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Unit 2
Critical Approaches to Shakespeare.
Second Half of the Twentieth Century

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2.3. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

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INTRODUCTION

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The following unit is an overview of the most important critical approaches to Shakespeare during the second half of the twentieth century. We will focus our attention on post-structuralist critical lines such as new historicism, cultural materialism, gender studies, psychoanalysis, and post-colonialism.

Section 2.1. on structuralism is necessary in order to offer the context which post-structuralist analysis will stand against. Section 2.2. on post structuralism and deconstruction presents the new definitions of structure, text, author, and reader that you need to bear in mind to understand the critical mechanisms used by new historicists, materialists, critics working on gender studies, psychoanalysts, or post-colonialists. It is essential to assimilate the different conceptions of language of structuralism and post-structuralism since both critical approaches apply their linguistic views to the analysis of texts. The post-structuralist defines language as a locus without a centre, without a fixed meaning, not as a stable and enclosed structure of meaning as structuralism did. The post-structuralist text is open to multiple interpretations. This unit will develop this idea in detail.

The post-structuralist idea of subjectivity, explained in section 2.3., as opposed to the humanist definition of the human being as the recipient of a trans-historical essence must be understood to correctly interpret post-structuralist analysis of Shakespeare's works. The characters are no longer analysed as human beings that share qualities supposedly common to all humankind. Post-structuralists analyse human identity as fashioned by the social, historical, and political context of the time.

The subject is considered a cultural artefact. The concept of cultural difference is also vital to understanding this approach. There is no human essence that links all human beings since our social, religious, political, and economic environments make us all different from each other. The term “difference” in relation to subjectivity should also be taken into account when studying this unit.

These critical approaches will also connect the literary discourse with social, political, historical, and religious thought during Shakespeare’s time. His works at times are considered as strengthening Elizabethan and Jacobean social and political discourse but also as challenges to authority. But these critics, especially the materialists, will also point out the contemporary relevance of the analysis of the playwright’s work. Shakespeare is then appropriated, and sometimes interpreted, to strengthen or defy certain twentieth-century discourses.

STUDY GUIDELINES

Some concepts analysed in this unit are quite complex. Please refer back to *Ejes de la literatura inglesa medieval y renacentista* and carefully re-read chapter 5 “El Teatro de Shakespeare (1): Introducción.” There you will find useful introductions to new historicism, cultural materialism, and gender studies.

The excerpts used in this unit will also clarify many of the concepts and will illustrate how post-structuralist ideas are applied to Shakespeare. Many include footnotes that invite you to relate them to other texts in other sections. By doing so, you will observe how critical commentaries on certain texts complement or oppose each other. This will show you how Shakespeare’s works can be subjected to a variety of interpretations that not only enrich the texts but also give the reader a prominent role.

On contemporary literary theory see Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson’s *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1993) and Vincent B. Leitch’s *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2001). On Shakespearean criticism see Russ McDonald’s *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000* (2003). It is a collection of the most important critical essays on Shakespeare’s works from the

second half of the twentieth century. In McDonald's anthology you can find some of the articles in full referred to in Unit 1 and Unit 2 such as Cleanth Brooks's "The Naked Babe' and the Cloak of Manliness," Tillyard's "Cosmic Background" in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, Stephen Greenblatt's "Invisible Bullets," Jonathan Dollimore's "Radical Tragedy," Catherine Belsey's "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies" and Francis Barker and Peter Hulme's "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish': The Discursive Con-texts of *The Tempest*." You can also find texts by critics in Unit 1 and 2 such as Wolfgang Clemen, Louis Adrian Montrose, Jean E. Howard, Alan Sinfield, Stephen Orgel, Bruce Smith, Linda Woodbridge, and Ania Loomba.

2.1. STRUCTURALISM

French philosopher and the most famous structuralist critic Roland Barthes defined structuralism as “a certain mode of analysis of cultural artefacts, in so far as this mode originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics” (1970: 412). For structuralists, culture is a group of systems of signs with the same organisation and features that language has as viewed by the Swiss philologist, professor and founder of modern structural linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure (1857- 1913). Structuralism, which flourished in the 1960s, applies linguistics to all aspects of social behaviour. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Saussure defines language as a closed and stable system of signs. His concept of the linguistic sign is the foundation of structuralism, not only in linguistic terms but also as a system of thought that considers social and cultural life to be ruled by systems of signs like those in language.

For Saussure, each sign is made up of two elements: a sound image or its graphic equivalent, called a signifier, and its corresponding concept or signified. The signifier and the signified are indivisible, like two sides of a single sheet of paper. The concept of arbitrariness is central for Saussure. The relationship between a signifier, for example the sound-image “tree,” and a signified, the concept “tree,” is merely the result of linguistic convention: There is no natural link. The relationship of the whole sign and its referent, the real thing to which it refers, is also arbitrary. Saussure here underlines the divergence between language and reality. Language does not reflect reality, it gives form to our experience of things and orders what would otherwise be just a confused mixture of ideas. Referents do not determine the meaning of words: words establish the meaning of things. For example, the signified “chair” is not determined by the existence of the actual objects to which it is arbitrarily linked. It is the sign “chair” that makes the real object “chair” distinguishable from other

objects such as “tables”. There is no natural bond between word and thing. Saussurean theories imply that language is not transparent to reality. Reality, or the way we view reality, is constructed through language.

For Saussure, signs are arbitrary but also differential. This idea is essential for Saussure since the meaning of a sign depends on its relationship to other signs and more specifically on its difference from them. The sound-image “tree” has significance because it differs from “free,” “try,” etc. The concept “tree” has significance because it differs from concepts such as “bush,” “plant,” etc. Signs do not have a substantial and inherent meaning, they have a relational one and must be analysed as essential parts of a whole. The arbitrary and differential nature of the linguistic sign and the non-correspondence of language and reality is the linguistic basis for the structuralist idea that all meaning in every sphere of human activity consists of closed systems wholly independent of the material world. Saussure is primarily interested in analysing how those systems are organised. His research does not focus on what people actually say, or “parole,” the way each one of us speaks as an individual, but in the language-system, or “langue,” that is, the underlying structure of signs that allows us to use language, to speak. Saussure is concerned with structure and not with individual utterances. His aim is to analyse the internal functioning of language.

Structuralism is a system of thought that applies Saussure’s linguistic theory to all social and cultural activities. Language is a unique archetype since any form of social behaviour is viewed as a closed system of signs. The main goal of the structuralist is to unearth the fundamental rules by which these signs are combined into meanings. But, whereas the meaning of these signs is not important for structuralists, their internal relations to one another, their structural configuration, is. Structuralism has a close relationship with semiotics or semiology, the general science of signs. Semiology studies every social and cultural form of expression, like gestures, forms of dress, ways of eating, poems, football matches, and traffic lights, as systems of signs whose organisation and meaning, far from being natural or inherent, are just artificial constructs that depend on social and cultural conventions.

Developed by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, structural anthropology was the earliest and most relevant example of

social structural analysis. By using linguistic analysis, Lévi-Strauss intended to uncover the cultural and social structures that govern different cultures. His well-known analysis of myths, rituals, and kinship relations is based on the idea that they can be studied as if they were structured and organised as a language, as a closed system of signs in a differential relationship to each other. Lévi-Strauss tried to prove that though every culture has different social and cultural signs, there is a basic set of laws that are common to all cultural organisations and that govern the structure of these systems of signs. For Lévi-Strauss those sets of laws were deep-seated in the structures of the human brain.

Literary structuralism was founded on Saussure's linguistics and followed the structural methods of Lévi-Strauss. It emerged as a new type of structural analysis, since literature, considered as another field of social and cultural expression, was also regarded as a system of signs that could be examined in semiological terms. However, since language is the very essence of literature, the Saussurean definition and organisation of language is not used as just a mere pattern or tool of cultural analysis in literary structuralism in the same way as it is used in structural anthropology. The linguistic pattern has more weight in the analysis of literature since, as Barthes remarks, "language is literature's Being, its very world" (1970: 411). Literary structuralists are primarily concerned with the language of the texts not about what the texts say or their message, but about how the texts say it or their code. They do not analyse the content or meaning of the text, they analyse its form or the way this meaning is produced. Like Saussure, literary structuralists refuse to analyse the relationship between the sign and its referent, the word and the external object, the text and its message. They focus on the text as a self-contained entity standing apart from external reality and from the readers' response or the author's intentions. The Humanist and Romantic traditions consider that texts hold an essence, a central meaning that stems from the author's soul. The author creates his or her own meaning that translates into words, taking the shape of a literary work. For structuralists, the real essence of a literary work is its linguistic structure alone since human meaning is merely a construct. The author is unable to control language or use it in order to express his or her feelings and thoughts faithfully. Language, as we have already noted, is not able to reflect reality and it is able to control an author whose only

way of giving form to what he or she tries to communicate is through a system whose signs do not naturally relate to what they refer to.

In some ways, literary structuralism resembles the formalist methods of new criticism and its rejection of the so-called “intentional” and “affective fallacies.” However, we have to bear in mind that whereas new critics intend to find an organic unity, coherence, a central and single meaning in a text, structuralists disregard the referential dimension, and focus on the analysis of the relationship between signifiers, while rejecting the search for a final and unifying signified or meaning that could relate the text to an external reality. For the structuralist, a literary text is a closed system of signs organised and structured like language. One of their main aims is to bring to light the underlying set of rules in all works of literature. Such a set of rules is viewed as a general science of literature called “poetics” and is based on the Saussurean delineation between “langue” and “parole.” Structuralists regard every literary work as an example of “parole” or individual use of language that holds the underlying and constant rules and structures that belong to a general grammar of literature or general literary “langue.” The structuralist’s purpose is to analyse the way in which these rules are expressed in every single literary work.

A structural analysis of a text aims to find the laws of parallelism, relations, equivalences, etc., by which the linguistic structures within the literary text work. The most characteristic method of structural analysis is the organisation of texts in “binary oppositions.” The concept of the binary pairs is based on the Saussurean idea that the meaning of a sign depends on its differential relationship with another sign. For structural anthropologists, for instance, binary oppositions such as man/woman, nature/culture, light/dark, reason/passion, etc., reflects the functioning of every culture and ultimately the structure of human thought. Within these pairs, the second term is always considered subordinate to the first. By applying the same methods, the literary structuralist views attempts to organise the text in structured patterns which reveal the relation between its hierarchical and opposite units.

There are few structural analyses devoted to Shakespeare’s work. However, as Terence Hawkes remarks in “Shakespeare and New Critical Approaches” (1986):

There does exist a bulk of anti-Bradleian Anglo-American criticism which might reasonably be called quasi-structuralist: that is, its commitment lies wholly against Bradleian 'realism' and very much in favour of a view of the plays as structures deploying depersonalized 'themes' in which opposed concepts (such as appearance and reality, disorder and order, death and life) present a moral or political scheme in general rather than particular psychological terms. (290)

The "quasi-structuralists" Hawkes is referring to are critics such as L.C. Knights or G. Wilson Knight. In section 1.5. we observed how Wilson Knight focused on the analysis of patterns of images and symbols to find the central theme and unity of the play. L.C. Knights, in "How Many Children had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism" (1933), responds to Bradley's character criticism.¹ He considers this question irrelevant to the analysis of the text since the allusion in *Macbeth* to Lady Macbeth's breastfeeding is just made for poetic effect.² It is not intended to make us wonder about her maternal role as if she were a real woman. Characters cannot be analysed as human beings, according to Knights, who postulates that the structure of the play has to be found in its poetry. His analyses also pay close attention to language. The works of these two critics are seen as an anticipation of the pure structuralist analysis in so far as they reject authorial intention and psychological realism. They both consider that authority lies within the text.

Hawkes presents Roman Jakobson and Lawrence Jones's complex analysis of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 in *Shakespeare's Verbal Art in Th'Expece of Spirit* (1969) as "the classic 'structuralist' reading of a Shakespearian text" (290). According to Hawkes this analysis "stands as a powerful and exhilarating exercise in pushing one kind of structuralism to its virtual limits" (290).³

SELECTION OF TEXTS

In an essay about *Macbeth* in his book *Some Shakespearean Themes and An Approach to Hamlet* (1960), L. C. Knights states that

¹ See *Selection of Texts* 1.

² See *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* edition of *Macbeth* 1.7.54.

³ See *Selection of Texts* 2.

“the essential structure of *Macbeth*, as of the other tragedies, is to be sought in the poetry” (1970: 102). In “How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?” (1933), Knights defines *Macbeth* as “a statement of evil” (2000: 119) and through a detailed analysis of the poetry of the play he highlights the fact that the play blends three main themes: the reversal of values, the unnatural disorder, and the deceitful appearance. Consequently, Knights observes in the whole pattern of the play what could be considered binary oppositions of order and disorder and truth and deceit.

Text 1 presents the introduction to this essay. In contrast to Bradley’s or Coleridge’s studies of Shakespeare’s plays, Knights rejects psychological realism and argues that criticism should focus on the formal qualities of the text instead. His method is based on scrupulous attention to language.

Text 2 is Jakobson and Jones’s pure structural analysis of the couplet of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129. Note their interest in the linguistic configuration of these two lines and the obvious difference between this type of analytical interpretation and other studies based on the examination of the language of the plays such as G. Wilson Knight’s, Caroline Spurgeon’s, Wolfgang Clemen’s or even L. C. Knights’s. Notice the numeric division between lines and quatrains and how the text is dissected. Every term is analysed and related to the rest of the elements in the sonnet. This type of analysis attempts to unearth the hidden linguistic rules and whole structure of the sonnet, its internal functioning. As we can see, this structural analysis is focused on the code and considers its meaning to be secondary.

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| <p>1. L. C. Knights, “How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?” (1933) in <i>A Shakespeare Reader: Sources and Criticism</i> (2000)</p> |
|---|

... the only profitable approach to Shakespeare is a consideration of his plays as dramatic poems, of his **use of language** to obtain a total complex emotional response. Yet the bulk of Shakespeare criticism is concerned with his characters, his heroines, his love of Nature of his ‘philosophy’ – with everything in short,

except with the **words on the page**, which it **is the main business of the critic to examine ...**

The habit of regarding Shakespeare's persons as 'friends for life' or, maybe, 'deceased acquaintances', is responsible for most of the **vagaries** that serve as Shakespeare criticism ... It accounts for **Dr. Bradley's Notes**. It is responsible for all the **irrelevant moral and realistic canons** that have been applied to Shakespeare's plays, for the sentimentalizing of his heroes (Coleridge and Goethe on *Hamlet*)⁴ and his heroines. And the loss is incalculable. Losing sight of the *whole* dramatic pattern of each play, we inhibit the development of that full complex response that makes our experience of a Shakespeare play so very much more than an appreciation of 'character' – that is, usually, of somebody else's 'character.' The more complete, more intimate possession can only be obtained by treating **Shakespeare** primarily as **a poet**.

Since everyone who has written about Shakespeare probably imagines that he has 'treated him primarily as a poet', some explanation is called for. How should we read Shakespeare?

We start with so many lines of verse on a printed page which we read as we should read any other poem. We have to elucidate the meaning ... and to unravel ambiguities; we have to estimate the kind and quality of imagery and determine the precise degree of evocation of particular figures; we have to allow full weight to each word, exploring its 'tentacular roots', and to determine how it controls and is controlled by the rhythmic movement of the passage in which it occurs. In short, we have to decide exactly why the lines 'are so and not otherwise.' (2000: 118)

Roman Jakobson and Lawrence Jones, *Shakespeare's Verbal Art in Th' Expençe of Spirit* (1969)

Sonnet 129 as printed in the 1609 Quarto and as presented by Jakobson and Jones:⁵

- I 1 Th'expençe of Spirit in a waste of shame
 2 Is lust in action, and till action, lust

⁴ See section about Critical Approaches to *Hamlet* in Unit 3.

⁵ For a detailed analysis of this sonnet see www.shakespeares-sonnets.com.

- 3 Is perjurd, murdrous, blouddy full of blame,
 4 Savage, extreame, rude, cruel, not to trust,
II 1 Injoyd no sooner but dispised straight,
 2 Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
 3 Past reason hated as a swallowed bayt,
 4 On purpose layd to make the taker mad.
III 1 Made in pursut and in possession so,
 2 Had, having, and in quest, to have extreame,
 3 A blisse in prooffe and provd and very wo,
 4 Before a joy proposd behind a dreame
IV 1 All this the world well knowes yet none knowes well,
 1 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.⁵

The terminal couplet exhibits a considerable number of features alien to the three quatrains. This couplet is devoid of adjectives, participles, indefinite articles (against the fifteen adjectives, eleven participles, and six indefinite articles of the quatrains), and of relational (grammatical) verbs. It is the only strophe with a plural substantive, notional (lexical) finites, substantival and adjectival pronouns and with a relative clause. The four nouns of IV are pure substantives, whereas in the quatrains most of the substantives are deeply related to verbs ...

The sonnet has two topics – the lust and the luster – and omits the designation of the former in the final strophe and the designation of the latter in the initial strophe. The abstract appellation of the first topic attracts a string of further abstract nouns. The first strophe characterizes lust in itself; the second launches a set of passive participles with a hint to the yet unnamed *dramatis personae* and finishes by referring to the *taker* of the *bayt*; the third strophe uses active participles to depict the taker's behavior and brings forward images of lust as objects of his strivings. The adjective *extreame* applied to lust in the first strophe is transferred to the luster in the third. Mere anaphoric pronouns refer in the terminal couplet to the previous representation of lust, and the notion of the luster grows into a generalized idea of men and their damnation. The final line seems to allude to the ultimate persona, the celestial condemner of mankind.

The entire couplet consists of mere monosyllables, partly stressable, partly proclitic; but note Puttenham: "In words monosyllable the accent is indifferent and may be used for sharp or flat and heavy at our pleasure" (p. 92)! We observe

a similar lapidary makeup of the terminal couplet in several other of Shakespeare's sonnets, e.g. 2, 18, and 43. **This structure** favors a clear-cut duple phrasing of the lines in question:

All this / the world / well knowes / yet none / knowes well,
To shun / the heaven / that leads / men to / this hell. (26-27)

2.2. POST-STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

Post-structuralism is a system of thought that questions certain key concepts of structuralism such as signs and structures. The internal functioning of language is once more the pattern post-structuralists use to analyse how texts are organised but this time language is no longer considered a stable and enclosed structure of meaning, as Saussure argued. Language is now viewed as a locus without a centre, without a fixed meaning: meaning is always deferred, always absent.

In order to understand the full scope of these assertions the student must be familiar with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and his conclusions after analysing Saussure's linguistic method. Derrida questions structuralism after exploring the implications of Saussure's idea of linguistic difference. Derrida uses the term "différance" in order to explain his ideas on language. "Différance" is an ambiguous term. It derives from the French "différer" which means "to defer, postpone, delay," alluding to the nature of meaning, and "to differ, be different from," hinting at the nature of signs, and the nature of the signifiers. The dual meaning of the term "différance" refers to the necessary connections among the units of language in a text and to their distinctive nature. The meaning of an element in a text depends on its correlation with other elements before and after it, and its existence depends on its being distinct from these other elements. Let us analyse these ideas in more detail.

Saussure argues that meaning is a matter of difference, that "cat" is "cat" because it is not "cap" or "bat."⁶ But this process of difference in

⁶ You can find these same examples in Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (1983: 110).

language could be never-ending. That is, “cat” is “cat” also because it is not “cad” or “mat,” and “mat” is what it is because it is not “map,” and so on. Post-structuralism concludes that every sign is what it is because it is not any other sign. Each sign is different from all others. That infinite multiplicity of differences is what gives them their meaning. Meaning then depends on difference.

Saussure also argues that there is an intimate relationship between the unities of the sign, namely the signifier and signified. But post-structuralism questions such blending. A signified is not the outcome of the difference between two signifiers; it is the result of the differences between an unlimited number of signifiers. For post-structuralism, signifieds and signifiers are no longer the two inseparable sides of a single sheet of paper. The signified “boat” is not just the product of the difference between the signifier “boat” and “moat,” it is also the product of a complex and infinite interaction of signifiers like “coat,” “boar,” “bolt,” etc. For post-structuralism, this non-stop play of signifiers is what gives origin to meaning. Meaning is again difference and interplay of elements.

The idea that the signifier is subordinate and a verbal substitute for an independent and prior signified is also questioned. For post-structuralism, signifieds constantly turn into signifiers that incessantly turn into new signifieds. There is a constant play of signifiers in language, no hierarchical distinctions between signified and signifiers. Terry Eagleton points out that “when we look up the meaning or signified of a signifier in a dictionary, we just find some other signifiers whose meaning can also be looked up, and so on. This circular and infinite process will never let us arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier in itself” (1983: 111). Language is viewed by post-structuralism as a chain of signifiers always in contact with each other and since there does not exist a signified that does not turn into a signifier, language is a variable structure without a signifying centre.

Post-structuralists apply these linguistic views to textual analysis and conclude that its meaning is always deferred; that there is not a final, fixed meaning in a text. Texts are considered chains of signifiers that need each other in order to signify since contexts are essential to determine their meaning. Every meaning or signified alluded to by any

specific signifier is constantly modified by later ones and vice-versa. Consequently, post-structuralism considers the meaning of a text as always constantly changing, never completely present since it is always deferred, always incomplete. Texts only offer a constant interplay of signifiers without a final and definite signified. As a consequence, and as Eagleton argues, this system:

... strikes a serious blow at certain traditional theories of meaning. For such theories, it was the function of signs to reflect inward experiences or objects in the real world, to 'make present' one's thoughts and feelings or to describe how reality was ... nothing is ever fully present in signs: it is an illusion for me to believe that I can ever be fully present to you in what I say or write, because to use signs at all entails that my meaning is always dispersed, divided, and never quite at one with itself. (112)

This theory of the text marks a great difference between structuralism and post-structuralism. The former considers the play, novel, or poem as a "work," as something finished, a product with unity and an ordered structure. Post-structuralism considers the literary object as a "text" in constant process, plural, open to multiple interpretations as Roland Barthes argues in his essay "From Work to Text" in 1971. Barthes questions his own initial structuralist critical views, especially from the publication in 1970 of his study of Balzac's story *Sarrasine S/Z*. Already, in his influential essay "The Death of the Author" (1968), Barthes defines the text not as "a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (2001: 1,468). Barthes here is introducing the idea of intertextuality. All literary texts are made up of textual traces already in other literary texts. The role of the author is just "to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them" (1,468). Barthes considers that to correctly read a text one must remove its author. By taking into account the authorial presence we are giving the text a meaning, a closed explanation, a unity, an origin. Writing must be detached from its immediate context. For post-structuralism, the author is a mere scriptor since the origin of the text lies in language itself. It is language which speaks and performs in the text, not the author: a post-structuralist

analysis is not interested in the psychology, life, social, or historical context of the author. Barthes argues that “writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the identity of the body writing” (1,466). However, to Barthes the death of the author implies the birth of the reader. The multiplicity of the text is finally focused on the reader. According to Barthes, the unity of the text is not in its origin, in the author, but in its destination, in the reader:

Classic criticism has never paid attention to the reader: for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys: we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author. (1,470)

Derrida uses the term “différance” in opposition to the notion of “logocentrism.” He applies his linguistic theory to philosophical interpretations of his own worldview. Derrida bases his analysis of “logocentrism” on the traditional Western idea that language acts as the reflection of external ideas, as opposed to Saussure’s notion that language produces reality and does not reflect it. Derrida considers “logocentric” those forms of thought whose beliefs and modes of behaviour are ruled by some external point of reference. Using linguistic terms, Derrida metaphorically sees these types of society as languages whose diverse elements are in search of a transcendental and a final signified, namely God, Truth, the Idea, the Self, etc., to which all signifiers are referring. This transcendental signified is considered as “The Meaning,” “The Sign” around which the whole structure of that language, of that system of thought, of that society, is organised.

Derrida terms these systems of thoughts, like ours, “metaphysical.” They are usually social organisations governed by an unquestionable transcendental signified or first principle that rules a whole hierarchy of values. Derrida observes how such values are usually organised in binary opposition with privileged first principles, as for example: reality/appearance, clear/uncertain, self/non-self, speech/writing, soul/body,

inside/outside, literal/ metaphorical, masculine/feminine, truth/falsity, sense/nonsense, or reason/madness. According to Derrida, the priority given to the first half of these polarities is due to ideological pressures and needs. Out of its need for power or survival, each social organisation, each human group, generates and favours a series of structured patterns of social values generally accepted by the whole community. Consequently, for Derrida, what these metaphysical systems consider to be foundational truths or stable first principles are just provisional cultural constructs.

For Derrida the transcendental or final signified and the privileged halves of the polarities are just ideological fictions. The philosopher establishes a linguistic comparison and views all social concepts and values as signifiers at work in an indefinite play of signification. As signifiers, these social concepts need each other to acquire meaning. The meaning of each signifier depends on the existence of the rest of the signifiers in the signifying chain. Each signifier is defined by its difference from an infinite number of signifiers, that is, every signifier is defined by what it excludes. For Derrida, every single signifier, every social value or concept, is closely related to the rest, it is defined by what it is not. Each signifier at play within this never-ending signifying chain is essential for the meaning of the rest. Since they are assigned the same status within the signifying system, there should be no privileged terms within the binary opposition. Eagleton applies this linguistic theory to the configuration of social values and states:

Consider, in our society, Freedom, the Family, Democracy, Independence, Authority, Order and so on. Sometimes such meanings are seen as the origin or the goal of all the others, the source from which they flow or the goal towards which all other meanings are or should be marching; but this, as we have seen, is a curious way of thinking, because for this meaning ever to have been possible other signs must already have existed. (1983: 114)

Derrida opposes this “metaphysical” and “logocentric” view by deconstructing the fictional and ideological binary oppositions, by showing how there is no clear differentiation between the halves. The deconstructive analysis of such pairs will consider their constituents not as being antithetical but rather as sharing similar features. By

dismantling social binaries, deconstruction can be considered as a social and political practice that breaks up the foundation of ideological systems that favour a certain set of values while bringing others down. Eagleton shows how a deconstructive analysis would define the terms of the binary man/woman:

Woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is. Man therefore needs this other even as he spurns it, is constrained to give a positive identity to what he regards as no-thing. Not only is his own being parasitically dependent upon the woman, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating her, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be quite so other after all. Perhaps she stands as a sign of something in man himself which he needs to repress, expel beyond his own being, relegate to a securely alien region beyond his own definitive limits. Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien also intimate – so that man needs to police the absolute frontier between the two realms as vigilantly as he does just because it may always be transgressed, has always been transgressed already, and is much less absolute than it appears. (115)

Derrida applies his philosophical views to textual analysis by using as his main critical tool deconstructive readings. As we have already pointed out, structuralist analysis views the text as a structured system organised in binary oppositions such as Culture versus Nature, Order versus Disorder or Man versus Woman. The structuralist analysis systematises the text in ordered structures of meaning so that it has a stable and fixed signification. As a post-structuralist critical theory, deconstruction questions and reacts to structuralist analysis by opposing and dismantling the idea of structure and the concept of constant meaning in a text. A deconstructive reading identifies the contradictions within the text that disrupt the inner order that the structuralist claims to find. Such contradictions are found through analysing paradox, ambiguity, polysemy, metaphor, figurative devices, and wordplay within the text. On many occasions these elements are uncovered after the analysis of marginal fragments in the texts such as footnotes, certain images or allusions that reverse the logocentric and metaphysical oppositions

supposedly at work in the text and shows how the distinction between the two halves of the binaries dissipates. Deconstructive readings try to demonstrate how every single text interrupts the internal logic and organisation that the structuralist method attempts to discover.

As we have already seen, post-structuralism no longer regards language as a stable structure of meaning but as a signifying chain where its elements can only be defined in a differential relation to the others. For structuralism, the structure of the text had a centre that imposed certain order and hierarchy of meanings. For post-structuralism that centre does not exist. There is a continuous displacement of meaning that impedes the critical discovery of a central meaning in a text that would faithfully correspond to an external referent. For post-structuralism, there is not a pure correspondence between language and its object. Since language does not operate as a perfectly transparent medium, it cannot be used to ascertain the thoughts of an author who is in turn unable to express through language his or her intentions. Derrida rejects the traditional idea that literary texts possess an essential meaning that literary criticism discovers. Deconstruction rejects the traditional differentiation between literature and criticism since, for Derrida, no critical work can make a final reading of a text: there is not an authoritative final analysis. Since the act of reading is expressed through language, criticism turns itself into a new text that can be analysed and interpreted. For Derrida, all language, not just literary usage, is informed by the play of “différance.”

Texts are open and each act of reading may be reinterpreted, dismantled, undermined, deconstructed. The constant play of signifiers makes language betray itself and turns it into a deceitful, duplicitous, and tricky system unable to reach final knowledge.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

These extracts from Belsey’s influential article contain a deconstructive analysis of sexual difference in Shakespeare’s comedies. She centres on the role of disguise and the way traits assigned to maleness and femaleness are disrupted. Pay close attention to the post-structuralist critical terms that Belsey uses to oppose the

structuralist conception of meaning and also to point out Derrida's concept of the "metaphysical" and his theory of deconstruction as the disruption of binary oppositions. Before her "radical" textual analysis, Belsey examines certain Elizabethan social circumstances that she will later apply to her literary criticism. She describes the two different meanings of the family during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as "dynasty and as private realm of warmth and virtue" (1996: 169). Despite the fact that oppositions never disappeared, Belsey observes how in the sixteenth century the place of women is newly defined within the domestic sphere. Consequently, the meaning of what it was to be a woman was challenged. The relationship between husband and wife became more harmonious and there was a certain sense of equality between both sides of the binary. The man/woman opposition was destabilised as it is in comedies such as *As You Like It*.

Catherine Belsey, "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies" in *Alternative Shakespeares* (1996)

A **conservative criticism** reads in quest of familiar, obvious, common-sense meanings, and thus reaffirms what we already know. A **radical criticism**, however, is concerned to produce readings which challenge that knowledge by revealing alternative meanings, disrupting the system of differences which legitimates the perpetuation of things as they are. The project of such a criticism is not to replace one authoritative interpretation of a text with another, but to suggest a plurality of ways in which texts might be read in the interests of extending the reach of what is thinkable, imaginable or possible.

I want to suggest that Shakespearean comedy can be read as **disrupting sexual difference**, calling into question that set of relations between terms which proposes as inevitable an antithesis between masculine and feminine, men and women. (166-67)

Meaning depends on difference, and the fixing of meaning is the fixing of difference as opposition. It is precisely this identification of **difference as polarity** which **Derrida** defines as **metaphysical**. In conjunction with the

common-sense belief that language is a nomenclature, a set of labels for what is irrevocably and inevitably there – whether in the world or in our heads – this process of fixing meaning provides us with a series of polarities which define what is. These definitions are also values. In the oppositions ‘I/you’, ‘individual/society’, ‘truth/fiction’, ‘masculine/feminine’ one term is always privileged, and one is always other, always what is not the thing itself.

The **insistence on meaning as single, fixed and given is thus a way of reaffirming existing values**. Conversely, those moments when the **plurality of meaning** is most insistent are also moments of crisis in the order of existing values. A contest for meaning **disrupts the system of differences** which we take for granted, throwing into disarray the opposition and the values which structure understanding. The contest for the meaning of the family which took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries **disrupted sexual difference**, and in the space between the two sets of meanings, the old and the new polarities, there appear in the fiction of the period shapes, phantasms perhaps, that **unsettle the opposition defining the feminine as that which is not masculine** – not, that is to say, active muscular, rational, authoritative ... powerful. Women are defined precisely as the opposite sex, and the ‘evidence’, the location of this antithesis, is the process of reproduction. The family as the proper source of that process, the place of reproduction, is thus among the major determinants of the meaning of sexual difference itself. A radical **discontinuity in the meaning of the family**, which is not in any sense an evolution, produces a gap in which definitions of other modes of being for women are momentarily visible. The period of Shakespeare’s plays is also the period of an **explosion of interest in Amazon, female warriors, roaring girls** (Shepherd 1981) and **women disguised as pages**.

An interest in female transvestism is not, of course, confined to the Renaissance. It stretches at least from Ovid’s story of Iphis and Ianthe (*Metamorphoses*, IX, lines 666-797) to twentieth-century pantomime. But it is hard to think of any period when the motif is so recurrent. It appears in five of Shakespeare’s comedies of love and marriage. And in turn Rosalind and Viola, Portia, Julia and Imogen⁷ are the direct descendants of a long line of English and European Renaissance heroines of prose and drama, Neronis, Silla and

⁷ Viola, in *Twelfth Night*, Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Imogen in *Cymbeline* use male disguise as Rosalind does in *As You Like It*.

Gallathea, Lelia, Ginevra, Violetta and Felismena, who are **disguised as men in order to escape the constraints and the vulnerability of the feminine**. ...

The effect of this motif of **women disguised as men** is hard to define. In the first place, of course, it **throws into relief the patriarchal assumptions of the period**. 'Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold' (*As You Like It*, I.iii.106): that women are vulnerable is seen as obvious and natural. It is not, on the other hand, seen as essential or inevitable, but as a matter of appearance. Rape is a consequence not of what women are but of what men believe they are. Rosalind tells Celia,

We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances.

(*As You Like It*, I.iii.116-18)

Not all men are equally courageous, but they are all less vulnerable than women because they look as if they can defend themselves ... Even while it reaffirms patriarchy, the tradition of female transvestism challenges it precisely by **unsettling the categories which legitimate it**. (177-80)

2.3. NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL MATERIALISM

By the early 1980s, new historicism, also known as the "return of history," emerged as a post-structuralist approach that introduced a ground-breaking system of historical analysis of Renaissance literary texts. American new historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Adrian Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg, Stephen Orgel, and Leonard Tennenhouse, and British new historicists, also known as cultural materialists, such as Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, Catherine Belsey, Francis Barker, and Raymond Williams, among many others, opposed the historical analysis developed by Tillyard in the 1940s.⁸

Tillyard viewed history as something that objectively reflected reality and the literary text as a mere mirror of historical facts and values of the age. Tillyard observed just one divine and monarchic dominant

⁸ See chapter 1.5.3.

Elizabethan world-picture and considered its culture and history as unified, ordered and stable entities where subversive elements had no place. He saw history and culture in structuralist terms, since they were viewed as ordered structures with a ruling centre or origin engendered by the ruling classes in their own interests. New historicists radically oppose such conclusions. They point out the textuality of history and, by following the post-structuralist idea that there is never a true correspondence between language and its external referent, new historicists argue that historical accounts are unable to show us the facts of the past objectively. Consequently, literature cannot directly reflect historical reality either. New historicists also defend a post-structuralist definition of history as a discontinuous structure without a centre. For new historicism, there are multiple, and sometimes even antagonistic, histories where everything, including dissenting and challenging voices, has its significant place within the social formation. New historicism points out reality's discontinuity and not its uniformity.

Accordingly, the harmonious relationship between the constituents of the traditional history/literature or context/text binary is dismantled by new historicism. In Tillyard's opinion, literature is just a mimetic object that faithfully reflects history, the unified external reality of its age. There is then a hierarchical relationship between the pairs of a binary that puts history above literature. However, for new historicists hierarchies disappear and the binary is deconstructed since literature is included within the definition of history. For new historicism, history is understood as the multiform result of a convergence of the historical, the religious, the scientific, the political, the educational, as well as the literary social discourses. Consequently, the literary text is considered one of the multiple discourses that contribute to constructing heterogeneous history. But, at the same time that literature actively participates in the cultural construction of a society, in what the reader or spectator senses as his or her own culture, it is also the passive result of the exchange and interaction of those social discourses. A literary text is a site of intertextuality in which we can identify the presence and interconnection of elements that belong to multiple and diverse cultural discourses. Let's take a closer look at this idea.

In “Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish’: The Discursive Con-texts of *The Tempest*” (1996), the new historicists Francis Barker and Peter Hulme point out that the literary work is located:

... at the intersection of different discourses which are related to each other ... it would be meaningless to talk about the unity of any given text – supposedly the intrinsic quality of all “works of art” ... the text is in fact marked and fissured by the interplay of the discourses that constitute it. (197)

As we see, by mentioning its intertextual nature, the text is described in Derridean terms by alluding to the disruption of its stable and unified structure and its decentring. The idea of the text as a site of intertextuality can be traced back to Michel Foucault’s influential description of the “frontiers of the book” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) as:

... never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network ... the book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse. (1997: 23)

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes this new type of text as a historical “monument” which must be analysed to ascertain the diverse cultural nature of a certain age. Foucault makes a distinction between what he calls a “total” and a “general” history. The former corresponds to the traditional idea of a historical analysis that “seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle material or spiritual – of a society, the significance common to all the phenomena of a period ... what is called metaphorically the face of a period” (9). This type of analysis views historical documents as valid sources that reflect a unified historical truth. However, what he describes as “general” history turns the documents into “monuments” that have to be carefully analysed in order to discover, not a single truth, cultural essence or the “significance

common to all the phenomena of a period,” but the interconnection between the different social and cultural discourses at work in those texts:

History has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations ... history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments* ... In our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument. (7)

Deeply influenced by Foucault, in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), Stephen Greenblatt, founding figure of new historicism, defines the text, and more specifically the Renaissance play, not as “the central, stable locus of theatrical meaning,” but as “the site of institutional and ideological contestation” (1997: 3). Greenblatt views the plays as historical “monuments” or as holding a series of collective beliefs inherent to different discursive practices that are all interconnected and dependent on each other and participate in the construction of the ideology of a certain social formation. The aim of the critic is to uncover these relations. This interpretative practice is defined by Greenblatt as “a poetics of culture” (5).

One of the methods of analysis used by new historicists is based on an anthropological approach explained by Clifford Geertz in the opening essay of *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) called “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture.” Thick descriptions are detailed analyses of small matters such as social events or human behaviours at work within a certain social formation. Since Geertz considers culture to be “an interworked system of construable

signs” (14), the thick description of a single event of culture, of one of those signs, can reveal how its social structures work and how they signify. As we have already noted, new historicism considers that any type of cultural discourse or document is closely related to the rest in the sense that they are all a result of the same ideological forces; in Geertz’s terms they are constituents of a collective system of signs in constant relation to each other. Consequently, the thick description of any anecdote or detail included within any social document such as travel, religious, historical or medical treatises shows how the social mechanisms at work within these texts share the same ideological values that we can find after the analysis of the literary text. That is the reason why many new historicist texts begin with a reference to elements outside of the text, that is, with a historical anecdote that later on relates to the analysis of the literary text. When Greenblatt refers to his analytical method in the first chapter of *Shakespearean Negotiations* he states:

In the essays that follow I propose something different: to look less at the presumed center of the literary domain than at its borders, to try to track what can only be glimpsed, as it were, at the margins of the text. (1997: 4)

According to Greenblatt, the literary work is one of those cultural practices that are constantly circulating in society and in contact with the rest. The diverse discourses that converge in a play and the relationship between them turn it into a faithful reflection of the process that he calls “circulation of social energy” (19).⁹ To Greenblatt, literary works, and

⁹ In *Shakespearean Negotiations* Greenblatt states: “But what is ‘social energy’? ... it is manifested in the capacity of certain verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences. Hence it is associated with repeatable forms of pleasure and interest, with the capacity to arouse disquiet, pain, fear, the beating of the heart, pity, laughter, tension, relief, wonder” (1997: 6). A few paragraphs later he points out that “the circulation of social energy by and through the stage was not part of a single coherent, totalizing system. Rather it was partial, fragmentary, conflictual; elements were crossed, torn apart, recombined, set against each other; particular social practices were magnified by the stage, others diminished, exalted, evacuated. What then is the social energy that is being circulated? Power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience: in a sense the question is absurd, for everything produced by the society can circulate unless it is deliberately excluded from circulation. Under such circumstances, there can be no single method, no overall picture, no exhaustive and definitive cultural poetics” (19).

more specifically Shakespeare's plays, are essential constituents of that social process:

Theatrical values do not exist in a realm of privileged literariness, of textual or even institutional self-referentiality. Shakespeare's theater was not isolated by its wooden walls, nor did it merely reflect social and ideological forces that lay entirely outside it: rather the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater was itself a social event in reciprocal contact with other social events. Drama, and artistic expression in general, is never perfectly self-contained and abstract, nor can it be derived satisfactorily from the subjective consciousness of an isolated creator. Collective actions, ritual gestures, paradigms of relationship, and shared images of authority penetrate the work of art, while conversely the socially overdetermined work of art, along with a multitude of other institutions and utterances, contributes to the formation, realignment and transmission of social practices ... (45)

With these words, the founding father of new historicism remarks on the relevance of "the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text" (1984: 5).¹⁰

As we can see, Greenblatt emphasises the importance of the social presence of the world in the literary text over the role of its author. New historicism opposes the humanist idea that considers the work of art to be a reflection of the inner self of an author, of his or her thoughts and emotions. Influenced, once again, by Foucault's observations in his essay "What is an Author?" (1969), these critics consider the author to be a mere ideological construction, not the origin of the signifying essence and meaning of his or her work. According to Foucault,

We are accustomed ... to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations ... The truth is quite the contrary: the author is not an indefinite source of signification which fills a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by

¹⁰ See *Selection of Texts* 5.

which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. (1988: 209)

The author precedes his or her work in the sense that it is the result of the meeting of different social discourses at work in the construction of a certain culture. Such exchange and negotiation of discourses ultimately shapes the author's view of his or her own cultural surroundings that he or she eventually reflects in a piece of work. Authors are not free or autonomous, they are dependent upon the social forces around them and are mere intermediaries between ideology and the literary text.

The description of the author as an ideological construction is intimately related to the new historicist definition of culture and man. The American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz had a major influence on new historicism. In *The Interpretation of Cultures* he defines culture as:

... a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call “programs”) – for the governing of behaviour ... man is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such cultural programs, for ordering his behavior. (1973: 44)

According to Geertz, we, as human beings, are:

... incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture ... our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless ... men; they, too, every last of them, are cultural artifacts. (49-51)

These definitions of culture as a “set of control mechanisms” and man as a “cultural artefact” were first used by Greenblatt in his pioneering work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) and became two of the most significant new historicist maxims. New historicism resists essentialist humanism, the idea that all human beings throughout history share a common, inborn, and universal human nature or essence. The image of

man as a cultural artefact rejects the existence of such an essence and the definition of man as unified and autonomous. For new historicism, man is controlled, constrained, and shaped by social and historical forces and is an ideological construction. Consequently, the term “subjectivity” in this context acquires a new meaning. It does not refer to that inherent and transhistorical human essence untouched by external constraints. It now alludes to the process of “subjectification” by means of which man is “subject,” is dependent upon, is subordinate to the social and cultural pressures of his own age.

This conception of the human being is closely related to the reason why new historicists choose Renaissance literary texts as their main object of study. In his work *Radical Tragedy. Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (1984), Jonathan Dollimore describes the early seventeenth century as a transitional period between two different ages and two different notions of the human being, respectively based on the Christian essentialism of the Middle Ages and the essentialist humanism of the Enlightenment. The former views human essence as “metaphysically constituted – i.e. it derives from, and is dependent upon, divine and natural law. At its simplest, man is an effect of God” (xxix). The latter considers that essence as inherent to man and not dependent on divine intervention; man is held to be an autonomous and unique entity. For Dollimore, during the Renaissance period or what he calls “the early modern England” (xxx), the decay of Christian essentialism led to a decentring of man, a recognition of the discontinuous nature of his definition and an insistence on the relationship between social processes and subjectivity. Renaissance drama was a catalyst for all these ideas:

So if on the Renaissance stage the idea that divine and/or natural law informs identity is being interrogated, the result is not man released from medieval shackles, but subjects caught up in a messy, conflictual displacement of the metaphysical (divine/natural law) by the social. The contradictions of history flood the space vacated by metaphysics. Correspondingly the metaphysically constituted subject becomes a decentred, contradictory subjectivity. In the fate of Antony, Coriolanus, Vittoria of Flamineo, we ‘read’ not the working of Fate or God, but a

contemporary reality which both creates and destroys them; a reality which asks to be identified in materialist terms – it is manifestly historical, social and political – even though it cannot be exhaustively described by them. (xxx)

Dramatic characters are analysed as ideological constructs, as created and shaped by a discontinuous reality made up of fragments belonging to different discourses such as the historical, the social and the political.¹¹ “Ideology” and “discourse” are central concepts in new historicist analyses and are widely examined by Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970), the influential Marxist thinker Louis Althusser analyses the process by which human subjects are shaped by ideology. Ideology fashions man through the workings of what Althusser calls the ISA (Ideological State Apparatuses), that is “a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (2001:1,489). These apparatuses should not be confused, Althusser remarks, with State apparatuses such as the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which operate through repression and violence. The ISA are the religious ISA, that is, the system of the different Churches; the educational ISA or the system of the different public and private schools; the family ISA; the legal ISA; the political ISA or the political system including the different Parties; the trade-union ISA; the communications ISA, which include the press, radio, television, etc.; and the cultural ISA such as literature, the Arts, sports, etc. Therefore, the ISA depend on ideology (1,489).

The instrument these ISA use to shape and control human consciousness is the language at work in the social processes, the ideological discourse. These ideological discourses endeavour to maintain social hierarchies and order while subjugating individuals. The analysis of each discourse reveals the values each ISA aims to communicate and the ideas that it is determined to silence. The ruling classes control the dominant discursive formations to serve their own interests, perpetuate their privileges, and preserve social differences.

¹¹ See *Selection of Texts* 1.