

ROUGH, *VERY ROUGH* HISTORICAL SURVEY OF CRITICAL THEORIES IN US

NB–Caveats:

- theories do not evolve in lock-step fashion
- theories often germinate in the thinking of a particular figure(s) and do not immediately become “movements”; witness Saussure’s theories, expounded in early 20th century, which do not become a literary movement until the 1950-60s
- theory did *not* begin in the modern era, though theories have grown rapidly and dramatically in the 20th c.
- theories often emerge antithetically, responding to the perceived inadequacies of an earlier methodology

Historical	Practical Criticism	Psychoanalytic	Marxist	New Criticism
(early 20 th c. & earlier)	(1920s)	(1930s)	(1930s)	(1950-60s)
works are influenced profoundly which produce them	forerunner to New Crit	lit is an expression of the state of mind & the structure personality of author OR	consciousness is constituted by an ideology —beliefs, values, ways of thinking and feeling through which humans perceive and explain, reality	a detailed consideration of the work itself in isolation from attendant circumstances like the period in which it was produced, what was going on in the writer's life, its national origin, etc.
real meaning is always in the past	discussion of particular works & writers	translate text’s manifest elements into the unconscious determinants that constitute suppressed meanings	ideology is dominant mode of thought in any era is conceived to be, ultimately, the product of its economic structure and the resulting class-relations and class-interests.	only suitable method of consideration is explication or close reading , i.e., a detailed, subtle analysis of the work's ambiguities and many meanings
Structuralism		Feminism	Reader Response	Poststructuralism
(1960s)		(1970s)	(1970s)	(1970-80s)
text but also the author is canceled as the structuralist places in brackets the actual work and the person who wrote it, in order to isolate the true object of enquiry--the <u>system</u>		West civ is patriarchal = male-centered & controlled and designed to subordinate women to men	text is created by reader as s/he engages in an evolving process of reading & evaluating	emphasizes the essentially <i>unstable</i> nature of signification
meaning is determined not by the individual but by the system which governs the individual		texts & critical approaches are infused w/ male assumptions--objective, disinterested & universal--represent male ways of reasoning	reconstructions of a text are variable because each reader is different and because the text is no longer conceived of as uniform and coherent, thus offering a single, approved meaning	traces the insistent activity of the signifier as it forms chains & cross-currents of meaning w/ other signifiers & defies the orderly requirements of the signified

aim is to discover the codes, the rules, the systems, which underlie all human social and cultural practices		alternate concern w/ developing a specifically female framework for dealing w/ works written by women in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis & interpretation		anything expressed in language is affected or distorted by that language
Post-Colonialism		New Historicism	Queer Theory	
(1980s)		(1980s)	(1990s)	
cross-disciplinary method of analyzing the conditions that affect the production, reception, & cultural significance of literature		challenges boundaries b/w high and low art or notions of literary texts	endeavors to identify and reclaim works of non-heterosexual writers	
usually challenge notions of traditional canons of achievement		history is not a homogeneous & stable pattern of facts & events which can be used as the "background" to explain lit of an era	challenge notions of gay identity as essential, universal, & transhistorical	
illustrate the ways in which issue of aesthetics are tied to dominant cultural and political ideologies		readers are subjects who are shaped & positioned by the conditions & ideological formations of their own era	further considers cross-influences of race and social class in construction of gay identity	
		these readings construct, rather than discover ready-made, the textual meanings they describe & the literary & cultural histories they narrate		

HISTORICAL APPROACH

- begins with the implicit notion that reality is fixed and knowable and that there are reliable ways of discerning and understanding that reality
- furthermore history is a collection of facts which can be assembled and proven as reliable
- based on a fundamental principle--either an author's life or times or both provide the most important means of understanding a literary work
- works are influenced profoundly and ineradicably by the society, the period, and the culture which produce them
 - real meaning is always in the past
- another crucial influence is that of the author who has chosen particular words and placed them in precise relationships to produce the work
 - to understand and appreciate that work the reader must attempt to recreate the writer's time, frame of mind, or social milieu
- as E. D. Hirsch suggests there are correct and incorrect ways of reading and interpreting, and the final "correct" test of any reading is its correspondence to history
- Keeseey suggests that the historical approach gained currency from 2 important changes in thinking that occurred in the 19th c.:
 - art is the expression of an individual, unique mind
 - a sense of the *pastness* of the past
- such critics are sometimes called "geneticists" because they focus on the author or origin of the work for its meaning
 - it is axiomatic, then, that these are critics of *causes*
- contrary to what many may contend, the historical approach is alive and well and thriving and can be seen in literary biographies

NEW CRITICISM

- C critical approach that has its origins in writings of T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards in the 1920's
- C a reaction against emphasis on writers' biographies, a work's social context, or literary history
- C the emphasis instead was upon a detailed consideration of the **work itself**

A number of basic tenets prevail:

- C the poem must be treated as such
 - C it is an independent, self-sufficient verbal object
 - C it must be seen in isolation from attendant circumstances like the period in which it was produced, what was going on in the writer's life, its national origin, etc.
- C the only suitable method of consideration is **explication** or **close reading**, i.e., a detailed, subtle analysis of the work's ambiguities and many meanings
- C literature represents a *special kind of language*, apart from ordinary communication or clinical description
 - C it is characterized by an organic unity of overall structure and integrated meanings
- C literature's essential components are words, images, & symbols which revolve around central ideas or themes
 - C the purpose of criticism is to reveal a central, integrated, free-standing *unity*
- C as critic Murray Krieger wrote, "[a] poem is a tight, compelling, finally closed context [that demands readers] judge the work's efficacy as an aesthetic object"

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM, Abrams

Psy. crit sees lit as an expression of the state of mind & the structure of personality of the indiv author.

A work of lit is correlated w/ its author's distinctive mental & emotional traits:

- ref to author's personality to explain & interpret a lit work
- ref to lit works in order to estab, biographically, the personality of the author
- the mode of reading a lit work specifically as a way of experiencing the distinctive subjectivity, or consciousness of its author

Psychoanalytical Criticism

Freud is creator and proposed that lit and other arts consist of imagined, or fantasied, fulfillment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality & propriety

- the chief enterprise of psychoanalytic critic is to reveal the true content of a lit work by translating its manifest elements into the unconscious determinants that constitute their suppressed meanings

Freud saw the artist as possessing special abilities that separated them from the neurotic personality"

- have high degree of ability to sublimate
- have ability to elaborate fantasied wish-fulfillments into manifest features of a work of art in a way that conceals or deletes their per. elements & thus they can satisfy the unconscious desires of people other than the indiv artists
- thru genius they can mold the artistic medium into a "faithful image of the creatures of the imagination" as well as into a satisfying artistic form
- lit and art, unlike dreams & neuroses, may serve the artist as a mode of fantasy that opens "the way back to reality"

Freud saw the mind as having 3 functions:

- **id** = incorporates libidinal & other desires
- **superego** = internalization of standards of morality & propriety
- **ego** = tries to negotiate conflicts b/w the 2

Kenneth Burke, Edmund Wilson, & Lionel Trilling all owe debt to Freud

Jungian Crit (or depth psychology)

Carl G. Jung emphasizes not indiv consciousness but "collective unconscious," shared by all people in all cultures

- this constitutes "racial memories," primordial images & patterns of exper that he calls *archetypes*
- unlike Freud, lit not seen as form of libidinal wish-fulfillment
- great lit is expression of archetypes of collective unconscious
- Jung's influence has been greatest on **myth** and **archetypal criticism**

Post-Freudian Crit

Harold Bloom and *anxiety of influence* adapts to composition and reading of lit Freud's concepts of Oedipus complex & distorting operation of defense mechanisms in dreams

Jacques Lacan, "semiotic Freud," recast basic concepts of psychoanalysis into formulations derived from linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure & apply these to the operations of the process of signification

- "The unconscious is structured like a language"
- divides early stages of development into "imaginary" = pre-linguistic stage & "symbolic" = acquisition of language
- in imaginary there is no clear distinction b/w subj and obj or b/w self & others
- in symbolic stage infant assimilated inherited system of linguistic differences & learns to accept its predetermined "position" in such linguistic oppositions as male/female, father/son, mother/daughter
 - sym realm of lang is the realm of the law of the father, in which the "phallus" (in a symbolic sense) is "the privileged signifier" that serves to estab the mode for all other signifiers
 - Lacan translated F's views of the mental workings of dream-formation into textual terms of the play of signifiers, converting F's distorting defense-mechanisms into linguistic figures of speech. All processes of linguistic expression & interpretation, driven by "desire" for a lost & unachievable obj, move incessantly along a chain of unstable signifiers w/o any possibility of coming to rest on a fixed signified, or presence

Marxist Criticism, Abrams

Based originally on writings of Marx & Engels w/ following premises:

- C the evolving history of humanity, of its social relations, of its institutions and of its ways of thinking are largely determined by the changing mode of its "material production"-- that is, of its overall economic organization.
- C Historical changes in the fundamental mode of production effect changes in the social class structure, establishing in each era dominant and subordinate classes that engage in a struggle for economic, political, and social advantage.
- C Human consciousness is constituted by an **ideology**--that is, the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and by recourse to which they explain, what they take to be reality. An ideology is, in complex ways, the product of the position and interests of a particular class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimize and perpetuate, the interests of the dominant economic and social class.
- C ideology for Marxists have to do w/ dominant mode of thought in any era is conceived to be, ultimately, the product of its economic structure and the resulting class-relations and class-interests.
- C further claim is that the reigning ideology of a period incorporates the interests of the dominant and exploitative class, the "bourgeoisie," who are the owners of the material means of production and distribution, as opposed to the "proletariat," or wage-earning working class
 - C to those living in and with that ideology, all seems a natural and inevitable way of seeing, explaining, and dealing with the enviroing world, but in fact has the hidden function of legitimizing and maintaining the position, power, and economic interests of the ruling class. Bourgeois ideology is regarded as both producing & permeating the social and cultural institutions and practices of the present era--including religion, morality, philosophy, politics, and the legal system, as well as (though in a less direct way) literature and the other arts
- C Marxist critic tries to "explain" the literature in any historical era not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as "products" of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era; usually, the Marxist critic also examines the relation of a literary product to the actual economic and social reality of its time and place.
- C **Georg Lukacs** notes that each great work of literature creates "its own world," which is unique and seemingly distinct from "everyday reality"

- C favored 19th cent realism (for their depiction of real world of class conflicts, economic and social “contradictions” & alienation of indiv under capitalism) and disdained modernist texts as decadent for their exclusive concern w/ subjectivity of the alienated indiv.
- C **Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer** of “Frankfurt School” praised modernists for fragmenting & disrupting the life they “reflect,” estab a distance & effect a detachment which serve as implicit critiques
- C **Louis Althusser** incorporated structuralism into his approach such that society is constituted by diverse “nonsynchronous” social formations, or “ideological state apparatuses,” including religious, legal, political, and literary institutions.
- C Each of these is interrelated with the others in complex ways, but possesses a "relative autonomy"; only "in the last instance" is the ideology of a particular institution determined by the material base in the contemp mode of economic production.
- C ideologies vary according to the form & practice of each mode of state apparatus, and that the ideology of each mode operates by means of a type of discourse which "interpellates" (calls upon) the individual to take up a pre-established "subject position," which in each instance serves the ultimate interests of the ruling class
- C **Pierre Macherey** stressed the supplementary claim that a lit text not only distances itself from its ideology by its fiction and form but also exposes “contradictions” that are inherent in that ideology by its “silences” or “gaps.” The Marxists critics makes these silences speak the text’s unconscious content
- C **Raymond Williams** adapts Marxism to humanism w/ concern for the overall texture of an individual's "lived experience."
- C **Terry Eagleton** discusses text as a special kind of production in which ideological discourse--described as any system of mental representations of lived experience--is worked into a specifically literary discourse.
- C **Frederic Jameson** most eclectic of current Marxists & contends that Marxist criticism "subsumes" all other "interpretive modes" & exposes the role of the "political unconscious," a concept which he describes as his "collective," or "political," adaptation of the Freudian concept that each individual's unconscious is a repository of repressed

desires.

C those things not said are symptoms of the repression by ideology of the contradictions of "History" into the depths of the political unconscious

WHAT STRUCTURALIST CRITICS DO

1. They analyze (mainly) prose narratives, relating the text to some larger containing structure, such as:
 - (a) the conventions of a particular literary genre, or
 - (b) a network of intertextual connections, or
 - (c) a projected model of an underlying universal narrative structure, or
 - (d) a notion of narrative as a complex of recurrent patterns or motifs.

2. They interpret literature in terms of a range of underlying parallels with the structures of language, as described by modern linguistics. For instance, the notion of the 'mytheme,' posited by Levi-Strauss, denoting the minimal units of narrative 'sense,' is formed on the analogy of the morpheme, which, in linguistics, is the smallest unit of grammatical sense. An example of a morpheme is the 'ed' added to a verb to denote the past tense.

3. They apply the concept of systematic patterning and structuring to the whole field of Western culture, and across cultures, treating as 'systems of signs' anything from Ancient Greek myths to brands of soap powder.

STRUCTURALISM, by Raman Selden

- Structuralism has attracted some literary critics because it promises to introduce a certain rigor and objectivity into the impressionistic realm of literature. This rigor is achieved at a cost. By subordinating *parole* to *langue* the structuralist neglects the specificity of actual texts, and treats them as if they were like the patterns of iron filings produced by an invisible force.
- Not only the text but also the author is canceled as the structuralist places in brackets the actual work and the person who wrote it, in order to isolate the true object of enquiry--the system.
- According to structuralists, writing has no origin. Every individual utterance is preceded by language: in this sense, every text is made up of the 'already written.'
- By isolating the system, structuralists also cancel history since the structures discovered are either universal (the universal structures of the human mind) and therefore timeless, or arbitrary segments of a changing and evolving process.
- Historical questions characteristically are about change and innovation, whereas structuralism has to exclude them from consideration in order to isolate a system.
- Therefore structuralists are interested not in the development of the novel or the transition from feudal to Renaissance literary forms, but in the structure of narrative as such and in the system of aesthetics governing a period. Their approach is necessarily static and ahistorical: they are interested in neither the moment of the text's production (its historical context, its formal links with past writing, etc.) nor the moment of its reception or 'reproduction'
- There is no doubt that structuralism represented a major challenge to the dominant New Critical, Leavisite, and generally humanist types of critical practice. They all presupposed a view of language as something capable of grasping reality. Language had been thought of as a reflection of either the writer's mind or the world as seen by the writer. In a sense the writer's language was hardly separable from his or her personality; it expressed the author's very being.
- However, as we have seen, the Saussurean perspective draws attention to the pre-existence of language. In the beginning was the word, and the word created the text.
- Instead of saying that an author's language reflects reality, the structuralists argue that the structure of language produces 'reality'. This represents a massive 'demystification' of literature. The source of meaning is no longer the writer's or the reader's *experience* but the operations and oppositions which reader's language.
- Meaning is determined no longer by the individual but by the system which governs the individual.
- At the heart of structuralism is a scientific ambition to discover the codes, the rules, the systems, which underlie all human social and cultural practices.
- However, our discussion of Genette showed that the very definition of an opposition within narrative discourse sets up a play of meaning which resists a settled or fixed structuration.

Feminist Crit, Abrams

Not a unitary theory nor a clear, definite procedure for reading lit.

Three basic premises underlie most of the practitioners:

1.) West civ is **patriarchal** = male-centered & controlled and designed to subordinate women to men.

U As Simone de Beauvoir wrote, women are conceived as the Other, a negative object, the non-male.

U women are taught to submit and internalize the patriarchal ideology & thus conditioned to derogate their own sex & to cooperate in their own subordination

2.) Concepts of **gender** have less to do w/ biology or physiology than with cultural training and expectation.

3.) **Patriarchal** ideology pervades writings considered **great literature**.

U Females are depicted in subordinate or marginal roles & women readers are asked to identify either w/ something outside themselves or against themselves by taking up the position of the male subject.

U Critical approaches are infused w/ male assumptions--objective, disinterested & universal--represent male ways of reasoning.

Feminist approaches tend to fall into one of the following categories:

1.) **Woman as Reader**, where women bring to light revisionary readings that counter sexual bias written into lit. Works. Sexual prejudices are uncovered and analyzed.

2.) **Gynocriticism**--crit which concerns itself w/ developing a specifically female framework for dealing w/ works written by women in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis & interpretation

U Concerned w/ identifying what are taken to be the distinctively feminine subj matters in lit written by women--world of domesticity, birthing, nurturing

U Emphasis on distinctively feminine mode of exper or subjectivity in thinking feeling, valuing & perceiving one self and world

U Investigation of distinctively feminine style of speech & writing

U Another goal is to challenge, reorder, or reconstruct the literary cannon to include women writers excluded or placed on the margin

3.) Theory of role of Gender--poststructural critics like Lacan & reworkings of Freudian psychology suggest that male bias is encoded in language itself.

- U Lang is irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, & male-dominated
- U Lacan's term--phallogocentric
- U Helene Cixous emphasizes female writing that is prelinguistic
- U other theorists are Luce Irigaray & Julia Kristeva

READER RESPONSE, M. H. Abrams

Wolfgang Iser

- C developed a phenomenological analysis of reading process
- C lit text, as product of *writer's intentional acts*, partially controls reader's responses but always contains a number of "gaps" or "indeterminate elements"
- C reading is evolving process of anticipation, frustration, retrospection, reconstruction, & satisfaction
- C "implied reader" = estab by text & will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures"
- C "actual reader" = responses are inevitably colored by his/her accumulated private expers.
- C texts thus are range of poss meanings despite reader's orientation

David Bleich

- C all readings are a "subj process" determined by personality of indiv reader

Norman Holland

- C relies on Freudian concepts
- C a work is a projection of fantasies, engendered by interplay of unconscious needs & defenses, that makes up "identity" of author
- C reader's "subj" response to text is "transactive" encounter b/w fantasies projected by author 7 defenses, expectations, & wish-fulfilling fantasies of reader
- C reader transform fantasies into a unity [notice New Crit. Desire for coherence], or "meaningful totality," which constitutes reader's interpretation
- C there is no universally determinate meaning of a work; 2 readers will agree only in so far as their "identity themes" are sufficiently alike

Harold Bloom

- C also uses psychoanalytic concepts of Freud more complexly than Holland
- C "all reading is misreading"

Stanley Fish

Early Fish:

- C creator of affective stylistics
- C early writings advanced idea of act of reading as conversion of spatial sequence of words into temporal flow of exper for informed reader w/ lit competence
- C act of reading is one of assimilating, making errors, correcting those errors, etc.
- C meaning of an utterance not final, corrected result but reader exper of all of it; mistakes are part of meaning of text [notice idea of mistakes suggests there is a “correct” method or result]

Later Fish:

- C interpretive communities, each composed of members who share a part reading “strategy” or “set of community assumptions”
- C now affective stylistics only one of many poss methods of interpretation
- C each communal strategy “creates” all the seemingly obj features of text as well as “intentions, speakers, & authors” we may infer from text
- C no universal “right reading” of any text; validity of any reading always depends on assumptions & strategy of reading that one happens to share w/ other members of a part inter community

POSTSTRUCTURALISM, Raman Selden

--fuller working out of principles of structuralism, which tries to deflate scientific pretensions of structuralism

--while the signifier/signified relationship is arbitrary, speakers in practice require particular signifiers to be securely attached to particular concepts, & therefore they assume that signifier and signified form a united whole & preserve a certain identity of meaning

--poststruct. emphasizes the essentially *unstable* nature of signification

--much of the energy of poststruc has gone into tracing the insistent activity of the signifier as it forms chains & cross-currents of meaning w/ other signifiers & defies the orderly requirements of the signified

Derrida & Deconstruction

--he notes that the notion of "structure," even in structuralist theory, has always presupposed a "center of meaning"

--this center governs the structure but is itself not subj to structuralist analysis (to find the structure of the center would be to find another center)

--people desire a center because it guarantees *being as presence*

--the Western tendency to see things in terms of opposites--body/soul, good/bad, nature/culture-- however, Derrida insists we cannot choose b/w them because then a new center & guarantee of presence would be created

--Derrida's notion of *differance* is offered as explanation of what prevents a sign from being a full presence

--emphasizing the contradictory etymology of the word *differer* which means both to differ and to defer.

--to differ, the term suggests the idea that the sign emerges from a system of differences which are spaced out w/in the system

--to defer is a temporal term in which signifiers enforce an endless postponement of "presence"

--writing does not require or usually involve a writer's presence yet our exper and preference for talk leads to the phonocentrism Derrida speaks of as endemic to Western thinking

--Derrida seeks to overturn this, and all hierarchies of thought, to show the ways opposites overlap and displace one another & he concludes that all human activity is one of addition and substitution

--Derrida's method of reading often involves noting a hierarchy, reversing it, & then finally resists the creation of a new hierarchy by displacing the superiority of the second term

--deconstruction occurs when we locate the moment when a text *transgresses the laws it appears*

to set up for itself. At this pt texts seemingly go to pieces.

--in other words, a sign can break its "real context" & be read in a different context regardless of what its writer intended

Paul de Man

--develops a rhetorical type of deconstruction in his concern w/ tropes & the ways in which writers say one thing & mean another

--they may substitute one word for another (metaphor) or displace meaning from one sign in a chain to another

--tropes pervade lang, exerting a force which destabilizes logic, & thereby denies the possibility of straightforwardly literal or referential use of lang

--he shows that the effects of lang & rhetoric prevent a direct representation of the real & agrees w/ Nietzsche that lang is essentially figurative & not referential or expressive--there is then no original unrhetorical lang

--thus reference is always contaminated w/ figurality

--reading is always necessarily "misreading" because tropes inevitably intervene b/w critical & lit texts

--a "correct" misreading tries to include & not repress the inevitable misreadings which all lang produces

--he believes that lit texts are *self-deconstructing*: "a lit text simultaneously asserts & denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode"

--de Man does not, however, deny lang's referential function; it is simply placed, he says, "under erasure"

DECONSTRUCTIONISM, Stephen Bonnycastle

--deconstructionism is almost always negative & based on the assumption that it is *not possible* to develop valid beliefs about the nature of the world & of human exper.

--*structuralists* maintain lang does not merely *represent* the world, it also organizes the world.
--lang is not transparent; it affects what we see when we look at the world

--*deconstructionists* say any truth expressed in a part lang is affected or distorted by that lang, thus *nothing expressed in lang is absolutely true*
--truth is mediated by lang

--they agree w/ structuralists that lang works thru binary oppositions: male/female, center/margins, white/black. truth/lies
--deconstructionists are quick to spot those oppositions and ask what they are based upon, usually power relations that the powerful use to maintain their authority

Derrida

--challenges Western philosophy saying that since Plato philosophers have given direct communication thru speech a higher status than communication thru written texts.
--speech is primary and writing secondary
--he doesn't believe in truth existing before lang; instead, a statement can exist only *in lang*, prior to its encoding in lang, it has no existence

--assumptions of Western philosophy are built into our lang, so that it is impose to use the word "truth" w/o implying that one subscribes to Western phonocentric ideas of it
--he has coined a number of words to express revised vision of how culture works--
"logocentric," "phonocentric," "*différance*," "aporia," "the play of lang"
--he uses many puns & games w/ words, to indicate the materiality of words affects how we use and understand them
--its materiality affects the way we use it in the same way that the material properties of a block of wood will affect what kind of sculpture we can make out of it

--words have an identity only becuz they are different from any other words--they don't have an essence of their own
--words are not *better* than one another; they are just *different* from one another

--norms & standards always imply someone or something excluded & exclusion may have nothing to do w/ being better but w/ being different

--social norms, like fictional stories, are *constructed*; they are not absolute or natural
--deconstructionism realizes that a norm has been constructed, so it can be altered

--one assumption is that when people speak or write they are much less in control of what they are doing than was previously thought
--what they say and think is, in important ways, structured by the lang they speak and & the ways in which they speak it: "We don't speak lang; it speaks us"

--another assumption is that we should pay more attention to hidden assumptions in our lang & culture, esp when we think we are being neutral, factual, objective
--norms require scrutiny--whose interests do they serve, who is excluded, why, & is this

desirable

--Derrida criticizes previous philosophers for not paying close enough attention to the rhetorical nature of the major texts of West. philosophic trad

--he stresses the relativity of truth, standards, & norms

DERRIDA

Generally speaking, and esp. in “Structure, Sign, Play,” Derrida’s method can be reductively described as:

- choose alternatives (nature/culture), invert these, and finally subvert all hierarchies
- subvert the ability to set boundaries, limits, or margins to what is “inside” and “outside”
- analyze inherent nonlogicality—or rhetoricity (reliance on rhetorical figures and figurative language)—in **all** uses of language

Derrida’s ultimate point was not so much literary analysis as a **way of reading all texts** in order to reveal and subvert the tacit metaphysical presuppositions of Western thought

one of Derrida’s most famous coinings is the term *différance*, which means to be different as well as to defer

& DECONSTRUCTIONISM

- we can never, deconstructionism insists, in any instance of speech or writing, have a fixed and decidable *present* meaning
- from the deconstructionist point of view, we can never get beyond the sequence of verbal signs to anything that stands outside of, and independent of, the language system that constitutes the text
- the deconstructionist reader neither institutes nor produces
 - deconstruction is something that simply “happens” to a critical reading

New Historicism--Abrams

--poststructural approach, w/ following influences & appropriations:

--Althusser's idea that *ideology* manifests itself in different ways in the discourse of each of the semi-autonomous institutions of an era & ideology works to position its readers as the "subjects" in the discourse, that is, subordinates them to the interests of the ruling class

--Michel Foucault's theory that patterns of power-relations at any given era in a society constitute the concepts, oppositions, & hierarchies of its discourse & determine what will be accounted knowledge & truth as well as deviational

--texts represent a number of independent & often conflicting voices

--culture is constituted by distinctive sets of signifying systems & **thick descriptions** (close readings) of social production or even to recover meanings it has for the people involved in it as well as discover the patterns of conventions, codes & modes of thinking that invest the cultural item w/ those meanings

--Louis Montrose's seminal phrase--new hist is "a reciprocal concern w/the historicity of texts & the textuality of history"

--a text, whether literary or historical, is a discourse which, altho it may seem to present, or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called **representations**--that is verbal formations which are "ideological products" or "cultural constructs" of a part era & these representations reproduce, confirm, & propagate the power-structures of domination & subordination which characterize a given society

Common claims include the following:

--lit does not occupy a "trans-historical" aesthetic realm; instead, it is simply one of many kinds of texts, all of which are subject to the particular conditions of a time and place

--many lit texts represent a diversity of dissonant voices, which express orthodox and subversive forces of an era

--history is not a homogeneous & stable pattern of facts & events which can be used as the "background" to explain lit of an era

--a lit text is "embedded" in its context, as an interactive component w/in a network of institutions, beliefs, & cultural power-relations, practices, & products that, in their ensemble, constitute what we call history

--operations & values of consumer capitalism saturate literary & aesthetic institutions & relations

--humanistic concept of an essential human nature is another widely held ideological illusion generated by a capitalist culture

--those historians who ascribe a degree of freedom & initiative to an individual author do so to keep open that theoretical possibility that an individual can conceive & inaugurate radical changes in the social power-structure of which that indiv's own "subjectivity" & function are a product

--readers are subjects who are shaped & positioned by the conditions & ideological formations of their own era

--insofar as a reader's ideology may conform to the ideology of the writer of a lit text, the readers will **naturalize** the text (interpret its culture-specific & time-bound representations as tho they were the features of universal & permanent human exper)

--insofar as readers ideology differs from that of the writer, they will **appropriate** the text (interpret it so as to make it conform to their own cultural prepossessions)

--these readings construct, rather than discover ready-made, the textual meanings they describe & the literary & cultural histories they narrate

--in discussing *The Tempest*, Greenblatt argues that the play maneuvers the audience into accepting & even glorifying the power-structure to which the audience is itself subjected

--his general thesis is that, in order to sustain its power, any durable political and cultural order not only to some degree allows, but actively fosters subversive elements & forces, yet in such a way as more effectively to "contain" such challenges to the existing order