Criticism* or *New Fraud?* (1965). Barthes responded to Picard by arguing that traditional critics' recourse to the values of clarity, nobility, and humanity, which they treat as neutral and self-evident, actually exerts a coercive, censoring force on other interpretive possibilities. The Picard affair is the backdrop for one of Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author."

The publication of S/Z marks a turning point in Barthes' relation to Structuralism. It is a multilevel analysis that refuses to structure the text otherwise than by cutting it into hundreds of little pieces of varying lengths (called *lexias)* and also by identifying five broad functions (called *codes)* at work in the text. When critics and scholars look for a break between Structuralism and Poststructuralism, S/Z stands in between. Here, Barthes pursues not so much a *critique* of Structuralism. The hints of larger

structures at work are fragmentary and multiple, not sustained, and the theoretical comments are printed as digressions, numbering almost a hundred. Boredom with the structuralist project of reducing all narratives to a common grammar combines with delight in the foretaste of a multitude of grammars and rhetoric hinted at but not developed in S/Z. Barthes' other essay "From Work to Text" (1971), is one of the clearest available summaries of the Poststructuralist theory of the "text" as it was developed not only by Barthes but by all the writers associated with the vanguard journal *Tel Quell,* including Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and others. This description of "textuality" can be seen as one way of marking the transition between Structuralism and Poststructuralism.

LET US KNOW

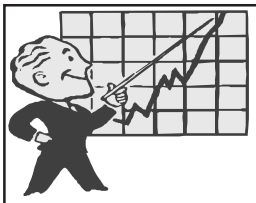


Work vs Text

Both Structuralists and Poststructuralists would contrast their analyses to the classical study of literary and other cultural objects ("work"). The *text* is a process; the *work* is a product. *Works* can be found on library shelves; *texts* are signifying fields into which one enters. The point is not that literature can be divided into works and texts but that the reader can activate either the closure of the signified (the coherence of a meaning) or the "play" of the signifier (the dissemination and disruption of meanings). The text deserves no vital "respect"-it is not alive and can thus be "broken" or "manhandled" in ways that would violate organic forms. The death of the author turns out to be based not on a murder but on an elimination of the metaphor of life in the first place. The work is "consumed"; the text is "produced" in S/Z, Barthes called these the *readerly* and the *Writerly* aspects of a text.

In later writings such as *The Empire of Signs* (1970); *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973); *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975); *Camera Lucida* (1980); and the posthumously published *Incidents* (1987), Roland Barthes seems to resurrect precisely the author he had killed off. However, the contradiction is more apparent than real. While the disembodied, abstract author of the network of signs does indeed become an embodied and

particular author, the body and biography are both seen as historical, and both are structured like a text. The author is still not an extra textual *identity* determining meaning. The body can be read like a text, just as the text can be read like a body. Gaps in meaning, like the gaps in a garment, are equivalent sites of pleasure. In 1976, this critic of academic criticism was elected to the Chair in Literary Semiology at France's most prestigious institution, the College de France. In his inaugural lecture, published as *Lefon* (1978), he explains why he is an unlikely choice for such a post and then goes on to recapitulate many of his thoughts about Semiology and Literature. Barthes thus ended up as one of the most anti establishment academics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the main points raised by Barthes in the essay "The Death of the Author"?

Q 2: State the significance of Barthes' works like *Writing Degree Zero* and *Mythologies*.

Q 3: How did Barthes respond to Picard's arguments?

Q 4: In what way, is the publication of S/Z is a turning point in Barthes' relation to Structuralism?

Q 5: How does Barthes differentiate between work and text?

3.4 READING THE TEXT: "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

In his story *Sarrasine,* Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: "This *was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility."* Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity?

Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

No doubt, it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance'-the mastery of the narrative code-may possibly be admired but never his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.

Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it. In France, Mallarme

was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'. Mallarme's entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader). Valery, encumbered by a psychology of the Ego, considerably diluted Mallarme's theory but, his taste for classicism leading him to turn to the lessons of rhetoric, he never stopped calling into question and deriding the Author; he stressed the linguistic and, as it were, 'hazardous' nature of his activity, and throughout his prose works he militated in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer's interiority seemed to him pure superstition. Proust? himself, despite the apparently psychological character of what he called his *analyses,* was visibly concerned with the task of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his characters; by making of the narrator not he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who *is going* to *write* (the young man in the novel-but, in fact, how old is he and who is he'?-wants to write but cannot; the novel ends when writing at last becomes possible), Proust gave modern writing its epic. By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model; so that it is clear to us that Charlus does not imitate Montesquiou but that Montesquiou-in his anecdotal, historical reality-is no more than a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus.

Lastly, to go no further than this prehistory of modernity, Surrealism, though unable to accord language a supreme place (language being system and the aim of the movement being, romantically, a direct subversion of codes itself moreover illusory: a code cannot be destroyed, only 'played off'), contributed to the desacralization of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of

meaning (the famous surrealist 'jolt'), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing, together. Leaving aside literature itself (such distinctions really becoming invalid), linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors, Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing. just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

The removal of the Author (one could talk here with Brecht of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage) is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or-which is the same thing-the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent).

The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after.* The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here* and *now.* The fact is (or, it follows) that *writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy,' call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which

it is uttered-something like the I *declare* of kings or the I *sing* of very ancient poets. Having buried the Author, the modern scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion and that consequently, making a law of necessity, he must emphasize this delay and indefinitely 'polish' his form. For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Jouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings; to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on anyone of them.' Did he wish to *express himself,* he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he "thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely; something experienced in exemplary fashion by the young Thomas de Quincey, he who was so good at Greek that in order to translate absolutely, modern ideas and images into that dead language, he had, so Baudelaire tells· us (in *Paradis Artificiels),* 'created for himself an unfailing dictionary, vastly more extensive and complex than those resulting from the ordinary patience of purely literary themes'. Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred.

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases:' society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text ·is 'explained'-victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled,* nothing *deciphered;* the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing),* by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases-reason, science, law.

Let us come back to the Balzac sentence. No one, no 'person', lays it: its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading. Another-very precise-example will help to make this clear: recent research J. P. Vernant) has demonstrated the constitutively ambiguous nature of Greek tragedy, its texts being woven from words with double meanings that each character understands unilaterally (this perpetual misunderstanding is exactly the 'tragic'); there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him-this someone being precisely the reader (or here; the listener). Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations

that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.



LET US KNOW

It is important for us to note that Barthes acknowledges the presence of this idea of 'the death of the author' in the works of previous writers, such as the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who said—"it is language which speaks". He also recognized Marcel Proust as being "concerned with the task of inexorably blurring…the relation between the writer and his characters"; the Surrealist movement for employing the practice of "automatic writing" to express "what the head itself is unaware of"; and of linguistics as a discipline for "showing that the whole of enunciation is an empty process". Barthes' articulation of the death of the author is a radical and drastic recognition of this severing of authority and authorship.

3.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

The essay "The Death of the Author" begins with an example taken from Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* – the tale of a sculptor who falls in love with an Italian diva, subsequently revealed to be not a woman but a castrato. Barthes' focus here is on a sentence in the text in which a series of exclamations about femininity cannot be clearly attributed to the conscious

intentions of any one person, whether that be the author, the narrator, a character, or even "universal wisdom." Barthes argues that the effective, productive, and engaged reading of a text depends on the suspension of preconceived ideas about the character of the particular author—or even about human psychology in general. From the moment that writing detaches itself from an immediate context, "It is language which speaks, not the author." The author, the text, and the reader are each composed of a universe of quotations without origin or end. In its celebration of the birth of the reader, Barthes explores the consequences of freeing the reading process from the constraints of fidelity to an origin, a unified meaning, an identity, or any other pre-given exterior or interior reality. According to Barthes, an author should not claim absolute authority over his or her text.

Thus, we can assume that "The Death of the Author" is a meditation on Barthes' ideas of the author and reader. His argument is that the author has no sovereignty over his own words (or images, sounds, etc.) as that belong to the reader who interprets them. According to Barthes when we encounter a literary text, we need not ask ourselves what the author intended in his words but what the words themselves actually say. A text employs symbols, which are deciphered by readers, and since the function of the text is to be read, the author and process of writing is irrelevant. Barthes also states that meaning is not something retrieved or discovered, but rather something spontaneously generated in the process of reading a text, which is an active rather than passive action. Although Barthes does not seem to have suggested that the death of the author lets any reader read any text the way he or she likes, he is perhaps suggesting that reading always involves continuous writing or rewriting of the text's meaning.

Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" is an attack on traditional literary criticism mostly focused on trying to retrace the author's intentions or the meaning in the author's mind. Instead, he asks the readers to adopt a more text-oriented approach that focuses on the interaction of the reader with it. This also means that the text is open to interpretation, its meaning more fluid than previously thought. Thus, Barthes views on the 'death of the author' proves emancipatory, because he feels that the author is not an

Author-god, but a 'scriptor,' or someone who produces the work, but is not more equipped to interpret it than anybody else. Practically speaking, authors may not be available or willing to talk about "what they meant." The information we have on the author's background may be inaccurate, and might be interpreted differently by another critic.



LET US KNOW

According to Barthes, the author is a "scriptor"—a word he uses expressively to disrupt the traditional continuity of power between the terms "author" and "authority." The scriptor exists to produce but not to explain the work and "is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, [and] is not the subject with the book as predicate". Every work is "eternally written here and now", with each re-reading, because the "origin" of meaning lies exclusively in "language itself" and its impressions on the reader.

Barthes notes that the traditional critical approach to literature raises a thorny problem: how can we detect precisely what the writer intended? The answer Barthes hints at is that we cannot. He introduces this notion of intention in the epigraph to the essay, taken from Honoré de Balzac's story *Sarrasine* in which a male protagonist mistakes a castrato for a woman and falls in love with him. When, in the passage, the character dotes over his perceived womanliness, Barthes challenges his readers to determine who is speaking and about what. "Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology?…We can never know." Writing, "the destruction of every voice," defies adherence to a single interpretation or perspective.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Why does Barthes state that the author has no sovereignty over his own words?

Q 7: Why is it that Barthes relates the author to scriptor?

Q 8: What are some of the sources of Barthes' ideas on 'the death of the author'?

3.6 RECEPTION OF BARTHES AND "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR"

Ideas presented in the critical essay "The Death of the Author" were anticipated by the New Critics who emerged in the United States from the 1940s-1970s. New Criticism however differs from Barthes' theory of critical reading because it attempts to arrive at more authoritative interpretations of texts. Nevertheless, New Critical precept of the "intentional fallacy" declares that a poem does not belong to its author; rather, "it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it. The poem belongs to the public." Barthes himself stated that the difference between his theory and New Criticism comes in the practice of "disentangling." Barthes' work has much in common with the ideas of the "Yale school" of deconstructionist critics such as Paul de Man and Barbara Johnson in the 1970s, although they are not inclined to see meaning as the production of the reader. Barthes, like the deconstructionists, insists upon the disjointed nature of texts, their fissures of meaning and their incongruities, interruptions, and breaks.

Post-structuralist scepticism about the notion of the singular identity of the self has also been important for some academics working in Feminist and Queer theory about which we have already studied in the previous course. These writers find in Barthes' work an anti-patriarchal, anti-traditional strain sympathetic to their own critical work. They read "The Death of the Author" as a work that obliterates not only stable critical interpretation but also stable personal identity. Michel Foucault also addressed the question of the author in his 1969 essay "What is an Author?" where he developed the idea of "author function" to explain the author as a classifying principle within a particular discursive formation. Although Foucault does not directly mention Barthes in his essay, his analysis can be seen as a challenge to Barthes' liberating the reader from domination by the author. Jacques Derrida too paid ironic homage to Barthes's "The Death of the Author" in his essay "The Deaths of Roland Barthes".

Some scholars have objected Barthes' argument *in toto*. Camille Paglia, for example, wrote: "Most pernicious of French imports [into American academia] is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything *more* affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe." Another theorist Seán Burke dedicated an entire book entitled *The Death and Return of the Author* opposing "The Death of the Author". J. C. Carlier, in the essay "Roland Barthes' Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography" argues that the essay "The Death of the Author" is the litmus test of critical competence. Those who take it literally automatically fail that test. Those who take it ironically and recognize a work of fine satiric fiction are those who pass the test. Barthes was satirizing the stale notion that the author should be disregarded. This interpretation cannot be logically faulted, as the essay, taken literally, says that the essay means what any reader chooses it to mean. To say that Barthes did not intend such a meaning betrays the literal meaning of the essay and invokes the traditional notion of authorial identity and continuity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: State the difference between New Critical views of the text and that of Roland Barthes.



3.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Barthes is a French Structuralist critic whose essay "Death of the Author" captures an important aspect of the aesthetic sensibility associated with Structuralism. Barthes argues that the traditional notion of an author is a product of the rationalist and empiricist thought that assigns a central importance to the individual human being. In literary studies, the author is often invoked as the origin and explanation of the text, or as its final signified. However, according to Barthes, the death of

the author signals the liberation of the reader who need not accept that the text has a single meaning enshrined in the biography of the author. Thus, the concluding line of the essay—"the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" is significant.



3.8 FURTHER READING

Leitch, Vincent B. (Gen. Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Macey, David. (2000). *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory.* Penguin Books.

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Death_of_the_Author

3.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Barthes argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in the interpretation of a text… …Barthes argues that the work and creator are not related.

Ans to Q 2: *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), analyzes the history of literary styles in terms derived from Marx and from Sartre… …here Barthes looks at the relations between Literature the various modern forms of its demystification, from Stephane Mallarme to Albert Camus… …in *Mythologies* (1957) makes a study of mass culture and everyday life… …he wanted to show how mass culture is saturated with ideological propositions presented as if they were natural and self-evident.

Ans to Q 3: In his book *On Racine* Barthes raised animosity among the traditional academic community for its concentration on the structures of Racine's *textual* world rather than his biographical or historical world… …Raymond Picard, countered Barthes with *New Criticism*

or *New Fraud?... …*Barthes responded by stating that traditional critics' recourse to the values of clarity, nobility, and humanity, which they treat as neutral and self-evident, actually exerts a coercive, censoring force on other interpretive possibilities… …this response remains as the backdrop for the essay "The Death of the Author."

Ans to Q 4: The publication of S/Z marks a turning point in Barthes' relation to Structuralism… …it is a multilevel analysis that refuses to structure the text otherwise than by cutting it into hundreds of little pieces of varying lengths and also by identifying five broad functions at work in the text… …when critics and scholars look for a break between Structuralism and Poststructuralism, S/Z stands in between.

Ans to Q 5: The *text* is a process; the *work* is a product… …*works* can be found on library shelves; *texts* are signifying fields into which one enters… …the point is not that literature can be divided into works and texts but that the reader can activate either the closure of the signified (the coherence of a meaning) or the "play" of the signifier (the dissemination and disruption of meanings).

Ans to Q 6: Because those words belong to the readers who would interpret them.

Ans to Q 7: Because Barthes feels that the author is not an Author-god, but a 'scriptor,' or someone who produces the work.

Ans to Q 8: Poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who said that "it is language which speaks"… …Marcel Proust's blurring the relation between the writer and his characters… …the Surrealist movement for employing the practice of "automatic writing" to express "what the head itself is unaware of"… …linguistics as a discipline for "showing that the whole of enunciation is an empty process".

Ans to Q 9: New Criticism differs from Barthes' theory of critical reading because it attempts to arrive at more authoritative interpretations of texts.



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Roland Barthes express his structuralist views through the essay "The Death of the Author"?

Q 2: In what way, does Roland Barthes, explain the role of the author and the reader in the essay "The Death of the Author"?

Q 3: The very last line of the essay "The Death of the Author" is "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author. Justify your views on the basis of the text of the essay.

Q 4: Barthes' essay argues against traditional literary criticism and its practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in an interpretation of a text. Discuss.

Q 5: Innumerate the contributions of Roland Barthes to Literary criticism and theory.

Q 6: Barthes' articulation of the death of the author is a radical and drastic recognition of this severing of authority and authorship. Discuss with reference to the text.

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UNIT 4: STANLEY FISH: "INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES" FROM "INTERPRETING THE *VARIORUM*"

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Stanley Fish: Life and Works

4.4 Reading the Text: "Interpretive Communities"

4.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

4.6 Reception of Fish and His Ideas

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.10 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Stanley Fish who is a prominent critic of reader response
- explain the important points raised by Fish in the essay "Interpreting the Variorum"
- state the role a reader plays in the interpretation of a text
- discuss the reception of Fish and his ideas raised in the essay

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the essay "Interpretive Community" which is a part of his longer essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*" by Stanley Fish. One of the most controversial figures in contemporary literary theory, Stanley Fish has been pivotal to the development of literary theory in America. A leading critic and an inventor of reader-response theory, and through the 1990s, a spirited defender of the humanities amid public attacks over political correctness, Fish is perhaps best known for his intellectual

style and eruditeness. Debunking standard notions of interpretation, Fish's essay "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976; rev. 1980) introduces his seminal concept, "Interpretive Communities", which radically revises interpretive theory by locating meaning not in texts but in readers, not in individual response but in the communities. In the previous unit, we have discussed Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" where he boldly states that the birth of the reader is at the cost of the death of the author. Stanley Fish in this essay, on the other hand, locates the meaning not in the text but in the readers. While Barthes provides his structuralist views on the meaning of the text, Fish discusses the importance of the readers in creating the meaning of a given text. Thus, as we finish reading this unit, we shall understand the important points regarding Fish's Reader Response criticism.

4.3 STANLEY FISH: LIFE AND WORKS

Stanley Fish was born in Providence, Rhode Island, where his father was a plumbing contractor. The first in his family to go to college, he attended the University of Pennsylvania receiving his B.A. in 1959. He went on to do graduate work at Yale University, then the bastion of the American New Critics including Cleanth Brooks and William K Wimsatt Jr. Soon he completed his M. A. and PhD in 1960 and 1962 respectively. He taught at the University of California at Berkeley from 1962 to 1974 and published two books before he was thirty, a book on Milton criticism, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967) and *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (1972), which was nominated for a National Book Award. From 1974 to 1985, he was Kenan Professor of English at the Johns Hopkins University, publishing another pioneering reader-response work, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). Concerned with interpretation and its consequences, at Johns Hopkins he also began to teach in the law school, pursuing an interest in legal theory that became more central to his work through the next two decades.

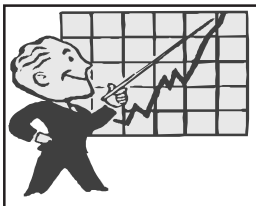
In 1985, Fish moved to Duke University as Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English and Law and as chair of the English department. As chair, he was instrumental in gathering scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and his spouse, Jane Tompkins, among others, who represented new theoretical approaches. After stepping down as chair in 1993, he became executive director of the Duke University Press, serving through 1998, when he took a position as dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

Through the 1990s, Fish was a public spokesperson for the humanities, frequently debating over political correctness; writing opinion pieces in the *New York Times;* and occasionally appearing on television. Meanwhile, he also published several notable books on theory, professionalism, law, and politics. A formative factor of Fish's work was his response to the New Criticism. Countering Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's declaration in "The Affective Fallacy" (1949) that the audience of a literary work is irrelevant, Fish declared that referring to affectiveness as a fallacy was a fallacy itself. An abiding concern throughout Fish's work is the rhetorical force of texts and their effects on readers. In *Surprised by Sin;* Fish focuses on the experience of the reader as he or she encounters Milton's *Paradise Lost.* He suspends conventional interpretations of Milton, arguing that the poem's meaning is located not in our final assessment but in the process of struggling through Milton's 'difficult grammar and rhetoric, which didactically makes readers repeat the Fall.

Through the late 1970s and 1980s, Fish engaged in broader theoretical speculations on interpretation and rhetoric, exemplified by *Is There a Text in This Class?.* He questions the existence of the freestanding literary text and argues for meaning as a process rather than a formal product. In his later work, Fish takes on the perennial problem of the relation of theory to practice. He persistently attacks the assumption that we generate our interpretations from the principles or theories we hold. Instead, in a trademark reversal, he argues that theory stems from our practices, occurs only after the fact, and has no consequences. Like "strategies," practices determine our interpretations. Extending this notion to law, Fish

makes a characteristically provocative claim that judges do not derive their decisions from legal principles, such as the doctrine of free speech, but accrue legal precedents to justify their practical judgments. This view is called antifoundationalism: the denial that practice derives from a predetermined foundation of theory or principle.

Probably because of his contrarian style as well as the nature of his claims, Stanley Fish has been one of the most cited literary critics of his generation, prompting both admiration and ire. Traditionalists have denounced him as a relativist who believes in nothing. Leftist critics have attacked him for espousing a circular position that makes principled political action impossible. Defenders of theory have countered that Fish's argument itself has consequences in delegitimizing the study of theory in the academy. Critics of his concept of interpretive communities note that it does not explain one's entrance into or departure from a particular community; there are social and political factors that influence what community one might enter. His work has indelibly marked contemporary literary theory, especially the 'concept of interpretation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the important works by the reader response critic Stanley Fish.

Q 2: What does Fish state countering Wimsatt and Beardsley's declaration in "The Affective Fallacy"?

4.4 READING THE TEXT: "INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES"

It seems then that the price one pays for denying the priority of either forms or intentions is an inability to say how it is that one ever begins. Yet we do begin, and we continue, and because we do there arises an immediate counter objection to the preceding pages. If interpretive acts are the source of forms rather than the other way around, why isn't it the case that readers are always performing the same acts or a sequence of random, acts, and therefore creating the same forms or a random succession of forms? How,

in short, does one explain these two "facts" of reading? (1) The same reader will perform differently when reading two "different" (the word is in quotation marks because its status is precisely what is at issue) texts; and (2) different readers will perform similarly when reading the "same" (in quotes for the same reason) text. That is to say, both the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader would seem to argue for the 'existence; for something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them; I will answer this challenge by asserting that both the stability and the variety are functions of interpretive strategies rather than of texts."

Let us suppose that I am reading *Lycidas*. What is it that I am doing? First of all, what I am not doing is "simply reading", an activity in which I do not believe because it implies the possibility of pure (that is, disinterested) perception. Rather, I am proceeding on ·the basis of (at least) two interpretive decisions: (I) that *Lycidas* is a pastoral and (2) that if was written by Milton. (I should add that the notions "pastoral" and "Milton" are also interpretations; that is, they do not stand for a set of indisputable, objective facts; if they did, a great many books would not now be getting written.) Once these decisions have been made (and if I had not made these; I would have made others, and they would be consequential in the same way), I am immediately predisposed to perform certain acts, to "find," by looking for themes (the relationship between natural processes and the careers of men, the efficacy of poetry or of any other action), to confer significances (on flowers, streams, shepherds, pagan deities), to mark out "formal" units (the lament, the consolation, the turn, the affirmation of faith, and so on). My disposition to perform these acts (and others; the list is riot meant to be exhaustive) constitutes a set of interpretive strategies, which, when they are put into execution, become the large act of reading. That is to say, interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading (the pure act of perception in which I do not believe); they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them. Several important things follow from this account:

(1) I did not have to execute this particular set of interpretive strategies because I did not have to make those particular interpretive (pre-reading) decisions. I could have decided, for example, that *Lycidas* was a text in which a set of fantasies and defenses find expression. These decisions would have entailed the assumption of another set of interpretive strategies (perhaps like that put forward by Norman Holland in *The Dynamics of Literary Response)* and the execution of that set would have made another text.

(2) I could execute this same set of strategies when presented with texts that did not bear the title (again a notion which is itself an interpretation) *Lycidas, a Pastoral Monody.* I could decide (it is a decision some have made) that *Adam Bede* is a pastoral written by an author who consciously modelled herself on Milton (still remembering that "pastoral" and "Milton" are interpretations, not facts in the public domain); or I could decide, as Empson did, that a great many things not usually considered pastoral were in fact to be so read; and either decision would give rise to a set of interpretive strategies, which, when put into action, would *write* the text I write when reading *Lycidas.* (Are you with me?).

(3) A reader other than myself who, when presented with *Lycidas,* proceeds to put into execution a set of interpretive strategies similar to mine (how he would do so is a question I will take up later), will perform the same (or at least a similar) succession of interpretive acts. He and I then might be tempted to say that we agree about the poem (thereby assuming that the poem exists independently of the acts either of us performs); but what we really would agree about is the way to write it.

(4) A reader other than myself who, when presented with *Lycidas* (please keep in mind that the status of *Lycidas* is what is at issue), puts into execution a different set of interpretive strategies will perform a different succession of interpretive acts. (I am assuming, it is the article of my faith, that a reader will always execute some set of interpretive strategies and therefore perform some succession of interpretive acts.) One of us might then be tempted to complain to the other that we could not

possibly be reading the same poem (literary criticism is full of such complaints) and he would be right; for each of us would be reading the poem he had made.

The large conclusion that follows from these four smaller ones is that the notions of the "same" or "different" texts are fictions. If I read *Lycidas as* and *The Waste Land* differently (in fact I do not), it will not be because the formal structures of the two poems (to term them such is also an interpretive decision) call forth different interpretive strategies but because my predisposition to execute different interpretive strategies will *produce* different formal structures. That is, the two poems are different because I have decided that they will be. The proof of this is the possibility of doing the reverse (that is why point 2 is so important). That is to say, the answer to the question "why do different texts give rise to different sequences of interpretive acts?" is that *they don't have* to, an answer which implies strongly that "they don't exist." Indeed, it has always been possible to put into action interpretive strategies designed to make all texts one, or to put it more accurately, to be forever making the same text. Augustine urges just such a strategy, for example, in *On Christian Doctrine* where he delivers the "rule of faith" which is of course a rule of interpretation, It is dazzlingly simple: everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when it is properly read, points to (bears the meaning of) God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His sake. If only you should come upon something, which does not at first seem to bear this meaning, that "does not literally pertain to virtuous behaviour or to the truth of faith," you are then to take it "to be figurative" and proceed to scrutinize it "until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced." This then is both a stipulation of what meaning there is and a set of directions for finding it, which is of course a set of directions-of interpretive strategies-for making it, that is, for the endless reproduction of the same text. Whatever one may think of this interpretive program, its success and ease of execution are attested to by centuries of Christian exegesis. It is my contention that any interpretive program, any set of interpretive strategies, can have a similar success, although few have been as spectacularly successful as this one.

(For some time now, for at least three hundred years. the most successful interpretive program has gone under the name "ordinary language.") In our own discipline programs with the same characteristic of always reproducing one text include psychoanalytic criticism, Robertsonianism (always threatening to extend its sway into later and later periods), numerology (a sameness based on the assumption of innumerable fixed differences).

The other challenging question-"why will different readers execute the same interpretive strategy when faced with the 'same' text?" can be handled in the same way. The answer is again that *they don't have to,* and my evidence is the entire history of literary criticism. And again this answer implies that the notion "same text" is the product of the possession by two or more readers of similar interpretive strategies.

However, why should this ever happen? Why should two or more readers ever agree and why should regular that is, habitual, differences in the career of a single reader ever occur? What is the explanation on the one hand of the stability of interpretation (at least among certain groups at certain times) and on the other of the orderly variety of interpretation if it is not the stability and variety of texts? The answer to all of these questions is to be found in notion that has been implicit in my argument, the notion of *interpretive communities.* Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. If it is an article of faith in a particular community that there is a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. In addition, if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it. The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text, (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being. This, then,

is the explanation both for the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same community) and for the regularity with which a single reader will employ different, interpretive strategies and, thus make different texts (he belongs to different communities). It also explains why there are disagreements and why they can be debated in a principled way: not because of a stability in texts, but because of a stability in the makeup of interpretive communities and therefore, in the opposing positions they make possible. Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text). Interpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from, one to another; thus, while the 'alignments are not permanent, they are always there, providing just enough stability for the interpretive battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure that they will never be settled. The notion of interpretive communities thus stands between an impossible ideal and the fear, which leads, so many to maintain it. The ideal is of perfect agreement: and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation. The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with hope or fear 'of ever being able to stop.

In other words, interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies, are net natural or universal, but learned. This does not mean that there is a point at which an individual has not yet learned any. The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired, are-the ways, of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten *or* supplanted, or, complicated or dropped from favour ("no one reads that way anymore"). When any of these things happens, there is a corresponding change in texts, not because they are being read differently, but because they are being written differently.

The only stability, then, inheres in the fact (at least in my model) that interpretive strategies are always being deployed, and this means that communication is a: much more chancy affair, than we are accustomed to think it. For if there are no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making

them, and if interpretive strategies are not natural, but learned (and are therefore unavailable to a finite description), what is it that utterers (speakers, authors, critics, me, you) do? In the old model, utterers are in the business of handing over ready-made or prefabricated meanings. These meanings are said to be encoded; and the code-is assumed to be in the world independently of the individuals who are obliged to attach themselves to it (if they do not they run the danger of being declared deviant). In my model, however, meanings are not extracted but made' and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being. It follows then that what utterers do is to give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies. It is presumed that the invitation will be recognized, and that presumption rests on a projection on the part of a speaker or author of the moves *he* would make if confronted by the sounds or marks he is uttering or setting down. It would seem at first that this account of things simply reintroduces the old objection; for isn't this an admission that there is after all a formal encoding, not perhaps of meanings, but of the directions for making them, for executing interpretive strategies? The answer is that they will only *be* directions to those who already have the interpretive strategies in the first place.

Rather than producing interpretive acts, they are the product of one. An author hazards his projection, not because of something "in" the marks, but because of something, he assumes to be in his reader. The very existence of the "marks" is a function of an interpretive community, for they will be recognized (that is, made) only by its members. Those outside that community will be deploying a different set of interpretive strategies (interpretation cannot be withheld) and will therefore be making different marks. So once again, I have made the text disappear, but unfortunately, the problems do not disappear with it. If everyone is continually executing interpretive strategies and in that act constituting texts, intentions, speakers, and authors, how can anyone of us know whether he is a member of the same interpretive community as any other of us? The answer is that he cannot, since any evidence brought forward to support the claim would

itself be an interpretation (especially if the "other" were an author long dead). The only "proof" of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: "we know." I say it to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me.



LET US KNOW

In yet another important text "Is There a Text in The Class?" (1980), Fish proposes that competent readers often form part of Interpretive communities, consisting of members who share interpretive strategies or set of community assumptions of reading a text. Therefore, the validity of any text depends on the assumptions and strategies the readers share with the other members in their community.

4.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

This is to note that Stanley Fish divides the essay into four sections for the convenience of reading. The first section is a short introduction, which clearly states that the essay was written in three stages, which allows for the different parts of the essay to better stand alone in their arguments. In the introduction, Fish directly addresses his readers and explain the process he went through while writing this particular essay. The second section is entitled 'The Case for Reader-Response Analysis', where he disputes the formalistic views of analyzing a piece of text and states the importance of the reader's views of a piece of text when it comes to analyzing that piece of text. In the third section entitled 'Undoing the case for reader-response analysis', Fish discusses and then disputes the idea that a piece of text has the author's intended meaning hidden throughout the piece of text. Thus, the reader interprets the text in their own way and it does not matter what the author's intention was while writing the text.

The final section of Fish's essay is entitled "Interpretive Communities" which is prescribed for your study. Here, Fish discusses the

different ways of interpreting a piece of text and how one reader may interpret two similar texts two completely different ways. The interpretation of a text depends on the reader's state of mind as it also depends on the reader's cultural background and upbringing to determine how they will interpret the text. Readers with similar cultural backgrounds and upbringings may interpret a text similarly, which then creates an 'Interpretive Community.' It is important to note here what Fish states, "The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired are the ways of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten or supplanted or complicated or dropped from favor."

The longer essay "Interpreting the *Variorum"* epitomizes Fish's stance and style as a literary theorist. It characteristically uses Milton as a test case, attacks accepted beliefs in authorial intention and textual autonomy, and proposes the provocative thesis that texts are empty in themselves and made only by the reader. However, in the second section, "Undoing the Case for Reader-Response Analysis," Fish critiques his earlier assumption of an individual, informed reader. In a sense, his own essay acts as a self-consuming artifact. Correcting his claims that certain lines "generate a pressure for judgment" and that their "speaker is struggling with his agitated thoughts," he asserts that no text can generate any pressure and that any speaker is a fiction constructed by the poem's reader. "I did what critics always do," Fish confesses, "I 'saw' what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned around and attributed what I had 'seen' to a text and an intention."

Those interpretive principles, strategies derive from the educational and professional communities in which we receive training and have membership. These communities, rather than texts, govern and generate interpretation. Emphasizing in the last section of the essay the generative power of "interpretive communities," Fish proposes that they "are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts." In seeing reading as a form of writing, he parallels Poststructuralist views of the "death of the author" and of the writerly text (as expressed by Roland Barthes, for example). As proof of the existence

of interpretive communities, Fish cites the history of Milton criticism, amassed in the *Variorum* edition of Milton's works, which demonstrates that consensus is the rule within the community of Milton scholars. While changes of consensus present a problem for Fish, his inventive concept of the interpretive community foregrounds the professional and institutional dimensions of literary criticism.

The significance of the essay "Interpretive community" lies in the Fish's view that a text does not have meaning outside of a set of cultural assumptions regarding both what the characters mean and how they should be interpreted. This cultural context often includes authorial intent, though it is not limited to it. Fish claims that we as individuals interpret texts because each of us is part of an interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text. Furthermore, he claims, we cannot know whether someone is a part of our interpretive community or not, because any act of communication that we could engage in to tell whether we are part of the same interpretive community would have to be interpreted. That is, because we cannot escape our interpretive community, we can never really know its limits. The idea has been very influential in reader-response criticism, though it has also been very controversial. It is often interpreted as a relativistic standpoint that "words have no meaning," though this is not what Fish means. Quite the contrary, Fish is a staunch advocate of his own readings of various texts. Rather, he means to point out that readings of a text are culturally constructed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: On what does the interpretation of a text depend?

Q 4: What does Fish state about Interpretive Community?

4.6 RECEPTION OF FISH AND HIS IDEAS

As a frequent contributor to the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, Fish has been the target of wide-ranging criticism. Judith Shulevitz in *Slate Magazine* reported that not only does Fish openly proclaim himself,

"unprincipled" but also rejects wholesale the concepts of "fairness, impartiality, reasonableness." To Fish, "ideas have no consequences." For taking this stance, Shulevitz characterizes Fish as "not the unprincipled relativist he's accused of being. He's something worse. He's a fatalist." Likewise, among academics, Fish has endured vigorous criticism. The conservative R. V. Young writes, "Because his general understanding of human nature and of the human condition is false, Fish fails in the specific task of a university scholar, which requires that learning be placed in the service of truth. And this, finally, is the critical issue in the contemporary university of which Stanley Fish is a typical representative: sophistry renders truth itself equivocal and deprives scholarly learning of its reason for being...His brash disdain of principle and his embrace of sophistry reveal the hollowness hidden at the heart of the current academic enterprise."

The prominent British Marxist critic Terry Eagleton states, "Like almost all diatribes against universalism, Fish's critique of universalism has its own rigid universals: the priority at all times and places of sectoral interests, the permanence of conflict, the a priori status of belief systems, the rhetorical character of truth, the fact that all apparent openness is secretly closure, and the like." In her essay, *Sophistry about Conventions*, philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that Stanley Fish's theoretical views are based on "extreme relativism and even radical subjectivism." Discounting his work as nothing more than sophistry, Nussbaum claims that Fish "relies on the regulative principle of non-contradiction in order to adjudicate between competing principles", thereby relying on normative standards of argumentation even as he argues against them. Offering an alternative, Nussbaum cites John Rawls' work in *A Theory of Justice* to highlight "an example of a rational argument; it can be said to yield, in a perfectly recognizable sense, ethical truth." Nussbaum appropriates Rawls' critique of the insufficiencies of Utilitarianism, showing that a rational person will consistently prefer a system of justice that acknowledges boundaries between separate persons rather than relying on the aggregation of the sum total of desires. "This", she claims, "is altogether different from rhetorical manipulation."



4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have read about the idea of 'Interpretive community' as propounded by the famous reader response critic Stanley Fish. Fish suggests that the interpretation of a particular text is characterised not by the fixed meaning s in a linguistic system, but by practices and assumptions of an institution or a community, where meanings are derived from a context rather than from their position in the linguistic system. We have also understood that Interpretive Community is a central notion in the version of reader response theory developed by Stanley Fish (1980). We have learnt that an interpretive community is made up of readers who are agreed as to what constitutes literature and who have internalised the structures of understanding and practices deemed relevant to reading a literary text. Such readers display a literary competence comparable to the linguistic competence as described by Noam Chomsky. They are sufficiently experienced to have internalised the community's definition of the properties of literary discourse, and thus can respond appropriately to individual texts that they have not previously encountered.



4.8 FURTHER READING

Leitch, Vincent B. (Gen Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.*

Macey, David. (2000). *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory.* Penguin Books.

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Fish

4.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (1967)…

…*Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century*

Literature (1972)… …*Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980).

Ans to Q 2: Countering Wimsatt and Beardsley's declaration in "The Affective Fallacy" (1949) that the audience of a literary work is irrelevant, Fish declared that referring to affectiveness as a fallacy was a fallacy itself.

Ans to Q 3: The interpretation of a text depends on the reader's state of mind as it also depends on the reader's cultural background and upbringing to determine how they will interpret the text.

Ans to Q 4: Fish claims that we interpret texts because each of us is part of an interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text… …we cannot know whether someone is a part of our interpretive community or not, because any act of communication that we could engage in to tell whether we are part of the same interpretive community, would have to be interpreted… …that is, because we cannot escape our interpretive community, we can never really know its limits.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Stanley Fish as a reader response theorist with reference to his essay "Interpretive Community".

Q 2: What does Fish state regarding the interpretation of a text by a reader in the essay "Interpretive Community"? Elaborate.

Q 3: Discuss the contribution of Stanley Fish to 20th century literary theory?

Q 4: Read the essay "Interpretive Community" and jot down the main points discussed by Fish in the essay.

Q 5: Write a note on Reader Response theory. Also, discuss the concept of "Interpretive Community" as viewed by Stanley Fish.

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UNIT 5: MIKHAIL BAKHTIN: "FROM THE PREHISTORY OF NOVELISTIC DISCOURSE"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Mikhail Bakhtin: Life and Works

5.4 Reading the Text: "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"

5.5 Important Theoretical Issues Raised

5.6 Reception of Bakhtin and His Ideas

5.7 Let us Sum up

5.8 Further Reading

5.9 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.10 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin
- read the Text "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" in terms of its various aspects
- identify the important issues raised in the essay
- write about the critical reception of Mikhail Bakhtin as a theorist of literature

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block 1 of the course Literary and Critical Theory II. In this unit, we shall read Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" which is taken from his book *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Bakhtin is hailed as one of the greatest 20th century theorist of literature, and literary critics across a wide theoretical and political spectrum often acclaim his acumen as a theorist. He has been called a Formalist, a Marxist, a Christian humanist, a conservative, and a

radical; as his work intersects in eccentric ways with so many of the critical orthodoxies of 20th century literary criticism. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to understand the fact that in the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" Mikhail Bakhtin not only discusses the origin and nature of the novel but also sensitises the readers regarding the elements that distinguishes the novel from other genres.

5.3 MIKHAIL BAKHTIN: LIFE AND WORKS

Mikhail Bakhtin was born in the Russian town of Orel, and grew up in Vilnius and later Odessa. He earned a degree in classics and philology from the University of Petrograd in 1918. Working as a schoolteacher in Nevel in western Russia during the civil war between the Red Army and the anti-Bolshevist White armies, he met the group of intellectuals who would become part of his circle where he would formulate the critical concepts that were to dominate his thinking for the rest of his life. In 1920, Bakhtin settled in Vitebsk, where his circle, which by now included Voloshinov and Medvedev, continued to meet. In 1924, Bakhtin moved back to Petrograd (or St. Petersburg), now renamed Leningrad. However, in January 1929, he was arrested and imprisoned for alleged antigovernment activity and the Socratic crime of "corrupting the young." In prison, he suffered from health problems caused by chronic osteomyelitis, a painful inflammation of the bone marrow. He was sentenced to ten years in a labour camp, but on the intervention of friends, the sentence was commuted to six years internal exile in Kazakhstan. In 1936, as his exile was over, he taught at Mordovia Pedagogical Institute in Saransk until he resigned. He moved to a small town outside of Moscow where osteomyelitis led to the amputation of his right leg. After that surgery, Bakhtin had difficulty finding a permanent employment, though he occasionally delivered lectures at the Gorky Institute of World Literature.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Bakhtin started working on his dissertation on the French writer Francois Rabelais (1490-1553) as well as a book on novels that chronicle the main character's maturation and education (the Bildungsroman). World War II interrupted his work on the dissertation, and

only fragments of this book survive. After the war, Bakhtin was allowed to return to his university position in Saransk, and to his unfinished dissertation on Rabelais. Although he was finally granted the doctoral degree, he could not publish his dissertation; it remained unread until it was discovered in the Gorky Institute's archives by graduate students in the early 1960s. After Stalin's death in 1953, Bakhtin's scholarly fortunes began to rise even as his health began to deteriorate. In addition to osteomyelitis, he also suffered from emphysema caused by his heavy smoking. By the time of his death from complications of emphysema, he had become something of a cult figure in Russia. In the 1970s, his reputation spread to Paris through the work of Eastern European emigres such as Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov. From there in the 1980s, it reached North America and England, where his work had significant impact.

Bakhtin's earliest writings, in such essays as "Towards a Philosophy of the Act" and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" are densely philosophical and heavily indebted to the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Although these lengthy essays exhibit a keen interest in phenomenology and the inter-subjective nature of language, the publications of the Bakhtin Circle from the late 1920s defined the problems of language that would occupy Bakhtin for the rest of his life. In 1926, Voloshinov published *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique,* and Medvedev followed in 1928 with *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship.* In 1929, Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* appeared and also Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* the only book to be published under his own name before Stalin's death.

Bakhtin's theory of the novel relies on three key concepts. The *Carnivalesque-an* idea first introduced in *Rabelais and His World* (written in the 1930s and 1940s, published 1965)-is Bakhtin's term for those forms of unofficial culture (the early novel among them) that resist official culture, political oppression, and totalitarian order through laughter, parody and "grotesque realism," In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (1937-38) he develops the influential term *chrnotope* to describe the intrinsic connectedness of time and space and their central role in constituting literary

genres. Finally, and most significantly, the *dialogism* of language, the "intense interanimation and struggle between one's own and another's word," would come to dominate Bakhtin's thinking about language after 1926. This concept of the multivoiced nature of discourse received its fullest treatment in "Discourse in the Novel" (l934-35), a key text for narrative, linguistic, and literary theory.

In this book, Bakhtin here addresses the limitations of the abstract and formal analyses of literary technique widespread among critics during the interwar period. Traditional linguistics, stylistics, and the theory of the Russian formalists, represented by critics like Boris Eichenbaum—as well as contemporary Marxist philosophy of language and the new structural linguistics indebted to Ferdinand De Saussure, all fail to articulate an adequate account of the novel because they have not pursued a properly "sociological stylistics." The philosophy of language on which these inadequate critical methods are based posits, on the one hand, a unitary system of language—a system of more or less absolute norms that govern speech-and, on the other hand, an Individual who is seen as the controlling "author" of discourse. Bakhtin calls such a view of language "monologic" and he argues that it is alien to the dynamics of the novel because it describes not real, living language but an abstraction created through self-conscious deliberation about language and cut off from the daily ideological activities of social life. Living language exhibits *heteroglossia,* the term Bakhtin famously uses to describe the "internal stratification" of language: the interplay among its social dialects, class dialects, professional jargons, and languages of generations and age groups and of passing fads, "languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day, even of the hour." Heteroglossia, which Bakhtin hails as, the characteristic stylistic feature of the novel, celebrates not the systematic nature of language but the multiplicity, of all those. "centrifugal" forces at work in language, the variety of social speech types, and the diversity of voices interacting with one another.

LET US KNOW



Central to Bakhtin's theory of the novel is his belief that language is fundamentally dialogic. "Discourse in the Novel offers his most elaborate analysis of "dialogism" and its relationship to style in the novel. Bakhtin celebrates the dialogics of the novel while criticizing the monologism of poetry, which characteristically aims for a unified-and pure discourse. Although conflict, contradiction, and doubt may be present in the subject matter of poetry, they do not, according to Bakhtin; enter into the language of the poem itself, as they consistently do in. the novel.

Bakhtin's theories can sometimes appear confusing and vague because his critical terminology often seems at once evaluative and descriptive. He regularly establishes his critical vocabulary by defining certain terms positively against related terms given negative valences. Thus the novel is opposed to poetry; the carnivalesque to official discourse, the dialogic to the monologic. These judgments have posed problems for critics who value those genres that Bakhtin most frequently derogates as monologic, especially poetry, the epic, and drama. Other critics object that it is not clear to what degree Bakhtin espouses a mimetic theory of literature, insofar as language for him seems less to represent or reflect reality than to refract and rework it.

Nevertheless, Bakhtin's works have been much admired and extended by scholars in many fields. Those in cultural studies have found two major contributions particularly useful. First, Bakhtin focuses on "language" as the utterances of speaking subjects: that is, as spoken "discourse" and not the impersonal, prevocal signifiers or rhetorical tropes posited by the influential structuralist and poststructuralist traditions. Second, he insists that discourse unfolds in a heteroglot, dialogic force field of conflicting interests and ideologies; with literary language being only one of many discursive strata and itself divided by generic, stylistic professional, and other special features. These Bakhtinian views, widely advocated by cultural studies scholars, promote a complex socio-poetics

suited to a contemporary globalized world of diverse peoples, languages, and cultural forms.

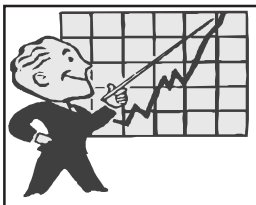
As a literary theorist, Bakhtin is associated with the Russian Formalists, and in 1963, Roman Jakobson mentioned him as one of the few intelligent critics of Formalism. During the 1920s, Bakhtin's work tended to focus on ethics and aesthetics in general. Early pieces such as *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* and *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* are indebted to the philosophical trends of the time—particularly the Marburg school neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen, including Ernst Cassirer, Max Scheler and, to a lesser extent, Nicolai Hartmann. Bakhtin began to be discovered by scholars in 1963, but it was only after his death in 1975 that authors such as Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov brought Bakhtin to the attention of the Francophone world, and from there his popularity in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries continued to grow. In the late 1980s, Bakhtin's work experienced a surge of popularity in the West.

In the 1920s, there was a "Bakhtin school" in Russia, in line with the discourse analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.



LET US KNOW

Bakhtin's primary works include *Toward a Philosophy of the Art,* an unfinished portion of a philosophical essay; *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Art,* to which Bakhtin later added a chapter on the concept of carnival and published with the title *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*; *Rabelais and His World,* which explores the openness of the Rabelaisian novel; *The Dialogic Imagination,* whereby the four essays that comprise the work introduce the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia, and chronotope; and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* a collection of essays in which Bakhtin concerns himself with method and culture.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who is Bakhtin? Name the important works of Bakhtin.

Q 2: What are the three key concepts in Bakhtin's Theory of the novel?

Q 3: State the meaning of the term Heteroglossia.

Q 4: What is at the centre of Bakhtin's theory of the novel?

Q 5: How did Kristeva and Todorov popularise Bakhtin's ideas?

5.4 READING THE TEXT "FROM THE PREHISTORY OF NOVELISTIC DISCOURSE"

The Excerpt of the text is taken from *David Lodge and Nigel Wood's Anthology.*

Section I

The stylistic study of the novel began only very recently. Classicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not recognize the novel as an independent poetic genre and classified it with the mixed rhetorical genres. The first theoreticians of the novel—Abbé Huet (Essay [Traité] sur l'origine des romans, 1670), Wieland (in his celebrated preface to Agathon, 1766-67), Blankenburg (Versuch über den Roman, 1774, published anonymously) and the Romantics (Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis) barely touched upon questions of style. In the second half of the nineteenth century there was an intensification of interest in the theory of the novel, as it had become the leading European genre—but scholarship was concentrated almost exclusively on questions of composition and thematics. Questions of stylistics were touched upon only in passing and then in a manner that was completely unsystematic.

Beginning with the 1920s, this situation changed rather abruptly: there appeared a large number of works dealing with the stylistics of individual novelists and of individual novels. These works are often rich in valuable observations. But the distinctive features of novelistic discourse, the stylistic specificum of the novel as a genre, remained as before

unexplored. Moreover, the problem of this specificum itself, its full significance, has to this day not yet been posed. Five different stylistic approaches to novelistic discourse may be observed: (1) the author's portions alone in the novel are analyzed, that is, only direct words of the author more or less correctly isolated — an analysis constructed in terms of the usual, direct poetic methods of representation and expression (metaphors, comparisons, lexical register, etc.); (2) instead of a stylistic analysis of the novel as an artistic whole, there is a neutral linguistic description of the novelist's language; (3) in a given novelist's language, elements characteristic of his particular literary tendency are isolated (be it Romanticism, Naturalism, Impressionism, etc.); (4) what is sought in the language of the novel is examined as an expression of the individual personality, that is, language is analyzed as the individual style of the given novelist; (5) the novel is viewed as a rhetorical genre, and its devices are analyzed from the point of view of their effectiveness as rhetoric.

All these types of stylistic analysis to a greater or lesser degree are remote from those peculiarities that define the novel as a genre, and they are also remote from the specific conditions under which the word lives in the novel. They all take a novelist's language and style not as the language and style of a novel but merely as the expression of a specific individual artistic personality, or as the style of a particular literary school or finally as a phenomenon common to poetic language in general. The individual artistic personality of the author, the literary school, the general characteristics of poetic language or of the literary language of a particular era all serve to conceal from us the genre itself, with the specific demands it makes upon language and the specific possibilities it opens up for it. As a result, in the majority of these works on the novel, relatively minor stylistic variations — whether individual or characteristic of a particular school -- have the effect of completely covering up the major stylistic lines determined by the development of the novel as a unique genre. And all the while discourse in the novel has been living a life that is distinctly its own, a life that is impossible to understand from the point of view of stylistic categories formed on the basis of poetic genres in the narrow sense of that term.

The differences between the novel (and certain forms close to it) and all other genres — poetic genres in the narrow sense — are so fundamental, so categorical, that all attempts to impose on the novel the concepts and norms of poetic imagery are doomed to fail. Although the novel does contain poetic imagery in the narrow sense (primarily in the author's direct discourse), it is of secondary importance for the novel. What is more, this direct imagery often acquires in the -106- novel quite special functions that are not direct. Here, for example, is how Pushkin characterizes Lensky's poetry.

He sang love, he was obedient to love,
And his song was as clear
As the thoughts of a simple maid,
As an infant's dream, as the moon. . .
(a development of the final comparison follows).

The poetic images (specifically the metaphoric comparisons) representing Lensky's 'song' do not here have any direct poetic significance at all. They cannot be understood as the direct poetic images of Pushkin himself (although formally, of course, the characterization is that of the author). Here Lensky's 'song' is characterizing itself, in its own language, in its own poetic manner. Pushkin's direct characterization of Lensky's 'song' — which we find as well in the novel — sounds completely different [6. 23, 1]:

Thus he wrote gloomily and languidly. . . .

In the four lines cited by us above it is Lensky's song itself, his voice, his poetic style that sounds, but it is permeated with the parodic and ironic accents of the author; that is the reason why it need not be distinguished from authorial speech by compositional or grammatical means. What we have before us is in fact an image of Lensky's song, but not an image in the narrow sense; it is rather a novelistic image: the image of another's [èu•oj] language, in the given instance the image of another's poetic style (sentimental and romantic). The poetic metaphors in these lines ('as an infant's dream,' 'as the moon' and others) in no way function here as the

primary means of representation (as they would function in a direct, 'serious' song written by Lensky himself); rather they themselves have here become the object of representation, or more precisely of a representation that is parodied and stylized. This novelistic image of another's style (with the direct metaphors that it incorporates) must be taken in intonational quotation marks within the system of direct authorial speech (postulated by us here), that is, taken as if the image were parodic and ironic. Were we to discard intonational question marks and take the use of metaphors here as the direct means by which the author represents himself, we would in so doing destroy the novelistic image [obraz] of another's style, that is, destroy precisely that image that Pushkin, as novelist, constructs here. Lensky's represented poetic speech is very distant from the direct word of the author himself as we have postulated it: Lensky's language functions merely as an object of representation (almost as a material thing); the author himself is almost completely outside Lensky's language (it is only his parodic and ironic accents that penetrate this 'language of another').

Another example from Onegin [1. 46, 1-7]:

He who has lived and thought can never
Look on mankind without disdain;
He who has felt is haunted ever
By days that will not come again;
No more for him enchantment's semblance,
On him the serpent of remembrance
Feeds, and remorse corrodes his heart.

One might think that we had before us a direct poetic maxim of the author himself. But these ensuing lines:

All this is likely to impart
An added charm to conversation

(spoken by the posited author to Onegin) already give an objective coloration to this maxim. Although it is part of authorial speech, it is structured in a realm where Onegin's voice and Onegin's style hold sway. We once

again have an example of the novelistic image of another's style. But it is structured somewhat differently. All the images in this excerpt become in turn the object of representation: they are represented as Onegin's style, Onegin's world view. In this respect they are similar to the images in Lensky's song. But unlike Lensky's song these images, being the object of representation, at the same time represent themselves, or more precisely they express the thought of the author, since the author agrees with this maxim to a certain extent, while nevertheless seeing the limitations and insufficiency of the Onegin — Byronic world view and style. Thus the author (that is, the direct authorial word we are postulating) is considerably closer to Onegin's 'language' than to the 'language' of Lensky: he is no longer merely outside it but in it as well; he not only represents this 'language' but to a considerable extent he himself speaks in this 'language.' The hero is located in a zone of potential conversation with the author, in a zone of dialogical contact. The author sees the limitations and insufficiency of the Oneginesque language and world view that was still fashionable in his (the author's) time; he sees its absurd, atomized and artificial face ('A Muscovite in the cloak of a Childe Harold', 'A lexicon full of fashionable words', 'Is he not really a parody?'); at the same time however the author can express some of his most basic ideas and observations only with the help of this 'language,' despite the fact that as a system it is a historical dead end. The image of another's language and outlook on the world [èu•oe jazykmirovozzrenie], simultaneously represented and representing, is extremely typical of the novel; the greatest novelistic images (for example, the figure of Don Quixote) belong precisely to this type. These descriptive and expressive means that are direct and poetic (in the narrow sense) retain their direct significance when they are incorporated into such a figure, but at the same time they are 'qualified' and 'externalized,' shown as something historically relative, delimited and incomplete — in the novel they, so to speak, criticize themselves.

They both illuminate the world and are themselves illuminated. Just as all there is to know about a man is not exhausted by his situation in life, so all there -108- is to know about the world is not exhausted by a particular

discourse about it; every available style is restricted, there are protocols that must be observed.

The author represents Onegin's 'language' (a period-bound language associated with a particular world view) as an image that speaks, and that is therefore preconditioned [ogovorennij govorjašèij]. Therefore, the author is far from neutral in his relationship to this image: to a certain extent he even polemicizes with this language, argues with it, agrees with it (although with conditions), interrogates it, eavesdrops on it, but also ridicules it, parodically exaggerates it and so forth — in other words, the author is in a dialogical relationship with Onegin's language; the author is actually conversing with Onegin, and such a conversation is the fundamental constitutive element of all novelistic style as well as of the controlling image of Onegin's language. The author represents this language, carries on a conversation with it, and the conversation penetrates into the interior of this language-image and dialogizes it from within. And all essentially novelistic images share this quality: they are internally dialogized images — of the languages, styles, world views of another (all of which are inseparable from their concrete linguistic and stylistic embodiment). The reigning theories of poetic imagery are completely powerless to analyze these complex internally dialogized images of whole languages.

Analyzing Onegin, it is possible to establish without much trouble that in addition to the images of Onegin's language and Lensky's language there exists yet another complex language-image, a highly profound one, associated with Tatiana. At the heart of this image is a distinctive internally dialogized combination of the language of a 'provincial miss' — dreamy, sentimental, Richardsonian—with the folk language of fairy tales and stories from everyday life told to her by her nurse, together with peasant songs, fortune telling and so forth. What is limited, almost comical, old-fashioned in Tatiana's language is combined with the boundless, serious and direct truth of the language of the folk. The author not only represents this language but is also in fact speaking in it. Considerable sections of the novel are presented in Tatiana's voice-zone (this zone, as is the case with zones of all other characters, is not set off from authorial speech in any formally

compositional or syntactical way; it is a zone demarcated purely in terms of style).

In addition to the character-zones, which take up a considerable portion of authorial speech in the novel, we also find in Onegin individual parodic stylizations of the language associated with various literary schools and genres of the time (such as a parody on the neoclassical epic formulaic opening, parodic epitaphs, etc.). And the author's lyrical digressions themselves are by no means free of parodically stylized or parodically polemicizing elements, which to a certain degree enter into the zones of the characters as well. Thus, from a stylistic point of view, the lyrical digressions in the novel are categorically distinct from the direct lyrics of Pushkin. The former are not lyrics, they are the novelistic image of lyrics (and of the poet as lyricist). As a result, under careful analysis almost the entire novel breaks down into images of languages that are connected to one another and with the author via their own characteristic dialogical relationships. These languages are, in the main, the period-bound, generic and common everyday varieties of the epoch's literary language, a language that is in itself ever evolving and in process of renewal. All these languages, with all the direct expressive means at their disposal, themselves become the object of representation, are presented as images of whole languages, characteristically typical images, highly limited and sometimes almost comical. But at the same time these represented languages themselves do the work of representing to a significant degree. The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with almost no direct language of his own. The language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language.

We pause on one more example. Here are four excerpts from different sections of Onegin:

(1) Thus a young [Molodoj] good-for-nothing muses. . . . [1. 2, 1]
(2) . . . Our youthful [mladoj] singer Has gone to his untimely end! . . . [6. 31, 10-11]

(3) I sing of a young [mladoj] friend, his checkered Career in fortune's cruel coil. [7. 55, 6-7]

(4) What if your pistol-shot has shattered

The temple of a dear young [molodoj] boy. . . . [6. 34, 1-2]

We see here in two instances the Church Slavonic form mladoj and in two instances the Russian metathesized form molodoj. Could it be said that both forms belong to a single authorial language and to a single authorial style, one or the other of them being chosen, say, 'for the meter'? Any assertion of the sort would be, of course, barbaric. Certainly it is the author speaking in all four instances. But analysis shows us that these forms belong to different stylistic systems of the novel.

The words 'mladoj pevec' [youthful singer] (the second excerpt) lie in Lensky's zone, are presented in his style, that is, in the somewhat archaicized style of Sentimental Romanticism. The words 'pet' [to sing] in the sense of pisat' stixi [to write verses] and 'pevec' [singer] and 'poet' [poet] are used by Pushkin in Lensky's zone or in other zones that are parodied and objectified (in his own language Pushkin himself says of Lensky: 'Thus he wrote. . . .'). The scene of the duel and the 'lament' for Lensky ('My friends, you mourn the poet. . . ' [6. 36, 1], etc.) are in large part constructed in Lensky's zone, in his poetic style, but the realistic and soberminded authorial voice is forever breaking in; the orchestration in this section of the novel is rather complex and highly interesting.

The words 'I sing of a young friend' (third excerpt) involve a parodic travesty on the formulaic opening of the neoclassical epic. The stylistically crude link-up of the archaic, high word mladoj with the low word 'prijatel' [acquaintance, friend] is justified by the requirements of parody and travesty.

The words molodoj povesa [young good-for-nothing] and molodoj prijate' [young friend] are located on the plane of direct authorial language, consistent with the spirit of the familiar, conversational style characteristic of the literary language of the era.

Different linguistic and stylistic forms may be said to belong to different systems of languages in the novel. If we were to abolish all the

intonational quotation marks, all the divisions into voices and styles, all the various gaps between the represented 'languages' and direct authorial discourse, then we would get a conglomeration of heterogeneous linguistic and stylistic forms lacking any real sense of style. It is impossible to lay out the languages of the novel on a single plane, to stretch them out along a single line. It is a system of intersecting planes. In Onegin, there is scarcely a word that appears as Pushkin's direct word, in the unconditional sense that would for instance be true of his lyrics or romantic poems. Therefore, there is no unitary language or style in the novel. But at the same time there does exist a center of language (a verbal-ideological center) for the novel. The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) cannot be found at any one of the novel's language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect. The different levels are to varying degrees distant from this authorial center.

Belinsky called Pushkin's novel 'an encyclopedia of Russian life'. But this is no inert encyclopedia that merely catalogues the things of everyday life. Here Russian life speaks in all its voices, in all the languages and styles of the era. Literary language is not represented in the novel as a unitary, completely finishedoff and indisputable language — it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices [raznoreèivost'], developing and renewing itself. The language of the author strives to overcome the superficial 'literariness' of moribund, outmoded styles and fashionable period-bound languages; it strives to renew itself by drawing on the fundamental elements of folk language (which does not mean, however, exploiting the crudely obvious, vulgar contradictions between folk and other languages).

Pushkin's novel is a self-critique of the literary language of the era, a product of this language's various strata (generic, everyday, 'currently fashionable') mutually illuminating one another. But this interillumination is not of course accomplished at the level of linguistic abstraction: images of language are inseparable from images of various world views and from the living beings who are their agents — people who think, talk, and act in a setting that is social and historically concrete. From a stylistic point of view

we are faced with a complex system of languages of the era being appropriated into one unitary dialogical movement, while at the same time separate 'languages' within this system are located at different distances from the unifying artistic and ideological center of the novel.

The stylistic structure of Eugenij Onegin is typical of all authentic novels. To a greater or lesser extent, every novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of 'languages,' styles and consciousnesses that are concrete and inseparable from language. Language in the novel not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation. Novelistic discourse is always criticizing itself.

In this consists the categorical distinction between the novel and all straightforward genres — the epic poem, the lyric and the drama (strictly conceived). All directly descriptive and expressive means at the disposal of these genres, as well as the genres themselves, become upon entering the novel an object of representation within it. Under conditions of the novel every direct word — epic, lyric, strictly dramatic — is to a greater or lesser degree made into an object, the word itself becomes a bounded [ogranièennij] image, one that quite often appears ridiculous in this framed condition.

The basic tasks for a stylistics in the novel are, therefore: the study of specific images of languages and styles; the organization of these images; their typology (for they are extremely diverse); the combination of images of languages within the novelistic whole; the transfers and switchings of languages and voices; their dialogical interrelationships.

The stylistics of direct genres, of the direct poetic word, offer us almost no help in resolving these problems.

We speak of a special novelistic discourse because it is only in the novel that discourse can reveal all its specific potential and achieve its true depth. But the novel is a comparatively recent genre. Indirect discourse, however, the representation of another's word, another's language in intonational quotation marks, was known in the most ancient times; we encounter it in the earliest stages of verbal culture. What is more, long before the appearance of the novel we find a rich world of diverse forms

that transmit, mimic and represent from various vantage points another's word, another's speech and language, including also the languages of the direct genres. These diverse forms prepared the ground for the novel long before its actual appearance. Novelistic discourse has a lengthy prehistory, going back centuries, even thousands of years. It was formed and matured in the genres of familiar speech found in conversational folk language (genres that are as yet little studied) and also in certain folkloric and low literary genres. During its germination and early development, the novelistic word reflected a primordial struggle between tribes, peoples, cultures and languages — it is still full of echoes of this ancient struggle. In essence this discourse always developed on the bound- ary line between cultures and languages. The prehistory of novelistic discourse is of great interest and not without its own special drama.

In the prehistory of novelistic discourse one may observe many extremely heterogeneous factors at work. From our point of view, however, two of these factors prove to be of decisive importance: one of these is laughter, the other polyglossia [mnogojazycie]. The most ancient forms for representing language were organized by laughter — these were originally nothing more than the ridiculing of another's language and another's direct discourse. Polyglossia and the interanimation of languages associated with it elevated these forms to a new artistic and ideological level, which made possible the genre of the novel.

These two factors in the prehistory of novelistic discourse are the subject of the present article.

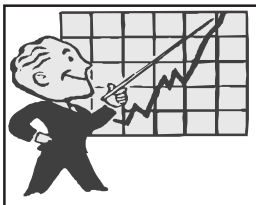
5.5 IMPORTANT THEORETICAL ISSUES RAISED

Bakhtin in this essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse", discusses the relationship between the stylistic elements an author often makes use of in a novel. Then he posits that it is these relationships that define the sense of style of a novel, and of the genre as a whole. Another distinguishing characteristic of the language in the novel is that language not only represents something in the world, but also "serves as the object of representation." Bakhtin also discusses the idea of parody. He spends a

great deal of time going over the origin of parody and its varying roles, just to conclude that the novel allowed the author to examine language from "the point of view of a potentially different language and style." It is this "creating consciousness" that sets apart the novel from other genres. Parody within the novel is a parody about an object (like the use of parody in other genres) but this parody itself becomes an object. The final section of "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," is an exploration of the use of the quotation. Bakhtin also spends some time going over the origin and use of the quotation, ending in its use today in the novel. Through his discourse on quotation, Bakhtin determines that the quotation was one of the first elements responsible for parody. "Latin parody, is therefore, a bilingual phenomenon," concludes Bakhtin. Bakhtin ends the essay by reminding the reader that we cannot examine the prehistory of the novelistic word with "mere literary styles."

Thus, we can conclude that in his essay, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Mikhail Bakhtin offers a study of novelistic discourse that emphasizes the history, culture, and construction of language used in modern novels. Bakhtin structures his essay into three sections, each of which outlines a specific aspect of his argument on the study of novelistic discourse. The first section outlines the history of the novel, as well as the history of and introduction to the study of novelistic discourse. Bakhtin mentions several other traditional approaches to the study, explaining the flaws associated with each. In the second section, he analyzes several different works of ancient Greece and argues that they should not be "contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles". The third and last section Bakhtin concludes his essay by reviewing the major points of his argument, and stating that novelistic discourse should not be narrowed by the study of linguistic tendencies, style, and abstract languages but it should be viewed, rather, as "a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages". In addition, Bakhtin states, novelistic discourse should be closely related to language and especially the changes that take place within language.

In this essay, Bakhtin also argues that instead of analyzing the style of a novel, one should instead analyze the intricacies of the language employed within the novel. He argues that in analyzing particular stylistic aspects of a novel, one emerges with a much limited view of a work. "…We wish only to emphasize that the novelistic word arose and developed not as the result of a narrowly literary struggle among tendencies, styles, abstract world views – but rather in a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages" (135). In stating this, Bakhtin seems to be saying that the history of different languages and cultures and the works they created contribute to the current form of the novel today. In addition, Bakhtin concludes his essay by stating, "The prehistory of the novelistic word is not to be contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles" (135).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What does the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," offer?

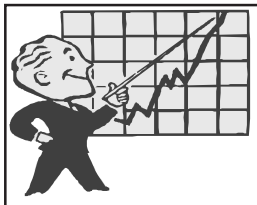
Q 7: How does Bakhtin structure the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"?

5.6 RECEPTION OF BAKHTIN AND HIS IDEAS

Mikhail Bakhtin is known today for his involvement in a wide variety of subjects, ideas, vocabularies and periods as well as his use of authorial disguises. He is also known for his influence on the growth of Western scholarship on the novel as a premiere literary genre. As a result of the breadth of topics with which he dealt, Bakhtin has influenced such Western schools of theory as Neo-Marxism, Structuralism and Semiotics. Bakhtin's works have also been useful in Anthropology, especially theories of ritual. As a literary critic, Bakhtin indicates that style is a developmental process, occurring within both the user of language and language itself. His work instils in the reader an awareness of tone and expression that arises from the careful formation of verbal phrasing. By means of his writing, Bakhtin has enriched the experience of verbal and written expression, which

ultimately aids the formal teaching of writing. Some even suggest that Bakhtin introduces a new meaning to rhetoric because of his tendency to reject the separation of language and ideology. As Leslie Baxter explains, for Bakhtin, "Because all language use is riddled with multiple voices (to be understood more generally as discourses, ideologies, perspectives, or themes), meaning-making in general can be understood as the interplay of those voices."

The essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" conveys some sense of two of Bakhtin's key ideas. The first is that a given utterance may be, not just the representation of something in the world, but also a representation of another speech act about that thing (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics contains and elaborate typology of such 'doubly-oriented discourse'.) The second is that prose fiction does greater justice to this aspect of language and human behaviour than the 'canonical' genres of epic, lyric and tragedy privileged by orthodox poetics —a capacity that it derives from the parodic-travestying genres of classical and medieval literature. This tradition is valued by Bakhtin because it offers permanent resistance to the tyranny of totalitarian 'monologic' ideologies, one of which he experienced at first hand. The essay was probably written in 1940, but first published in Russia in 1967. Later it was printed in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981), translated by Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What are the two key areas of Bakhtin as expressed in the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"?



5.7 LET US SUM UP

As we come to the end of this unit, we have learnt that in the essay, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," Bakhtin discusses the origin and nature of the novel arguing that "mere literary styles" are not enough to

analyze and define the novel. Instead, we should focus on the relationships between the distinct elements that distinguish the novel from other genres. Bakhtin begins by briefly charting the course of the attempt to analysis and define the novel, and the resulting failure, because of the failure to explore the "stylistic *specificum*, of the novel as a genre." Then, he provides a few examples of the use of imagery and metaphor within a novel, and how these elements differ from their use in poetics.



5.8 FURTHER READING

Leitch, Vincent B. (Gen. Ed.). (2001). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Lodge, David & Nigel Wood. (Eds.). (2003). *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader. (2nd Edn).*Pearson Education.

Macey, David. (2000). *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory.* Penguin Books.

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakhtin

5.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (Hints Only)

Ans to Q 1: Bakhtin is a 20th century theorist of literature… …a formalist critic… …*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Rabelais and His World, Toward a Philosophy of the Art, The Dialogic Imagination, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* are some of his important critical works.

Ans to Q 2: Carnivalesque an idea for those forms of unofficial culture that resist official culture, political oppression, and totalitarian order through laughter, parody and "grotesque realism"… …chrnotope that describes the intrinsic connectedness of time and space and their central role in constituting literary genres… …dialogism-the "intense interanimation and struggle between one's own and another's word.

Ans to Q 3: Heteroglossia is the term Bakhtin famously uses to describe the "internal stratification" of language… …the interplay among its social dialects, class dialects, professional jargons, and languages of generations and age groups and of passing fads… …Bakhtin views Heteroglossia as the characteristic stylistic feature of the novel.

Ans to Q 4: Central to Bakhtin's theory of the novel is his belief that language is fundamentally dialogic… …in his "Discourse in the Novel" he offers his most elaborate analysis of "dialogism" and its relationship to style in the novel… …Bakhtin celebrates the dialogics of the novel while criticizing the monologism of poetry.

Ans to Q 5: They brought Bakhtin to the attention of the Francophone world, and from there his popularity in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries continued to grow.

Ans to Q 6: The essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," offers a study of novelistic discourse that emphasizes the history, culture, and construction of language used in modern novels.

Ans to Q 7: Bakhtin structures his essay into three sections… …the first section outlines the history of the novel and provided an introduction to the study of novelistic discourse… … in the second section, he analyzes several different works of ancient Greece and argues that they should not be "contained within the narrow perimeters of a history confined to mere literary styles"… …the third section reviews his major arguments and states that novelistic discourse should not be narrowed by the study of linguistic tendencies, style, and abstract languages but it should be viewed, rather, as "a complex and centuries-long struggle of cultures and languages.

Ans to Q 8: The first idea is that a given utterance may be, not just the representation of something in the world, but also a representation of another speech act about that thing… …the second is that prose fiction does greater justice to this aspect of language and human behaviour than the 'canonical' genres of epic, lyric and tragedy privileged by orthodox poetics —a capacity that it derives from the parodic-travestying genres of classical and medieval literature.



5.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Assess the contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin as a literary critic.

Q 2: How does Mikhail Bakhtin engage himself with the issue of novelistic discourse? Discuss.

Q 3: What are the key concepts developed by Bakhtin while theorising the novel as a genre? Discuss.

Q 4: Provide a critical appreciation of Bakhtin's essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse."

*** ***** ***



REFERENCE LIST (FOR ALL UNITS)

Armstrong, Daniel & Cornelis H. Van Schooneveld. (Eds.). (1977). *Roman Jakobson: Echoes of His Scholarship*.

Barry, Peter. (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

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Sanders, Carol. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Death_of_the_Author

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Fish

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakhtin

Name of the Paper:
Course Code:

Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)
Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110068

Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinion and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the subjective statements, please detach the page and send back the entire to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, Block-1, Ground Floor, New Delhi-110068
(Please fill in capital letters)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? [ ][ ][ ]
2. Please give your opinion (by 1 marks) to the following items based on your reading of the Block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The TITLE of the course/ MAP the learning objectives are true to the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the MAP could satisfy the academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Units reveal have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented in a way which it could create interest					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Units through Illustrations/Diagrams, tables etc.) is encouraged the by					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Examination/ assessment and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments (Please feel free to provide your opinion)

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

   _____

   _____

2. What are the changes/improvements do you feel **REQUIRED** in order to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

   _____

   _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

June 2014