CHAPTER 1 A Literary Critical map

A first task in the construction of a practical hermeneutic is a survey of what has already been said.

1.1 The Hermeneutic Circle

The "hermeneutic circle" is defined, for example by Segundo,[1] as

> "the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal…… the circular nature of this interpretation stems from the fact that each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on." [2]

Segundo is here redefining a term used in relation to Bultmann's interpretation of the Scriptures. Segundo begins his chapter with a comment about the chicken and the egg, and a further reflection on the idea of the "hermeneutic circle" is that the relation between our interpretation of the Bible and our interaction with present-day reality is indeed that of chicken and egg: it is truly a circular relation with no obvious starting point. How could Christians unravel the links between their faith and their perception of the world so as to say that either came first? For our faith shapes our perception of the world, and our perception of the world shapes our faith. Western cultures, certainly, are laden with Biblical images and perspectives and it is not easy, even for many of those who are not Christians, to avoid a certain degree of immersion.

This circularity is a problem for all who write about hermeneutics, since writing is linear, and has to have a starting point. More deeply, does it not challenge the attempt in various Theological writings to give logical priority either to the Bible, or doctrine, or philosophy, or to experience, or commitment? Cone, for example, would argue that the Black community's experience of oppression

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1 The idea of the hermeneutic circle was suggested by the father of modern hermeneutics, Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's circle related the whole to the parts and the parts to the whole. F D E Schleiermacher : Hermeneutics : The Handwritten Manuscripts ed Kimmerle (Scholars Press 1977) p 195-6 quoted in Thisleton : New Horizons (Harper Collins) p 215 - see also the rest of chapter 6 and chapter 7.
There are other modern forms. First, that, as I point out later, one needs some prior understanding in order to be able to undestand (although this is "troublesome only to the extent that one assumes there to be a neutral vantage point for understanding, from which one can gain an 'objective' view of things: Garrett Green : Theology, Hermeneutics and Imagination (Cambridge University Press 2000) p 7) Second, that, we can never understand the whole without understanding the parts. See Jeanrond : Theological Hermeneutics (Macmillan 1991) pp 5,6

2 Juan Luis Segundo: The Liberation of Theology (Orbis 1976) p 8 : see pp 7 ff for a longer discussion.
Is this like Ricoeur's interpretation theory – an initial understanding is complemented by an act of explanatory validation or correction leading to critical comprehension? see Jeanrond : Theological Hermeneutics (Macmillan 1991) pp 73, 74

should be a norm for theology;[3] Segundo would look for a "pre-theological commitment to change and improve the world";[4] Jeanrond (following Ricoeur) tries to find a general philosophical basis for hermeneutics;[5] Vanhoozer[6] seems to be arguing for a Trinitarian (that is, doctrinal) basis; Webster would also put doctrine first.[7] Cone and Segundo would oppose Jeanrond and Vanhoozer; all four would be challenged by Newbigin, who prioritises faith in the Resurrection as the starting point for a new understanding of the world,[8] or by Warfield[9] who would claim to start with Scripture. Segundo analyses a number of theologians who do not complete the hermeneutic circle, but his critique makes its own assumptions about what is ethically(?) prior. These assumptions are not universals, then – the starting point is not clear.

1.2 A Literary Critical map

Where then can we start? Pragmatically, since we are looking for a practical, comparative, hermeneutic, it seems appropriate to survey the current situation, its theories of interpretation and its debates. I now therefore give a 'map' of some of the literary theories, and then expand the scale of that map to look in more detail at some significant theories.

The broadest and simplest map of literary criticism is perhaps that elaborated in Selden's: A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory,[10] which is based on a diagram of linguistic communication

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3 Cone : God of the Oppressed (Seabury Press 1975) p 81, 82

4 Juan Luis Segundo: The Liberation of Theology (Orbis 1976) p 39

5 Jeanrond: Text and Interpretation as categories of Theological Thinking (Gill & Macmillan 1988) p 8 though, NB he does not think it possible to move quickly from theory to practice, from formal hermeneutical reflection to discussion of texts: seealso Jeanrond : Theological Hermeneutics (Macmillan 1991) p 161 etc

6 Vanhoozer: Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998)

7 Webster: "Hermeneutics in Modern Theology: Some Doctrinal Reflections" Scottish Journal Of Theology 1998 Vol 51 No 3 p 308, 309

8 "To believe that the crucified Jesus rose from the dead, left an empty tomb, and regrouped his scattered disciples for their world mission can only be the result of a very radical change of mind indeed. Without that change the story is too implausible to be regarded as part of real history. Indeed the real truth is that the resurrection cannot be accommodated in any way of understanding the world except one of which it is the starting point....If it is true it has to be the starting point of a wholly new way of understanding the cosmos and the human situation in the cosmos." L Newbigin: Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth (SPCK 1991) pp 9-11

9 B B Warfield The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co 1948)

10 Raman Selden: A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) see p3

devised by Jakobson[11] and quoted, for example, in Lodge's anthology: Modern Criticism and Theory: a Reader.[12] Jakobson looks at the various things involved in an act of communication:

Context

Addresser ---> Message ---> Addressee

Contact

Code

(Contact means the medium: for example writing, the telephone, live speech etc... Code is usually a language familiar to addresser and addressee.)

This can be simplified, for the particular case of texts, where the contact is writing, and the addresser and addressee are writer and reader, to:

Context

Writer ---> Writing ---> Reader

Code

Jakobson attaches a linguistic function to each element in the diagram as follows:

Context

Referential

Writer	*Writing*	*Reader*
Emotive	Poetic	Conative

11 Roman Jakobson Closing Statement printed in the proceedings of a conference: Style in Language (ed Thomas Sebeok) (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press 1960)

12 David Lodge (ed): Modern Criticism and Theory: a Reader (Longman, 1988) see p 35

Code

Metalinguistic

If we adopt the addresser's / writer's viewpoint, we draw attention to the emotive use of language ('the emotive function aims at a direct expression of the speaker's attitude towards what he is speaking about'[13]); if we focus on the context, we isolate the referential use of language.[14] Emphasis on the writing itself will be interested in poetic considerations; 'whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focussed on the code: it performs a metalingual (i.e. glossing) function.'[15] If we concentrate on the addressee / reader, we are interested in (as it were) the effect - conative means in this context the 'desire to create action'. Selden then points out that literary theories tend to place an emphasis upon one function rather than another. Taking the main theories we are about to discuss, we might place them diagrammatically as follows:

Context

Marxist

Writer	*Writing*	*Reader*
Romantic	Formalistic	Reader-oriented

Code

Structuralist

Briefly, romantic theories emphasise the *writer's* mind and life. Reader-criticism (or phenomenological criticism or – especially in theological circles – reader-response criticism) centres on the *reader's* experience (that is, the reader's interpretative strategies, the way in which the reader constructs an interpretation). Formalist theories concentrate on the nature of *writing* itself in isolation (from writer, reader, time and culture...). Marxist criticism regards the social and historical *context* as fundamental. Structuralist criticism draws attention to the *codes* we use to construct

13 David Lodge: Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader (Longman, 1988) p 35

14 Raman Selden: A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 4

15 Lodge Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader p 37

meaning. At their best none of the approaches totally ignores the other dimensions of literary communication.

Feminist criticism cannot be given a place in our diagram because it is not an 'approach' in the sense that applies to other kinds of theory: feminist criticism attempts a global re-interpretation of all approaches from a distinctly revolutionary standpoint[16]. Psycho-analytic theories (which, like feminist theories would probably see themselves as attempting to reinterpret globally) are also unplaced. The map also omits the historical relation of these different theories, which of course did not develop simultaneously, nor simply consecutively. The map itself has a location; one might say the close reading techniques of the new criticism were its logical pre-cursor, and the "anarchy" (if such it is) of post-structuralism its logical destiny (at least advocates of post-structuralist theories might say so!). [17]

I look now in greater depth at these five theories, with the aim of arriving at some understanding of post-structuralism or deconstructionism:

1.3 Marxist theories

Marxist theories are shown as largely concerned with the context of literary works; one of the aphorisms from Marx himself, which might be said to constitute part of a basis of Marxist theories is 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness';[18] another basic statement might be: 'philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.'[19]

It is not surprising, then, that the group labelled Soviet Socialist Realists (the Union of Soviet Writers - 1932-1934) took their relationship to society very seriously. They saw the modernist rejection of realism in such artists, musicians and writers as Picasso, Schoenberg and T S Eliot as the decadent

16 Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 4

17 see Barton: Reading the Old Testament Method in Biblical Study (DLT 1984) p 154 etc for the impact of the various theories (in forms modified by subsequent developments, or adapted, often piecemeal) on Biblical criticism

18 K Marx: The German Ideology (Volume One) The Materialist Conception of History: 1845 (published in, for example: ed Kamenka The Portable Karl Marx (Penguin 1983) p 170)

19 K Marx: Theses on Feuerbach (published in, for example: ed Kamenka The Portable Karl Marx (Penguin 1983) p 158)

products of late capitalist society.[20] For them, the arts must demonstrate its commitment to the working class cause by its popular appeal, and by the extent of its social insight.

Lukacs[21] put forward a much more sophisticated view of reality in writing. A central idea was that of 'reflection'; artists did not offer simply a photographic picture of the world nor did they offer reality, but framed the world coherently through a mental structure; these reflections could be seen as embedded in an unfolding system as history developed (in a Hegelian – that is neither random nor linear, but dialectical – way).[22]

What is known as the Frankfurt School[23] had members such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and (loosely associated) Benjamin. They gave a privileged place to art and literature because they believed that these, together with a critical theory, offered the possibility of resistance to the domination and domestication of the working classes by totalitarian modern mass societies, such as they found in America and Eastern Europe. This was possible because of the capacity of modern art and literature to disturb, disrupt and fragment; hence they rejected realism altogether.

Some Marxist thinkers made links with structuralism: two of these were Althusser[24] and Goldmann.[25] Like Marxists, structuralists believe that individuals must be understood as part of their social existence, but where structuralists see the underlying structures as timeless and self regulating, Marxists see them as historical, changeable and fraught with contradictions.[26] Goldmann argued for a continually (Hegelian-Marxist: that is dialectically) constructed set of world views or 'trans-individual mental structures' which belong to various groups or classes, and upon which texts were based.

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20 Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 27

21 Georg Lukacs : The Historical Novel (Merlin Press, London 1962)
Georg Luacs : Studies in European Realism (Merlin Press, London 1972)

22 He argued for the concept of totality, which is an attempt to see the whole thing at once in all its complexity, organically, and to understand the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts; this was the basis for his rejection of modernist works, which he claimed were narrow, for example in their concern with formalist experiments.

23 More properly the Institute for Social Research, opened in 1924.

24 Althusser: "Ideology and the State" Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (trans Ben Brewster: Verso, London 1971) reprinted, for example in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 53-60

25 Goldmann: The Hidden God (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1964)

26 Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 38

Althusser, on the other hand, rejected the idea of a single central structure, arguing instead for a diffuse structure of different levels of the social totality which are relatively autonomous, determined in the last instance by the economic level. These various levels exist in complex relations of inner contradiction and mutual conflict. Art does not give a complete picture of reality, but has a fictional distance from the picture of reality it purveys, which allows us to see its ideology, and so transcend it.

Habermas,[27] meanwhile, made an attempt to understand totality, drawing on both the Frankfurt School, and more traditional notions of reason. However, the increasing complexities in the understanding of language and communication (and of the whole social formation) led to him formulating progressively bigger and more complex systems, where the end-point, and (old-fashioned) realities like power, became harder to see.

Recently Eagleton[28] has developed his theories about the relationship between literature and ideology in the light of post-structuralism. Deconstructionism can be used to undermine all certainties, but it denies material (or class) interests. The agenda for critics is to be set by politics; "they must expose the rhetorical structures by which non-socialist works produce politically undesirable effects and also interpret such works where possible against the grain so that they work for socialism." [29]

1.4 Reader-oriented Theories

This group of theories has in common the idea that the text is the site for the production and proliferation of meaning by the reader. In this view a poem, for example, has no real existence until read, and when it is, the reader is an active agent in making the meaning. In fact those pursuing these ideas hold, apart from this, quite disparate views on literary theory.

One philosophical root of such theories is Phenomenology - put forward by Husserl.[30] He tried to establish certainty at a time of great upheaval (after the First World War) by looking at what he called

27 Habermas : Theory and Practice (Eng trans : Beacon Press, Boston 1973)
Habermas : Knowledge and Human Interests (Eng trans Heinemann, London 1978)

28 Eagleton: Criticism and Ideology (New Left Books, London 1976)
Eagleton : Walter Benjamin or Towards Revolutionary Criticism (New Left Books 1981)

29 Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 44

30 Husserl : The Idea of Phenomenology (Nijhof, The Hague 1964)

the 'intentional objects of our consciousness'. What could be made sure was, he thought, what was in the mind; our thinking was directed (intended) towards various objects as they were in our minds. Everything else (for example the idea of objects in the world) was secondary and should be bracketed out.

His pupil, Heidegger,[31] rejected this emphasis on the thinking person, what he called the 'transcendental subject' and began with the irreducible giveness of human existence (*Dasein*). Our being is never identified completely with our selves, but is constantly thrown forwards in advance of ourselves as we interact with the world. We are merged with the objects of our consciousness because it (our consciousness) projects the things of the world but is also subjected to the world as we live in it. Our thinking is located in a situation and is historical, though this is more of an internal history than an external one (such as one might read in a history book).

Gadamer[32] was influenced by Heidegger, developing ideas about the way in which meaning depended on the historical situation of the interpreter. He asked some of the basic questions of literary theory: about the relationship of the author's intentions to the meaning (whatever that is) of a text; and about the difficulty of understanding works which are historically distant and culturally alien. Gadamer claimed that understanding of the past takes place through a fusion of our present with the past.[33]

Jauss, following Gadamer, developed the ideas of reception theory and hermeneutics.[34] According to him each reader brings an aesthetic dimension of their own time; successive readings are built into 'the tradition' of interpretations relating to a text (producing a new kind of literary history), and meaning is produced by a dialogue between the horizons of different generations of the readers and the horizon of the text. There is therefore no final meaning since future readings, producing new

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31 Heidegger : Being and Time (Blackwell, Oxford 1962)

32 Gadamer : Truth and Method (English trans : Sheed and Ward, London 1975)

33 see Eagleton Literary Theory : An Introduction (Blackwell, Oxford 1983) p 72; Eagleton argues that his answers seem to envisage a smooth stream of tradition linking all the historical situations in which a text has been interpreted; prejudice, which enables readers to stay within this stream, is only ever a positive thing.

34 Hans Jauss : Toward an Aesthetic of Reception (trans T Bahti : Harvester Press, Brighton 1982)
Jauss : "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" in New Literary History Vol 2 (1967) reprinted in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 82 ff

horizons, will interact with what has gone before to produce new meanings. Understanding is a fusion of the horizons: when dealing with a text, a fusion of the horizons of past and present.[35]

Ricoeur[36] continued to develop the ideas of hermeneutics, linking them in with those of phenomenology, to produce what has been called hermeneutic phenomenology.[37] He displays in addition, an interest in psycho-analysis, and in symbolism. He has a concept of 'the text', distanced from its writing, its writer, its original audience, and its original reference.[38] Its meaning may be grasped by 'reflection', by which he means an indirect method connected with the effort to exist, and using such things as the signs and symbols in the text: the meaning of a work is not conceived through a series of intellectual operations; it is relived, 'taken up again' as a message that is both old and forever renewed.[39] Ricoeur thinks that, while a text may allow of several interpretations, these are not of equal status, and it will be possible to adjudicate between them on a rational basis.[40]

In common with other reader-reception theorists, Iser[41] sees the text not as an object, but in terms of its effect on its readers. He makes the distinction between the implied reader (whom the text creates for itself - perhaps not exactly the same as the reader the author has in mind) and the actual reader, who may be quite different, and who has experience and values outside the text. The text does not represent objects but refers to the extra-textual world by selecting a world-view or value-system. The text is necessarily incomplete (if it were not so it would be crushingly boring) even though more structured than life. We get the picture of sentences creating gaps in much the same way as pillars create arches in a church. The reader must fill in these gaps, for example by making moral judgements, imagining situations and so on. As a result of the process of filling the gaps, an actual

35 Selden points out that Jauss would not be envisaging a fusion of all horizons, but only those which were compatible; some horizons and their interpretations would be rejected. Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 123

36Paul Ricoeur : Conflict of Interpretations (ed D Ihde : North Western University Press, Evanston 1974)
see also Ricoeur "Phenomenology and Theory of Language : An Interview with Paul Ricoeur" Modern Language Notes (December 1981) reprinted in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 89- 94

37 John B Thompson: Critical Hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas (CUP 1981)

38 J B Thompson Critical Hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas (CUP 1981) p 52

39 Gerard Genette: "Structuralism and literary criticism" in Figures of Literary Discourse (trans Alan Sheridan Blackwell, Oxford 1982) reprinted in Lodge: Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 70 ff

40 Thompson Critical Hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas (CUP 1981) p 53

41 Wolfgang Iser: The Act of Reading : A Theory of Aesthetic Response (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1978)

reader's initial world-view may be modified; reading the text may allow the reader 'to formulate the unformulated.'[42]

Hirsch[43] attacked both reader-oriented theories (eg of Iser) and hermeneutical theories (eg of Gadamer) as based on historical and cultural relativism and therefore as failing to understand sufficiently deeply the historicism of Herder and Dilthey.[44] His point is that historicism is about the fact that different people have different perspectives, but this must not be taken to mean that everyone in one era has the same perspective, which then differs from everyone else in another age. 'Cultural perspectivism, of the sort I have been attacking, forgets that the distance between one historical period and another is a very small step in comparison to the huge metaphysical gap we must leap to understand the perspective of another person in any time or place.'[45] Hirsch differentiates between the meaning which is put into a text by the author and which remains fixed, and the significance assigned by the reader, which is variable. He claims that readers are able to hold both the viewpoint of the author and that of reader simultaneously: 'the two perspectives are entertained both at once as in normal binocular vision.'[46]

Fish[47] began by looking (as I did) at the fact that attempts to interpret texts produced widely differing results; his conclusion was that the text itself was beyond interpretation, and the reason was that at these disputed points the text invited readers to make decisions for themselves, rather than have them made by the text or by critics. He went on from there to see that even this view (of the text inviting participation by the reader) was in itself an interpretation. He arrived, therefore, at the conclusion

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42 W Iser: "The reading process: a phenomenological approach" The Implied Reader (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1974) reprinted in Lodge (ed) Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 227 ff and in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 76 ff

43 E D Hirsch: "Faulty Perspectives" from Hirsch : The Aims of Interpretation (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1976) reprinted in Lodge (ed) Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 253 ff

44 Herder (1744-1803) Outlines of the Philosophy of Man challenged the assumption that the perspective of human nature is essentially the same at all times and in all places. Hirsch points out that this means assumptions about homogeneity in our present perspective are fallacious. Dilthey (1833-1911) proposed a psychological model for our potential ability to understand the past – that human beings share a common potential to be other than they are, and so to adopt culturally alien categories.

45 E D Hirsch: "Faulty Perspectives" in Lodge (ed) Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) p 258

46 E D Hirsch: "Faulty Perspectives" in Lodge (ed) Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) p 262

47 Stanley Fish : Is There A Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts 1980) "Interpreting the Variorum" from Is There A Text In This Class? is reprinted in Lodge (ed) Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 310 ff

that readers belong to interpretative communities, in which they share reading strategies; shared communities imply shared strategies which imply similar interpretations, and different communities imply different strategies which imply different interpretations. The point has been made[48] that Fish's idea of an interpretative community may be more sinister and repressive than he allows; it could suppress deviant readings, allowing only the smooth unconflicting harmony of well-trained readers.

1.5 Structuralist Theories

Structuralist theories are those which are interested in the structure underlying a work, that is in a text's form rather than its content.

De Saussure, in his Course in General Linguistics[49] pointed out that words have no meanings in themselves, indeed they are quite arbitrary; so for example names have no inherent relation to the objects in the real world they denote. They get meaning by a system of differences: that is 'cat' means small furry four-legged animal by being different from 'dog', 'can', 'bat', and so on. At a set of traffic-lights, red means stop because it is not green or amber. Thus behind actual spoken utterances (*parole*) there was a system of rules (*langue*) which it was thought could be studied scientifically; whereas the actual utterances and the objects in the real world to which they might be thought to refer could not.

Jakobson[50] (whose model of linguistic communication was quoted above), as a result of research with aphasic children, described two figures of speech: metaphor and metonymy. In his description, a metaphor is the substitution for a word by something similar, for example 'the monarch' or 'HM' instead of 'the Queen'. Metonymy is the association of a word with some quality or cause or effect relating to it - for example, 'the Crown' instead of 'the Queen'. Jakobson linked realism with metonymy, because it requires a context (you need to know the link between queen and crown) and

48 by Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 126 and to some extent by Eagleton Literary Theory: An Introduction (Blackwell, Oxford 1983) p 86

49 Ferdinand de Saussure, in his Course in General Linguistics (trans W Baskin : Fontana/Collins. London 1974) An extract is reprinted in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 8 ff

50 Roman Jakobson : "Linguistics and Poetics" : ed T Sebeok : Style in Language (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1960) reprinted in Lodge (ed) Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 32 ff
Roman Jakobson (with M Halle) : Fundamentals of Language (Mouton, The Hague and Paris 1975)

romanticism with metaphor. This suggested another level of structure. Jakobson's scheme also allowed some possibility of change running through history, which many structuralist theories do not.

The anthropologist Levi-Strauss[51] applied the ideas of structuralism to folklore, fairy tales and myths; he broke them down into small units called mythemes (compare morphemes and phonemes in linguistics), and looked at the structural patterns by which they were combined. He discerned basic sets of binary oppositions as one of the structures: for example, in the Oedipus myths, the under-valuing, and over-valuing of kinship ties, which relate to two views of the origin of human beings - born from the earth, and born from coition. This threw up the symbolic systems of myth through which people live and make sense of the world or rather the way in which myths think in men, unbeknown to them; for Levi-Strauss suspected these deep laws to be embedded in the structures of the human mind. This is of course anti-humanist and anti-historical, for it makes no difference which human beings use these myths, nor when; that point is a crucial criticism of structuralism.

Genette[52] built on the work of Levi-Strauss and others to develop a complex analysis of narratives, with five main categories: order (the time-order of the events of the narrative); duration (of the episodes - expanded, paused, summarised etc); frequency (the number of times events are narrated); mood (direct, indirect speech etc; point of view of narrator); voice (what kind of narrator and narratee are implied). This alerts us to the distinction between narration (the act of telling the story), and narrative (the story told). Genette sets up a number of such distinctions, but then dissolves them, for example by showing that there can never be a pure narrative divorced from the act of telling. This would eventually be one route to deconstructionism.

Roland Barthes[53] had a structuralist phase, during which he attempted to apply the ideas of structuralism to all social practices: for example selecting clothing or ordering a meal. In both cases,

51 Claude Levi-Strauss : Structural Anthropology (trans C Jacobson and B G Schoepf : Allen Lane, London 1968)

52 Gerard Genette: "Structuralism and literary criticism" in Figures of Literary Discourse (trans Alan Sheridan Blackwell, Oxford 1982) reprinted in Lodge: Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 70 ff
Gerard Genette: Narrative Discourse (Blackwell, Oxford 1980)

53 Roland Barthes : Writing Degree Zero (trans A Laves and C Smith : Jonathan Cape, London 1967)
Barthes : Elements of Semiology (trans A Laves and C Smith : Jonathan Cape, London 1967)
Barthes : Critical Essays (trans R Howard : Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1972)
see Barthes : "To Write : An Intransitive Verb?" in eds R Macksey and E Donato : The Structuralist Controversy (Johns Hopkins University Press 1966) reprinted in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 41 ff

there is a system, through which choices may be made between like elements in classes: for example various sorts of hat, or various sorts of shirt or various sorts of 'hors d'ouvres'. The particular choice made - syntagm - (of a combination of hat plus shirt plus trousers, or of entree, main course and pudding) demonstrates the individual's competence in the system.

I have already commented upon the anti-humanist stance of structuralism: language is language speaking through us, through the structures deep in our minds; therefore the individual is irrelevant - what should be studied is the system or structure in the human mind. It is also anti-historic in two senses: first that since these structures are embedded in the human mind there is no change from generation to generation, therefore no (literary or otherwise) history; secondly that the text reveals the structure all at once - there is no attention to the process of reading. That is, structuralism looks at things synchronically (at a moment in time) rather than diachronically (as a process through time). It may also be seen as anti-textual, since it ignores the specifics of actual texts - a number of apparently quite different texts may have the same structure. By the same token, it makes no attempt to evaluate the relative quality of texts, and indeed it is often said that detective stories provide the best examples for structuralist study.

1.6 Post-Structuralism

One way of seeing post-structuralism is within the larger context of post-modernism, which is itself indefinable. Looked at simplistically, post-modernism is a movement within the world of the arts generally, which said that the 'modern' (by which was meant a certain style of the years after the First World War [1914-1918]) had been done, and so asked what was left to do? Characteristics of the post-modern might be feelings of despair, disillusionment, meaninglessness, and exhaustion. There was a breaking down of the barriers between high culture and low culture, and an overall theme of 'the absent centre'.

Another way of seeing post-structuralism is to understand that it arose out of structuralism, when structuralist critics took structuralism beyond the limits within which it could work. For example, structuralist critics were used to seeing the structure behind a text; they could describe this using a meta-language. But a logical extension would be that a meta-meta-language could be used to look at

the structure of the structuralist critique; this implied an infinite regress of critical readings.[54] A second view of the roots of post-structuralism would be the observation that de Saussure showed how signifiers (words) took their meaning by being different from other words. But this system of differences could and should be extended infinitely, for firstly each word is not just different from a few other words but in fact all other words, so that the whole of language is invoked by the use of a single word; and secondly because each word is defined positively by other words (in a dictionary, for example) so that again the whole of language needs to be used; a third point here is that since a word takes its meaning from what it is not, in every word meaning is to that extent absent.[55]

Another area where post-structuralist thought rebelled against its predecessors is the category of discourse, which is language-in-use. The post-structuralists located the speaking subject in a social context as against the anti-humanist, anti-historical ideas of the structuralists. For the post-structuralists all language (in fact all of everything) is discourse (that is language in a social context).

Barthes[56] (as has been noted above) came to a post-structuralist view from a structuralist one; He pointed to the *aporia* (in this case the infinite regress) which was produced by the observation that a writer or critic can never step outside the discourse and adopt a position which is invulnerable to subsequent interrogative reading. He argued in "The death of the author" for readers to be completely free to take their pleasure of the text. He also argued for healthy signs – healthy because they drew attention to their own arbitrariness, rather than by artifice attempting to be natural.

Derrida[57] exploded the notion that the sign was fixed, pointing to an endlessly deferred play of meaning. He showed how structuralist philosophy constructs meaning by suppressing or marginalising some terms and privileging others; its binary oppositions were typical of ideologies.

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54 This was more or less the route that Roland Barthes took.

55 This is more or less the route that Jacques Derrida took – see below

56 Barthes : The Pleasure of the Text (trans R Miller : Hill and Wang, New York 1975)
Barthes : "The death of the author" from Image-Music-Text (ed and trans Stephen Heath : Fontana 1979) reprinted in Lodge: Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 166 ff and in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 114 ff

57 Derrida : Of Grammatology (trans G C Spivak : Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1976)
Derrida : "Signature Event Context" in Limited Inc (North Western University Press, Evanston 1988)
Derrida : "Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences" in Writing and Difference (trans Bass : Routledge and Kegan Paul / University of Chicago Press 1978) reprinted in ed Lodge: Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 108 ff and in eds Rice and Waugh : Modern Literary Theory : A Reader (Arnold 1996) pp 176 ff

He described a technique of deconstruction, in which he pursued (for example) a binary opposition until the whole text threatened to break down, self-consumed by its own logic. To take one often-quoted example, Derrida looked at the way in which speech is privileged over writing, being seen as more immediate and authoritative, because of the apparently more immediate presence of the author. Derrida showed that '"the living voice" is quite as material as print; and that since spoken signs, like written ones, work only by a processs of difference and division, speaking could be just as much said to be a form of writing as writing is said to be a second-hand form of speaking.'[58] Here again the system is transgressing the laws it lays down for itself: that is it deconstructs itself. (The debate about the privileging of writing over speaking or vice versa has an ironic aspect given the fact that the Bible has existed only in oral form for many people for much of its history.)

Foucault[59], looking at the idea of discourse, showed that not only was the social context of language-in-use important, but also its associations with power.[60] One of his arguments in this direction was the observation that what it is possible (in the sense both of intelligible and allowed) to say will change from one era to another. This implies that knowledge changes, and that no discourse is fixed, but is rather both cause and effect, wielding power at the same time as it stimulates opposition.[61]

It is deconstruction which is the major challenge to hermeneutics[62] and interpretation not just of the Bible, but of any text, and my next chapter looks at the way in which it lies behind many of the current debates in hermeneutics.

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58 Eagleton Literary Theory : An Introduction (Blackwell 1983) p 130; Derrida did a similar thing with his discussion of good and evil, where good is theologically prior, and evil defined in terms of good; one is led inexorably to the question which came first?

59 Michel Foucault : Language, Counter Memory, Practice, Selected Essays and Interviews (ed D F Bouchard : Blackwell, Oxford 1977)
Foucault : The Foucault Reader (ed Paul Rabinov : Penguin, Harmondsworth 1986)
Foucault : "What is an author?" in ed Josue Harari : Textual Strategies : Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism (Cornell University Press / Methuen & Co 1977) reprinted in ed Lodge: Modern Criticism and Theory (Longman 1988) pp 196 ff

60 One of the examples given is that of a University Faculty where tutors have power over what is acceptable from students, because the students wish to be awarded a degree.

61 Selden A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (HarvesterWheatsheaf 2nd ed 1989) p 102

62 "deconstruction on its own terms is irrefutable" Vanhoozer: Is there a meaning in this text? (Apollos 1998) p 198 referring to George Steiner's view: see G Steiner: Real Presences (Chicago University Press 1989) p 132