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Jonathan Culler

LITERARY THEORY

A Very Short Introduction

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Preface

Many introductions to literary theory describe a series of 'schools' of criticism. Theory is treated as a series of competing 'approaches', each with its theoretical positions and commitments. But the theoretical movements that introductions identify – such as structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and new historicism – have a lot in common. This is why people talk about 'theory' and not just about particular theories. To introduce theory, it is better to discuss shared questions and claims than to survey theoretical schools. It is preferable to discuss important debates that do not oppose one 'school' to another but may mark salient divisions within movements. Treating contemporary theory as a set of competing approaches or methods of interpretation misses much of its interest and force, which come from its broad challenge to common sense, and from its explorations of how meaning is created and human identities take shape. I have preferred to take up a series of topics, focusing on important issues and debates about them and on what I think has been learned.

Still, anyone reading an introductory book on literary theory has a right to expect an explanation of terms such as *structuralism* and *deconstruction*. I offer brief sketches of major critical schools or movements in the Appendix, which can be read first or last or referred to constantly. Enjoy!

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This book owes much to students in my introductory courses on literary theory at Cornell University, whose questions and arguments over the years have given me a sense of what to say in an introduction. I take special pleasure in thanking Cynthia Chase, Mieke Bal, and Richard Klein, who read and commented on this manuscript, prompting me to rethink and rewrite. Robert Baker, Leland Deladurantaye, and Meg Wesling assisted in particular ways, and Ewa Badowska, who has helped me teach literary theory, made crucial contributions to numerous aspects of this project.

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camp commanders who were connoisseurs of literature, art, and music has complicated attempts to make claims for the effects of particular sorts of study. But these issues should be confronted head on.

A different set of questions involves the *methods* for the study of cultural objects of all sorts – the advantages and disadvantages of different modes of interpretation and analysis, such as interpreting cultural objects as complex structures or reading them as symptoms of social totalities. Though appreciative interpretation has been associated with literary studies and symptomatic analysis with cultural studies, either mode can go with either sort of cultural object. Close reading of non-literary writing does not imply aesthetic valuation of the object, any more than asking cultural questions of literary works implies that they are just documents of a period. In the next chapter I pursue further the problem of interpretation.

Chapter 4

Language, Meaning, and Interpretation

Is literature a special kind of language or is it a special use of language? Is it language organized in distinctive ways or is it language granted special privileges? I argued in Chapter 2 that it won't work to choose one option or the other: literature involves *both* properties of language *and* a special kind of attention to language. As this debate indicates, questions about the nature and the roles of language and how to analyse it have been central to theory. Some of the major issues can be focused through the problem of meaning. What is involved in thinking about meaning?

Meaning in literature

Take the lines which we earlier treated as literature, a two-line poem by Robert Frost:

THE SECRET SITS

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

What is 'meaning' here? Well, there's a difference between asking about the meaning of a text (the poem as a whole) and the meaning of a word. We can say that *dance* means 'to perform a succession of rhythmic and patterned movements', but what does this text mean? It

what about for music – lexicon

suggests, you might say, the futility of human doings: we go round and around; we can only suppose. More than that, with its rhyme and its air of knowing what it is doing, this text engages the reader in a process of puzzling over dancing and supposing. That effect, the process the text can provoke, is part of its meaning. So, we have the meaning of a word and the meaning or provocations of a text; then, in between, there's what we might call the meaning of an utterance: the meaning of the act of uttering these words in particular circumstances. What *act* is this utterance performing: is it *warning* or *admitting*, *lamenting* or *boasting* for example? Who is *we* here and what does 'dancing' mean in this utterance?

We can't just ask about 'meaning', then. There are at least three different dimensions or levels of meaning: the meaning of a word, of an utterance, and of a text. Possible meanings of words contribute to the meaning of an utterance, which is an act by a speaker. (And the meanings of words, in turn, come from the things they might do in utterances.) Finally, the text, which here represents an unknown speaker making this enigmatical utterance, is something an author has constructed, and its meaning is not a proposition but what it *does*, its potential to affect readers.

We have different kinds of meaning, but one thing we can say in general is that meaning is based on difference. We don't know who 'we' refers to in this text; only that it is 'we' as opposed to 'I' alone, and to 'he', 'she', 'it', 'you', and 'they'. 'We' is some indefinite plural group that includes whatever speaker we think is involved. Is the reader included in 'we' or not? Is 'we' everyone except the Secret, or is it a special group? Such questions, which have no easy answers, come up in any attempt to interpret the poem. What we have are contrasts, differences.

Much the same could be said of 'dance' and 'suppose'. What *dance* means here depends on what we contrast it with ('dancing around' as opposed to 'proceeding directly' or as opposed to 'remaining still'); and

'suppose' is opposed to 'know'. Thinking about the meaning of this poem is a matter of working with oppositions or differences, giving them content, extrapolating from them.

Saussure's theory of language

A language is a *system* of differences. So declares Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist of the early twentieth century whose work has been crucial to contemporary theory. What makes each element of a language what it is, what gives it its identity, are the contrasts between it and other elements within the system of the language. Saussure offers an analogy: a train – say the 8.30 a.m. London-to-Oxford express – depends for its identity on the system of trains, as described in the railway timetable. So the 8.30 London-to-Oxford express is distinguished from the 9.30 London-to-Cambridge express and the 8.45 Oxford local. What counts are not any of the physical features of a particular train: the engine, the carriages, the exact route, the personnel, and so on may all vary, as may the times of departure and arrival; the train may leave and arrive late. What gives the train its identity is its place in the system of trains: it is this train, *as opposed to* the others. As Saussure says of the linguistic sign, 'Its most precise characteristic is to be what the others are not.' Similarly, the letter *b* may be written in any number of different ways (think of different people's handwriting), so long as it is not confused with other letters, such as *l*, *k*, and *d*. What is crucial is not any particular form or content, but differences, which enable it to signify.

For Saussure, a language is a system of signs and the key fact is what he calls the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. This means two things. First, the sign (for instance, a word) is a combination of a form (the 'signifier') and a meaning (the 'signified'), and the relation between form and meaning is based on convention, not natural resemblance. What I am sitting on is called a *chair* but could perfectly well have been called something else – *wab* or *punce*. It's a convention or rule of English

that it is the one rather than the other; in other languages it would have quite different names. The cases we think of as exceptions are 'onomatopoeic' words, where the sound seems to imitate what it represents, like *bow-wow*, or *buzz*. But these differ from one language to another: in French dogs say 'oua-oua' and *buzz* is *bourdonner*.

Even more important, for Saussure and recent theory, is the second aspect of the arbitrary nature of the sign: both the signifier (form) and the signified (meaning) are themselves conventional divisions of the plane of sound and the plane of thought respectively. Languages divide up the plane of sound and the plane of thought differently. English distinguishes *chair, cheer*, and *char* on the plane of sound, as separate signs with different meanings, but it need not do so – these could be variant pronunciations of a single sign. On the plane of meaning, English distinguishes 'chair' from 'stool' (a chair without a back) but allows the signified or concept 'chair' to include seats with and without arms, and both hard seats and soft luxurious seats – two differences that could perfectly well involve distinct concepts.

A language, Saussure insists, is not a 'nomenclature' that provides its own names for categories that exist outside language. This is a point with crucial ramifications for recent theory. We tend to assume that we have the words *dog* and *chair* in order to name dogs and chairs, which exist outside any language. But, Saussure argues, if words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next, which is not at all the case. Each language is a system of concepts as well as forms: a system of conventional signs that organizes the world.

Language and thought

How language relates to thought has been a major issue for recent theory. At one extreme is the common-sense view that language just provides names for thoughts that exist independently; language offers

ways of expressing pre-existing thoughts. At the other extreme is the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis', named after two linguists who claimed that the language we speak determines what we can think. For instance, Whorf argued that the Hopi Indians have a conception of time that can't be grasped in English (and so can't be explained here!). There seems no way of demonstrating that there are thoughts of one language that can't be thought or expressed in another, but we do have massive evidence that one language makes 'natural' or 'normal' thoughts that require a special effort in another.

The linguistic code is a theory of the world. Different languages divide up the world differently. Speakers of English have 'pets' – a category to which nothing in French corresponds, though the French possess inordinate numbers of dogs and cats. English compels us to learn the sex of an infant so as to use the correct pronoun to talk about him or her (you can't call a baby 'it'); our language thus implies that the sex is crucial (whence, no doubt, the popularity of pink or blue garments, to signal the right answer to speakers). But this linguistic marking of sex is in no way inevitable; all languages don't make sex the crucial feature of newborns. Grammatical structures, too, are conventions of a language, not natural or inevitable. When we look up in the sky and see a movement of wings, our language could perfectly well have us say something like 'It's winging' (as we say, 'It's raining'), rather than 'Birds are flying.' A famous poem by Paul Verlaine plays on this structure: 'Il pleure dans mon coeur | Comme il pleut sur la ville' (It cries in my heart, as it rains on the town). We say 'it's raining in town'; why not 'it's crying in my heart'?

Language is not a 'nomenclature' that provides labels for pre-existing categories; it generates its own categories. But speakers and readers can be brought to see through and around the settings of their language, so as to see a different reality. Works of literature explore the settings or categories of habitual ways of thinking and frequently attempt to bend or reshape them, showing us how to think something

that our language had not previously anticipated, forcing us to attend to the categories through which we unthinkingly view the world. Language is thus both the concrete manifestation of ideology – the categories in which speakers are authorized to think – and the site of its questioning or undoing.

Linguistic analysis

Saussure distinguishes the system of a language (la *langue*) from particular instances of speech and writing (*parole*). The task of linguistics is to reconstruct the underlying system (or grammar) of a language that makes possible the speech events or *parole*. This involves a further distinction between *synchronic* study of a language (focusing on a language as a system at a particular time, present or past) and *diachronic* study, which looks at the historical changes to particular elements of the language. To understand a language as a functioning system is to look at it synchronically, trying to spell out the rules and conventions of the system that make possible the forms and meanings of the language. The most influential linguist of our day, Noam Chomsky, the founder of what is called transformational-generative grammar, goes further, arguing that the task of linguistics is to reconstruct the 'linguistic competence' of native speakers: the implicit knowledge or ability speakers acquire and which enables them to speak and to understand even sentences they have never before encountered.

So linguistics *starts* from facts about the form and meaning utterances have for speakers and tries to account for them. How is it that the following two sentences with similar forms – *John is eager to please* and *John is easy to please* – have rather different meanings for speakers of English? Speakers know that in the first John wants to please and that in the second others do the pleasing. A linguist does not try to discover the 'true meaning' of these sentences, as if people had been wrong all along and deep down the sentences mean something else. The task of linguistics is to describe the structures of English (here, by positing an

* is there a true meaning to music? or to art in general?

underlying level of grammatical structure) so as to account for attested differences in meaning between these sentences.

Poetics versus hermeneutics

Here there is a basic distinction, too often neglected in literary studies, between two kinds of projects: one, modelled on linguistics, takes meanings as what have to be accounted for and tries to work out how they are possible. The other, by contrast, starts with forms and seeks to interpret them, to tell us what they really mean. In literary studies, this is a contrast between *poetics* and *hermeneutics*. Poetics starts with attested meanings or effects and asks how they are achieved. (What makes this passage in a novel seem ironic? What makes us sympathize with this particular character? Why is the ending of this poem ambiguous?) Hermeneutics, on the other hand, starts with texts and asks what they mean, seeking to discover new and better interpretations. Hermeneutic models come from the fields of law and religion, where people seek to interpret an authoritative legal or sacred text in order to decide how to act.

The linguistic model suggests that literary study should take the first track, of poetics, trying to understand how works achieve the effects they do, but the modern tradition of criticism has overwhelmingly taken the second, making the interpretation of individual works the payoff of literary study. In fact, works of literary criticism often combine poetics and hermeneutics, asking how a particular effect is achieved or why an ending seems right (both matters of poetics), but also asking what a particular line means and what a poem tells us about the human condition (hermeneutics). But the two projects are in principle quite distinct, with different goals and different kinds of evidence. Taking meanings or effects as the point of departure (poetics) is fundamentally different from seeking to discover meaning (hermeneutics).

If literary studies took linguistics as a model, its task would be to

describe the 'literary competence' that readers of literature acquire. A poetics describing literary competence would focus on the conventions that make possible literary structure and meaning: what are the codes or systems of convention that enable readers to identify literary genres, recognize plots, create 'characters' out of the scattered details provided in the text, identify themes in literary works, and pursue the kind of symbolic interpretation that allows us to gauge the significance of poems and stories?

This analogy between poetics and linguistics may seem misleading, for we don't know the meaning of a literary work as we know the meaning of *John is eager to please* and therefore can't take meaning as a given but have to seek it. This is certainly one reason why literary studies in modern times have favoured hermeneutics over poetics (the other reason is that people generally study literary works not because they are interested in the functioning of literature but because they think these works have important things to tell them and want to know what they are). But poetics does not require that we know the meaning of a work; its task is to account for whatever effects we can attest to – for example, that one ending is more successful than another, that this combination of images in a poem makes sense while another does not. Moreover, a crucial part of poetics is an account of how readers do go about interpreting literary works – what are the conventions that enable them to make sense of works as they do. For instance, what I called in Chapter 2 the 'hyper-protected cooperative principle' is a basic convention that makes possible the interpretation of literature: the assumption that difficulties, apparent nonsense, digressions, and irrelevancies have a relevant function at some level.

Readers and meaning

The idea of literary competence focuses attention on the implicit knowledge that readers (and writers) bring to their encounters with texts: what sort of procedures do readers follow in responding to works

what about for music – do you buy this?

as they do? What sort of assumptions must be in place to account for their reactions and interpretations? Thinking about readers and the way they make sense of literature has led to what has been called 'reader-response criticism', which claims that the meaning of the text is the experience of the reader (an experience that includes hesitations, conjectures, and self-corrections). If a literary work is conceived as a succession of actions upon the understanding of a reader, then an interpretation of the work can be a story of that encounter, with its ups and downs: various conventions or expectations are brought into play, connections are posited, and expectations defeated or confirmed. To interpret a work is to tell a story of reading.

But the story one can tell about a given work depends upon what theorists have called the reader's 'horizon of expectations'. A work is interpreted as answering questions posed by this horizon of expectations, and a reader of the 1990s approaches *Hamlet* with expectations different from those of a contemporary of Shakespeare's. A whole range of factors can affect readers' horizons of expectations. Feminist criticism has debated what difference it makes, what difference it should make, if the reader is a woman. How, Elaine Showalter asks, does 'the hypothesis of a female reader change our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes?' Literary texts and the traditions of their interpretation seem to have presumed a male reader and induced women readers to read as a man, from a male point of view. Similarly, film theorists have hypothesized that what they call the cinematic gaze (the view from the position of the camera) is essentially male: women are positioned as the object of the cinematic gaze rather than as the observer. In literary studies feminist critics have studied the various strategies by which works make a male perspective the normative one and have debated how the study of such structures and effects should change ways of reading – for men as well as women.

Comparison to Western v non-Western 20??

Interpretation

Focus on historical and social variations in ways of reading emphasizes that interpreting is a social practice. Readers interpret informally when they talk to friends about books or films; they interpret to themselves as they read. For the more formal interpretation that takes place in classrooms, there are different protocols. For any element of a work, you can ask what it does, how it relates to other elements, but interpretation may ultimately involve playing the 'about' game: 'so, what is this work really about?' This question is not prompted by the obscurity of a text; it is even more appropriate for simple texts than for wickedly complex ones. In this game the answer must meet certain conditions: it cannot be obvious, for instance; it must be speculative. To say ' *Hamlet* is about a prince in Denmark' is to refuse to play the game. But '*Hamlet* is about the breakdown of the Elizabethan world order,' or ' *Hamlet* is about men's fear of feminine sexuality,' or '*Hamlet* is about the unreliability of signs' count as possible answers. What are commonly seen as 'schools' of literary criticism or theoretical 'approaches' to literature are, from the point of view of hermeneutics, dispositions to give particular kinds of answers to the question of what a work is ultimately 'about': 'the class struggle' (Marxism), 'the possibility of unifying experience' (the New Criticism), 'Oedipal conflict' (psychoanalysis), 'the containment of subversive energies' (new historicism), 'the asymmetry of gender relations' (feminism), 'the self-deconstructive nature of the text' (deconstruction), 'the occlusion of imperialism' (post-colonial theory), 'the heterosexual matrix' (gay and lesbian studies).

The theoretical discourses named in parentheses are not primarily modes of interpretation: they are accounts of what they take to be particularly important to culture and society. Many of these theories include accounts of the functioning of literature or of discourse generally, and so partake of the project of poetics; but as versions of hermeneutics they give rise to particular types of interpretation in

which texts are mapped into a target language. What is important in the game of interpretation is not the answer you come up with – as my parodies show, some versions of the answer become, by definition, predictable. What's important is how you get there, what you do with the details of the text in relating them to your answer.

But how do we choose between interpretations? As my examples may suggest, at one level there is no need to decide whether *Hamlet* is 'ultimately about', say, Renaissance politics, men's relations to their mothers, or the unreliability of signs. The liveliness of the institution of literary study depends on the twin facts that (1) such arguments are never settled, and (2) arguments have to be made about how particular scenes or combinations of lines support any particular hypothesis. You can't make a work mean just anything: it resists, and you have to labour to convince others of the pertinence of your reading. For the conduct of such arguments, a key question is what determines meaning. We return to this central issue.

Meaning, intention, and context

What determines meaning? Sometimes we say that the meaning of an utterance is what someone means by it, as though the intention of a speaker determined meaning. Sometimes we say meaning is in the text – you may have intended to say *x*, but what you said actually means *y* – as if meaning were the product of the language itself. Sometimes we say context is what determines meaning: to know what this particular utterance means, you have to look at the circumstances or the historical context in which it figures. Some critics claim, as I have mentioned, that the meaning of a text is the experience of the reader. Intention, text, context, reader – what determines meaning?

Now the very fact that arguments are made for all four factors shows that meaning is complex and elusive, not something once and for all determined by any one of these factors. A long-standing argument in

literary theory concerns the role of intention in the determination of literary meaning. A famous article called 'The Intentional Fallacy' argues that for literary works arguments about interpretation are not settled by consulting the oracle (the author). The meaning of a work is not what the writer had in mind at some moment during composition of the work, or what the writer thinks the work means after it is finished, but, rather, what he or she succeeded in embodying in the work. If in ordinary conversation we often treat the meaning of an utterance as what the utterer intends, it is because we are more interested in what the speaker is thinking at that moment than in his or her words, but literary works are valued for the particular structures of words that they have put into circulation. Restricting the meaning of a work to what an author might have intended remains a possible critical strategy, but usually these days such meaning is tied not to an inner intention but to analysis of the author's personal or historical circumstances: what sort of act was this author performing, given the situation of the moment? This strategy denigrates later responses to the work, suggesting that the work answers the concerns of its moment of creation and only accidentally the concerns of subsequent readers.

Critics who defend the notion that intention determines meaning seem to fear that if we deny this, we place readers above authors and decree that 'anything goes' in interpretation. But if you come up with an interpretation, you have to persuade others of its pertinence, or else it will be dismissed. No one claims that 'anything goes'. As for authors, isn't it better to honour them for the power of their creations to stimulate endless thought and give rise to a variety of readings than for what we imagine to be a work's original meaning? None of this is to say that authors' statements about a work have no interest: for many critical projects they are especially valuable, as texts to juxtapose with the text of the work. They may be crucial, for example, in analysing the thought of an author or discussing the ways in which a work might have complicated or subverted an announced view or intention.

The meaning of a work is not what the author had in mind at some point, nor is it simply a property of the text or the experience of a reader. Meaning is an inescapable notion because it is not something simple or simply determined. It is simultaneously an experience of a subject and a property of a text. It is both what we understand and what *in* the text we *try* to understand. Arguments about meaning are always possible, and in that sense meaning is undecided, always to be decided, subject to decisions which are never irrevocable. If we must adopt some overall principle or formula, we might say that meaning is determined by context, since context includes rules of language, the situation of the author and the reader, and anything else that might conceivably be relevant. But if we say that meaning is context-bound, then we must add that context is boundless: there is no determining in advance what might count as relevant, what enlarging of context might be able to shift what we regard as the meaning of a text. Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.

Major shifts in the interpretation of literature brought about by theoretical discourses might, in fact, be thought of as the result of the widening or redescription of context. For example, Toni Morrison argues that American literature has been deeply marked by the often unacknowledged historical presence of slavery, and that this literature's engagements with freedom – the freedom of the frontier, of the open road, of the unfettered imagination – should be read in the context of enslavement, from which they take significance. And Edward Said has suggested that Jane Austen's novels should be interpreted against a background which is excluded from them: the exploitation of the colonies of the Empire which provides the wealth to support a decorous life at home in Britain. Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless, always open to mutations under the pressure of theoretical discussions.

Accounts of hermeneutics frequently distinguish a *hermeneutics of recovery*, which seeks to reconstruct the original context of production

(the circumstances and intentions of the author and the meanings a text might have had for its original readers), from a *hermeneutics of suspicion*, which seeks to expose the unexamined assumptions on which a text may rely (political, sexual, philosophical, linguistic). The first may celebrate the text and its author as it seeks to make an original message accessible to readers today, while the second is often said to deny the authority of the text. But these associations are not fixed and can well be reversed: a hermeneutics of recovery, in restricting the text to some supposedly original meaning remote from our concerns, may reduce its power, while a hermeneutics of suspicion may value the text for the way in which, unbeknownst to its author, it engages and helps us to rethink issues of moment today (perhaps subverting assumptions of its author in the process). More pertinent than this distinction may be a distinction between (1) interpretation which takes the text, in its functioning, to have something valuable to say (this might be either reconstructive or suspicious hermeneutics) and (2) 'symptomatic' interpretation which treats the text as the symptom of something non-textual, something supposedly 'deeper', which is the real source of interest, be it the psychic life of the author or the social tensions of an era or the homophobia of bourgeois society. Symptomatic interpretation neglects the specificity of the object – it is a sign of something else – and so is not very satisfying as a mode of interpretation, but when it focuses on the cultural practice of which the work is an instance, it can be useful to an account of that practice. Interpreting a poem as a symptom or instance of features of the lyric, for example, might be unsatisfactory hermeneutics but a useful contribution to poetics. To this I now turn.

Chapter 5
Rhetoric, Poetics, and Poetry

Poetics I have defined as the attempt to account for literary effects by describing the conventions and reading operations that make them possible. It is closely allied to *rhetoric*, which since classical times has been the study of the persuasive and expressive resources of language: the techniques of language and thought that can be used to construct effective discourses. Aristotle separated rhetoric from poetics, treating rhetoric as the art of persuasion and poetics as the art of imitation or representation. Medieval and Renaissance traditions, though, assimilated the two: rhetoric became the art of eloquence, and poetry (since it seeks to teach, to delight, and to move) was a superior instance of this art. In the nineteenth century, rhetoric came to be seen as artifice divorced from the genuine activities of thought or of poetic imagination and fell into disfavour. In the late twentieth century rhetoric has been revived as the study of the structuring powers of discourse.

Poetry is related to rhetoric: poetry is language that makes abundant use of figures of speech and language that aims to be powerfully persuasive. And, ever since Plato excluded poets from his ideal republic, when poetry has been attacked or denigrated, it has been as deceptive or frivolous rhetoric that misleads citizens and calls up extravagant desires. Aristotle asserted the value of poetry by focusing on imitation (mimesis) rather than rhetoric. He argued that poetry provides a safe

outlet for the release of intense emotions. And he claimed that poetry models the valuable experience of passing from ignorance to knowledge. (Thus, in the key moment of 'recognition' in tragic drama, the hero realizes his error and spectators realize that 'there but for the grace of God go I'.) Poetics, as an account of the resources and strategies of literature, is not reducible to an account of rhetorical figures, but poetics could be seen as part of an expanded rhetoric that studies the resources for linguistic acts of all kinds.

Rhetorical figures

Literary theory has been much concerned with rhetoric, and theorists debate the nature and function of rhetorical figures. A rhetorical figure has generally been defined as an alteration of or swerve from 'ordinary' usage; for instance, 'My love is a rose' uses *rose* to mean not the flower but something beautiful and precious (this is the figure of metaphor). Or 'The Secret Sits' makes the secret an agent capable of sitting (personification). Rhetoricians formerly attempted to distinguish specific 'tropes' which 'turn' or alter the meaning of a word (as in metaphor) from more miscellaneous 'figures' of indirection which arrange words to achieve special effects. Some figures are: alliteration (the repetition of a consonant); apostrophe (addressing something that is not a regular listener, as in 'Be still, my heart!'); and assonance (the repetition of a vowel sound).

Recent theory rarely distinguishes *figure* from *trope* and has even questioned the notion of an 'ordinary' or 'literal' meaning from which figures or tropes swerve. For example, is the term *metaphor* itself literal or figurative? Jacques Derrida, in 'White Mythology', shows how theoretical accounts of metaphor seem inevitably to rely on metaphors. Some theorists have even embraced the paradoxical conclusion that language is fundamentally figurative and that what we call literal language consists of figures whose figurative nature has been forgotten.

When we talk of 'grasping' a 'hard problem', for instance, these two expressions become literal through the forgetting of their possible figurality.

From this perspective, it's not that there is no distinction between literal and figurative but rather that tropes and figures are fundamental structures of language, not exceptions and distortions. Traditionally, the most important figure has been metaphor. A metaphor treats something *as* something else (calling George a donkey or my love a red, red rose). Metaphor is thus a version of a basic way of knowing: we know something by seeing it *as* something. Theorists speak of 'metaphors we live by', basic metaphorical schemes, like 'life is a journey'. Such schemes structure our ways of thinking about the world: we try to 'get somewhere' in life, 'find our way', 'know where we're going', 'encounter obstacles', and so on.

Metaphor has been treated as basic to language and the imagination because it is cognitively respectable, not inherently frivolous or ornamental. Its literary force, though, may depend on its incongruity. Wordsworth's phrase 'the child is father to the man' stops you, makes you think, and then lets you see the relationship of generations in a new light: the child's relationship to the man he later becomes is compared to a father's relation to his child. Because a metaphor can carry an elaborate proposition, even a theory, it is the rhetorical figure most easily justified.

But theorists have also stressed the importance of other figures. For Roman Jakobson, metaphor and metonymy are the two fundamental structures of language: if metaphor links by means of similarity, metonymy links by means of contiguity. Metonymy moves from one thing to another that is contiguous with it, as when we say 'the Crown' for 'the Queen'. Metonymy produces order by linking things in spatial and temporal series, moving from one thing to another within a given domain, rather than linking one domain to another, as metaphor can

do. Other theorists add *synecdoche* and *irony* to complete a list of 'four master tropes'. Synecdoche is the substitution of part for whole: 'ten hands' for 'ten workers'. It infers qualities of the whole from those of a part and allows parts to represent wholes. Irony juxtaposes appearance and reality; what happens is the opposite of what is expected (what if it rains on the weather forecaster's picnic?). These four master tropes – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony – are used by the historian Hayden White to analyse historical explanation or 'emplotment' as he calls it: they are the basic rhetorical structures by which we make sense of experience. The fundamental idea of rhetoric as a discipline, which comes out well in this fourfold example, is that there are basic structures of language which underlie and make possible the meanings produced in a wide variety of discourses.

Genres

Literature depends on rhetorical figures but also on larger structures, particularly literary genres. What are genres and what is their role? Are terms like *epic* and *novel* simply convenient ways of classifying works on the basis of gross resemblances or do they have functions for readers and writers?

For readers, genres are sets of conventions and expectations: knowing whether we are reading a detective story or a romance, a lyric poem or a tragedy, we are on the lookout for different things and make assumptions about what will be significant. Reading a detective story, we look for clues in a way we don't when reading a tragedy. What would be a striking figure in a lyric – 'the Secret sits in the middle' – might be a minor circumstantial detail in a ghost story or work of science fiction, where secrets might have acquired bodies.

Historically, many theorists of genre have followed the Greeks, who divided works among three broad classes according to who speaks: *poetic* or *lyric*, where the narrator speaks in the first person, *epic* or

narrative, where the narrator speaks in his own voice but allows characters to speak in theirs, and *drama*, where the characters do all the talking. Another way of making this distinction is to focus on the relation of speaker to audience. In epic, there is oral recitation: a poet directly confronting the listening audience. In drama, the author is concealed from the audience and the characters on stage talk. In lyric – the most complicated case – the poet, in singing or chanting, turns his back on his listeners, so to speak, and 'pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of Nature, a Muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object'. To these three elementary genres we can add the modern genre of the novel, which addresses the reader through a book – a topic we'll take up in Chapter 6.

Epic and tragic drama were in ancient times and in the Renaissance the crowning achievements of literature, the highest accomplishments of any aspiring poet. The invention of the novel brought a new competitor onto the literary scene, but between the late eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, the lyric, a short non-narrative poem, came to be identified with the essence of literature. Once seen primarily as a mode of elevated expression, the elegant formulation of cultural values and attitudes, lyric poetry later came to be seen as the expression of powerful feeling, dealing at once with everyday life and transcendent values, giving concrete expression to the most inward feelings of the individual subject. This idea still holds sway. Contemporary theorists, though, have come to treat lyric less as expression of the poet's feelings and more as associative and imaginative work *on* language – an experimenting with linguistic connections and formulations that makes poetry a disruption of culture rather than the main repository of its values.

Poetry as word and act

Literary theory that is focused on poetry debates, among other things, the relative importance of different ways of viewing poems: a poem is

both a structure made of words (a text) and an event (an act of the poet, an experience of the reader, an event in literary history). For the poem conceived as verbal construction, a major question is the relation between meaning and the non-semantic features of language, such as sound and rhythm. How do the non-semantic features of language work? What effects, conscious and unconscious, do they have? What sorts of interaction between semantic and non-semantic features can be expected?

For the poem as act, a key question has been the relation between the act of the author who writes the poem and that of the speaker or 'voice' that speaks there. This is a complicated matter. The author does not speak the poem; to write it, the author imagines him or herself or another voice speaking it. To read a poem – for instance, 'The Secret Sits' – is to say the words, 'We dance round in a ring and suppose . . .' The poem seems to be an utterance, but it is the utterance of a voice of indeterminate status. To read its words is to put yourself in the position of saying them or else to imagine another voice saying them – the voice, we often say, of a narrator or speaker constructed by the author. Thus we have, on the one hand, the historical individual, Robert Frost, and on the other, the voice of this particular utterance. Intermediary between those two figures is another figure: the image of poetic voice that emerges from the study of a range of poems by a single poet (in Frost's case, perhaps, that of a crusty, down-to-earth but reflective observer of rural life). The importance of these different figures varies from one poet to another and from one sort of critical study to another. But in thinking about lyric, it is crucial to *begin* with a distinction between the voice that speaks and the poet who made the poem, thus creating this figure of voice.

Lyric poetry, according to a well-known saying by John Stuart Mill, is utterance overheard. Now when we overhear an utterance that engages our attention, what we characteristically do is imagine or reconstruct a speaker and a context: identifying a tone of voice, we infer the posture,

situations, concerns, and attitudes of a speaker (sometimes coinciding with what we know of the author, but often not). This has been the dominant approach to the lyric in the twentieth century, and a succinct justification might be that literary works are fictional imitations of 'real world' utterances. Lyrics, then, are fictional imitations of personal utterance. It is as if each poem began with the invisible words, '[For example, I or someone could say] My love is like a red, red rose,' or '[For example, I or someone could say] We dance round in a ring and suppose . . .' Interpreting the poem, then, is a matter of working out, from indications of the text and from our general knowledge about speakers and common situations, the nature of the speaker's attitudes. What might lead someone to speak thus? The dominant mode of appreciation of poetry in schools and universities has been to focus on the complexities of the speaker's attitude, on the poem as the dramatization of thoughts and feelings of a speaker whom one reconstructs.

This is a productive approach to the lyric, for many poems do present a speaker who is performing recognizable speech acts: meditating on the significance of an experience, chiding a friend or lover, expressing admiration or devotion, for example. But if we turn to the beginnings of some of the most famous lyrics, such as Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' or Blake's 'The Tiger', difficulties arise: 'O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being!' or 'Tiger, Tiger, burning bright | In the forests of the night'. It is hard to imagine what sort of situation would lead someone to speak in this way or what non-poetic act they would be performing. The answer we are likely to come up with is that these speakers are getting carried away and waxing poetical, extravagantly posturing. If we try to understand these poems as fictional imitations of ordinary speech acts, the act seems to be that of imitating poetry itself.

The extravagance of lyric

What such examples suggest is the extravagance of lyric. Not only do lyric poems seem willing to address almost anything in preference to an actual audience (the wind, a tiger, my soul); they do so in hyperbolic accents. Exaggeration is the name of the game here: the tiger is not just orange but 'burning'; the wind is the very 'breath of Autumn's being' and, later in the poem, saviour and destroyer. Even sardonic poems are based on hyperbolic condensations, as when Frost reduces human activity to dancing round in a ring and treats the many forms of knowledge as 'supposing'.

We touch here on a major theoretical issue, a paradox that seems to lie at the core of lyric poetry. The extravagance of poetry includes its aspiration to what theorists since classical times have called the 'sublime': a relation to what exceeds human capabilities of understanding, provokes awe or passionate intensity, gives the speaker a sense of something beyond the human. But this transcendent aspiration is linked to rhetorical figures such as *apostrophe*, the trope of addressing what is not an actual listener, *personification*, the attribution of human qualities to what is not human, and *prosopopoeia*, the granting of speech to inanimate objects. How can the highest aspirations of verse be linked to such rhetorical devices?

When lyrics swerve from or play upon the circuit of communication to address what is not really a listener – a wind, a tiger, or the heart – this is sometimes said to signify strong feeling that leads the speaker to burst out in speech. But the emotional intensity attaches especially to the act of address or invocation itself, which frequently wills a state of affairs and attempts to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to the speaker's desire. 'O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud,' Shelley's speaker urges the West Wind. The hyperbolic demand that the universe hear you and act accordingly is a move by which speakers

constitute themselves as sublime poets or as visionary: someone who can address Nature and to whom it might respond. The 'O' of invocation is a figure of poetic vocation, a move by which the speaking voice claims to be not a mere speaker of verse but an embodiment of poetic tradition and of the spirit of poetry. Calling winds to blow or calling for the unborn to hear your cries is an act of poetic ritual. It is ritualistic, in that the winds do not come and the unborn do not hear. Voice calls in order to be calling. It calls in order to dramatize voice: to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as poetic and prophetic voice. The impossible, hyperbolic imperatives of apostrophes evoke poetic events, things that will be accomplished, if they are accomplished at all, in the event of the poem.

Narrative poems recount an event; lyrics, we might say, strive to be an event. But there is no guarantee that the poem will work, and apostrophe – as my brief quotations indicate – is what is most blatantly, most embarrassingly 'poetical', most mystificatory and vulnerable to dismissal as hyperbolic nonsense. 'Lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!' Sure. Pull the other one. To be a poet is to strive to bring this sort of thing off, to wager that it won't be dismissed as a lot of nonsense.

A major problem for the theory of poetry, as I've said, is the relation between the poem as a structure made of words and the poem as event. Apostrophes both attempt to make something happen and expose that happening as based on verbal devices – as on the empty 'O' of apostrophic address: 'O wild West Wind!'

To stress apostrophe, personification, prosopopoeia, and hyperbole is to join the theorists who through the ages have emphasized what *distinguishes* the lyric from other speech acts, what makes it the most literary of forms. The lyric, Northrop Frye writes, 'is the genre that most clearly shows the hypothetical core of literature, narrative and meaning in their literal aspects as word-order and word-pattern'. That is, lyric shows us meaning or story emerging from verbal patterning. You repeat

words that echo in a rhythmical structure and see if story or sense won't emerge.

Rhythmic words

Frye, whose *Anatomy of Criticism* is an invaluable compendium of thinking about lyric and other genres, calls the basic constituents of lyric *babble* and *doodle*, whose roots are *charm* and *riddle*. Poems babble, foregrounding non-semantic features of language – sound, rhythm, repetition of letters – to produce charm or incantation:

> This darksome burn, horseback brown,
> His rollrock highroad roaring down . . .

Poems doodle or riddle us, in their wayward indirection, their puzzling formulations: what is a 'rollrock highroad'? What of 'the Secret that sits in the middle and knows'?

Such features are very prominent in nursery rhymes and ballads, where frequently pleasure lies in rhythm, incantation, and strangeness of image:

> Pease porridge hot,
> Pease porridge cold,
> Pease porridge in the pot,
> Nine days old.

The rhythmical pattern and the rhyme scheme flaunt the organization of this piece of language and can both provoke special interpretive attention (as when rhyme raises the question of relation of the rhyme words) and suspend enquiry: poetry has its own order which gives pleasure, so there's no need to ask about meaning; the rhythmical organization lets language get under the guard of intelligence and lodge itself in mechanical memory. We remember 'Pease porridge hot'

without bothering to enquire what pease porridge might be, and even if we find out we are likely to forget that before we forget 'Pease porridge hot'.

The foregrounding and making strange of language through metrical organization and repetition of sounds is the basis of poetry. Theories of poetry then posit relations between different types of organization of language – metrical, phonological, semantic, thematic – or, to put it most generally, between the semantic and non-semantic dimensions of language, between what the poem says and how it says it. The poem is a structure of signifiers that absorbs and reconstitutes the signifieds, in that its formal patterns have effects on its semantic structures, assimilating the meanings words have in other contexts and subjecting them to new organization, altering stress and focus, shifting literal meanings to figurative ones, bringing terms into alignment, according to patterns of parallelism. It is the scandal of poetry that 'contingent' features of sound and rhythm systematically infect and affect thought.

Interpreting poems

At this level, the lyric is based on a convention of unity and autonomy, as if there were a rule: don't treat the poem as we might a bit of conversation, a fragment that needs a larger context to explain it, but assume that it has a structure of its own. Try to read it as if it were an aesthetic whole. The tradition of poetics makes available various theoretical models. The Russian Formalists of the early twentieth century posit that one level of structure in a poem should mirror another; Romantic theorists and English and American New Critics draw an analogy between poems and natural organisms: all the parts of the poem should fit together harmoniously. Post-structuralist readings posit an ineluctable tension between what poems do and what they say, the impossibility for a poem, or perhaps any piece of language, to practise what it preaches.

Recent conceptions of poems as intertextual constructions stress that poems are energized by echoes of past poems – echoes which they may not master. Unity becomes less a property of poems than something interpreters seek, whether they look for harmonious fusion or unresolved tension. To do this, readers identify oppositions in the poem (as between 'us' and the Secret or between knowing and supposing) and see how other elements of the poem, particularly figurative expressions, align themselves with these oppositions.

Take Ezra Pound's famous two-line poem, 'In a Station of the Metro':

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

Interpreting this involves working with the contrast between crowds in the subway and the natural scene. The pairing of the two lines enforces the parallel between the faces in the darkness of the subway and the petals on the black bough of a tree. But what then? The interpretation of poems depends not just on the convention of unity but also on the convention of significance: the rule is that poems, however slight in appearance, are supposed to be about something important, and therefore concrete details should be taken to have general significance. They should be read as the sign or 'objective correlative', to use T. S. Eliot's term, for important feelings or intimations of significance.

To make the opposition in Pound's little poem significant, readers need to reflect on how the parallel might work. Is the poem *contrasting* the urban crowd scene in the metro with the peaceful natural scene of petals on a wet tree limb or is it *equating* them, noting a similarity? Both options are possible, but the latter seems to make possible a richer reading by prompting a step powerfully underwritten by the tradition of poetic interpretation. The perception of *resemblance* between faces in the crowd and petals on a bough – seeing faces in the crowd as petals on a bough – is an instance of the poetic imagination 'seeing the world

anew', grasping unexpected relationships and, perhaps, appreciating what to other observers would be trivial or oppressive, finding profundity in formal appearance. This little poem thus can become a reflection on the power of poetic imagination to achieve the effects that the poem itself achieves. An example like this illustrates a basic convention of poetic interpretation: consider what this poem and its procedures say about poetry or the creation of meaning. Poems, in their deployment of rhetorical operations, may be read as explorations in poetics, just as novels, as we shall see next, are at some level reflections on the making intelligible of our experience of time and are thus explorations in narrative theory.

of liberation and from the debates within these movements about appropriate strategies and concepts. Should one celebrate and accentuate difference or challenge distinctions that stigmatize? How to do both? Possibilities of both action and understanding are at stake in theory.

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Further Reading

Chapter 1

Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982) begins with a discussion of theory in general. Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (London: Methuen, 1987), a broad and lively introductory survey. For Foucault, see Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 1994). For Derrida, see Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 85–179; Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Chapter 2

Paul Hernadi, ed., *What is Literature?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), for a range of representative statements. Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) argues against the notion of literature as a special kind of language. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse: On the Relation of Language to Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) treats literary works as fictional imitations of 'real' speech acts. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 1–53, on the idea of literature in general and literary studies in 19th-century Britain. Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1–61, a useful overview of

traditional conceptions of literature. Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33–75.

Chapter 3

'Forum: Thirty-Two Letters on the Relation between Cultural Studies and the Literary', *PMLA* 112: 2 (Mar. 1997), 257–86, a lively spectrum of current views. Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* surveys British developments. Tony Bennett *et al.*, eds., *Culture, Ideology, and Social Process: A Reader* (London: Batsford & Open University Press, 1987), an anthology of classic British essays for the Open University's 'Popular Culture' course. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin, 1989), an accessible introduction. Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993), and Mieke Bal, ed., *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), two recent collections. Ioan Davies, *Cultural Studies and Beyond: Fragments of Empire* (London: Routledge, 1995), a shrewd recent history. LITERARY CANON: Robert von Hallberg, ed., *Canons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Chapter 4

Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (London: Fontana, 1976; rev. edn.: Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), an introduction to his thought and influence. M. A. K. Halliday, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (London: Arnold, 1973), essays relevant to literary studies. Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), a valuable introductiontolanguageandthelinguisticdimensionsofliterature.William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) develops a convincing narrative about different critical schools' approaches to meaning in literature. Nigel Fabb *et al.*, eds., *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), strong recent essays. POETICS: Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975); Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), analysis of a Balzac story that switches

between poetics and hermeneutics. HERMENEUTICS: Donald Marshall, 'Literary Interpretation', in *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. Joseph Gibaldi, 2nd edn. (New York: MLA, 1992), 159–82. READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM: Jane Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Chapter 5

RHETORIC: Renato Barilli, *Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), a historical survey of key issues. GENRES: Paul Hernadi, *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972). APOSTROPHE: Jonathan Culler, 'Apostrophe', *The Pursuit of Signs, Semiotics Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981), 135–54. POETICS: Jonathan Culler, 'Poetics of the Lyric', *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 161–88. POETRY: For a range of essays engaged with theoretical questions, Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker, eds., *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Jacques Derrida, 'What is Poetry?' ('Che cos'è la poesia?'), in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 221–46.

Chapter 6

Two excellent, systematic books are Susan Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd rev. edn. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). See also Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983); Jonathan Culler, 'Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative', *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 169–87; Jonathan Culler, 'Poetics of the Novel', *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

1975), 189–238. DESIRE: Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Teresa de Lauretis, 'Desire in Narrative', *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 103–57. POLICING: D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

Chapter 7

Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), includes 'Signature, Event, Context' and other discussions of the performative. Barbara Johnson, 'Poetry and Performative Language', *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), a short, efficient discussion. Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), on Austin and Lacan.

Chapter 8

Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), a broad survey. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), synthesizes psychoanalysis and semiotics on subject formation, with literary and cinematic examples. For essentialism: Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For post-colonial theory: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

Appendix

For the institutional history of criticism, Jonathan Culler, 'Literary Criticism and the American University', in *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 3–40; Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Chris Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory, 1890 to the Present* (London: Longman, 1996).

On schools, see Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), a tendentious but very lively account of all the 'schools' except the Marxist criticism he embraces; Antony Easthope's *British Post-structuralism since 1968* (New York: Routledge, 1988), a sophisticated account of the fortunes of 'theory' in Britain; Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), a useful 'school'-oriented textbook; and Raman Selden, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. viii, *From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), which covers major movements. Richard Harland's *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and PostStructuralism* (London: Methuen, 1987) is a broad and lively introductory survey; Keith Green and Jill LeBihan, *Critical Theory and Practice: A Coursebook* (London: Routledge, 1996) cleverly fuses the survey by school with approach by 'topic'.