CHAPTER-II

FROM FORMALISM TO POST-MODERNISM: AN OVERVIEW

As we have seen, formalist theories in aesthetics view the work of art as autonomous, and in one way or another, present a defense of this view. In this chapter, we will see the development of thought about art and literary texts, which constitutes a movement away from the formalist position. This movement is characteristic of twentieth century thought in aesthetics. I have turned to literary criticism here, as I consider it a part of aesthetics, and many important developments in thought have taken place here. I have referred mainly to V.S. Sethuraman's Introduction (Sethuraman, 1989, pp 1-48) to his anthology titled "Contemporary Criticism", for the overview presented in this chapter, as I found his exposition particularly comprehensive and perspicacious, but I have also referred to works by other writers, and cited my sources where required.

Sethuraman expresses the view that recent literary criticism (of the years 1960 onwards, I understand) has been more "theoretical than practical", and must be understood in the light of developments beginning with what is known as the "New Criticism".

New Criticism

The New Criticism turned attention to the text itself, analysing it in objective, scientific ways, and not vesting much
importance in information about a text and its author, or about its social, political and other influences in the world. I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot helped this development, attempting to make criticism objective and impersonal. They held that art in general and poetry in particular, had an epistemological competence. A knowledge was formulated here, and this was superior to that afforded by science and technology. Richards held that poets made pseudo-statements but these were superior to those governed by logic. (Con Davis, 1986, pp.89-92 and 25-33).

The New criticism was superseded by newer schools when the former became rigid, academic and orthodox in its method. Its undoing may be located in its utter neglect of the moral, political, social and personal impact of literary works. But it contained within itself the seeds of subsequent developments. The New Critic focussed on the text, neglected scholarly research about the text, and tended to ignore the author's intention, expressed within or outside the text. The work of art stood by itself, he said. It was to be evaluated objectively. This was an acknowledgement of the work of art as autonomous.

But now, there was the question, where else does the art-object, or text, come into being but in the reader's or spectator's response? Thus, first the intention of the artist or author, and then the very existence of the author were done away with, and readers' responses became all-important, even as the text or art-object was exalted.

The art-object being exalted is clearly a case of its being allowed its autonomy. In order to hold attention on the art-
object, and to treat it as autonomous, it is quite clear that there must be neither a reference to author's intention, nor to readers' subjectivities. These two swings on either side of the work of art must be avoided. That is what an objective analysis or understanding of art must mean.

It seems to me rather sensible to understand a work of art thus, on its own terms. There is a realm of abstraction, or objectivity that we all share, and even enjoy. The artist puts forward the work he creates, into this realm of objectivity and viewers participate in this realm, when they enter the world of the work of art.

However, I do not hold the view that the artist's personal world and personal position should be ignored altogether, nor should the viewers' subjective worlds. There may be further readings which explore these dimensions of art, and these readings may prove fruitful, certainly.

Returning to historical developments in the understanding of the arts, particularly literature, we find that when the reader's response came to be held as most important - for it is here that the text comes to life, is experienced at all, is constituted at all - a plurality of readings had to be posited. For, reader's response varies with individuals. As a result, the being of the text became nebulous. There could be no fixity or certainty of meaning in a work of art, according to these theories.

Furthermore, the contributions of linguists and structuralists tended to make meaning disappear altogether. We
shall see presently how literary criticism arrived at such a pass.

Sethuraman explains that literary criticism has been touching upon philosophy in contemporary times, and to the Indian mind, the two have never been dissociated. I am not disturbed by this observation, for in my view, the understanding of art and literature must necessarily bring up philosophical questions, and hence aesthetics has rightly been, all along, considered a branch of philosophical enquiry. Criticism is an area where art and philosophy meet.

Half-way through this century, reaction began to build up against the New Criticism, which had formulated a doctrine of the autonomy of the work of art and stressed the need for the study of language, metaphor and the "texture" of poetry. The Chicago Aristotelians shifted this emphasis towards theme and plot. Northrop Frye, dissenting with the New Critics, stressed the study of myths, and tended to proceed from the scrutiny of a single text to generalizations about the "total universe of literature", in Sethuraman's words. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.4). Frye referred to this as "archetypal criticism".

The New Critic ignored the historical dimensions of a work of art, seeing it rather as a unique and timeless entity. Frye, on the other hand, saw a work of art as an instance of an archetype. The New Critic's interest focussed on a poem's semantics, its verbal complexity.
Frye’s Theory: Transitional

Frye’s theory was a transitional element between the New Criticism and structural and post-structural literary theories. Frye constructed a system of models for literary works, drawing upon fables and myths which he considered to be archetypes. These archetypes were for him basic or fundamental sources. In a sense, he thus held a conventionalist or traditionalist position. He also subscribed to the idea of criticism as a meta-language or meta-narrative, for cognition and interpretation of art, including narrative.

Frye’s theory was idealistic in that, according to him, every art-work was an instance of realizing some ideal, basic form. It was the realization of the timeless within a specific period of time.

In my view, the particular instance in which an archetype is realized is still unique, and an element of creativity is yet involved here. The archetype is reworked in unique variations. One might ask what happens to the concept of autonomy in the light of such a theory. An autonomy of ideal forms or archetypes struggles with specificity, here.

In an essay of 1957, "Poetry of the Tout Ensemble", published in a collection of his essays, edited by Robert D. Denham, Frye says:

"Poetry finds its fulfilment in a universe of its own, a universe symbolized by the term word (le Verbe, as distinct from le mot or la parole), which is, of course,
not another world from ours but another way of dealing with it. This verbal universe, a world of poetry rather than of poems or individuals, is also a human universe, a world of realized freedom, desire and intelligence.

...For just as the poem finds its ultimate meaning in a total poetic universe, so man finds his own being in a corresponding human totality." (Denham [Ed.], 1974 p.239)

We can see here how Frye places the individual work of art in a larger universe of art, and relates this to a universal concept of human being. I shall also present his explanation of the term mythos, as it throws considerable light on the problems of this research. I refer to his essay, "The Koire of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language," appearing in a collection of his works, again edited by Robert D. Denham. Frye writes:

"......to me myth always means, first and primarily, mythos, story, plot, narrative. The words story and history were originally identical, but they are now distinguished, and the word story seems to lie along an axis extending from history to fantasy. ......This sequential narrative, which is not present in the non verbal events themselves, is (his) mythos. My stock example for this has always been Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, where the phrase "decline and fall" indicates the mythical principle that controls the selection of material and various other factors,
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knowing reality and making art is blurred, but with a bias in favour of art.

We see in the above quoted passage how Frye sees an archetypal category, "catastrophe", in a particular work by Gibbon. The narrative by Gibbon is revealing this category, is about this category, is working out the concept, through a particular, rather than being simply the recounting about a particular series of events. Yet, Frye also consistently acknowledges specificity.

Like Frye or the stylistician, the structuralist is also interested in the system of signs within which works of art are created. He speaks of the matrix to which individual signs belong, or in which they are embedded. It is this matrix or structure of a language, or a culture as a whole, which gives individual signs their meanings. By themselves, or taken out of context, signs do not carry any meaning.

While I agree that signs can function only within a wider whole, a system of signs, I would also maintain that when the artist uses some of these signs to make a work of art, there is a creativity involved. The artist is limited by his culture, but within the limitations there is, certainly, an individual, creative process that occurs. This creativity adds something new to the tradition. The artist both follows and breaks his tradition.

But when we speak of a work of art as autonomous, do we mean that it would not use signs that already exist within a greater
whole? We have in mind, rather, that even as it uses signs which are meaningful (because they belong to a greater sign-system), it becomes an autonomous entity, which stands by itself, and has a value of its own, and has a peculiar, specific character of its own.

The structuralist speaks of the linguistic concepts of 'langue' and 'parole', which correspond to Chomsky's terms, "competence" and "performance". The "langue" is the whole potential of a language, the "parole" is that aspect of it which is realized in actual usage, in performance, within the larger potential or possibilities of a language.

As I understand it, the potential of a language makes possible various works of art within it. The art-work corresponds to "parole", or individual utterance, for both Frye and the structuralists. We have here a theory which places the art-work firmly within a traditional complex. Frye even speaks of the whole cultural linguistic complex as a narrative, and the specific art-work as a seeming 'displacement' from it, which can be 'relocated' within it.

Frank Kermode in England and Geoffrey Hartman in the United States prepared the way for major developments beyond the New Criticism. Kermode pointed out that the distinction between Romanticism and the modernist views of T.E.Hulme and T.S.Eliot was misleading, for in fact both explore the dissociated sensibility and its expression, or symbolism in art. Both view the artist as an estranged, isolated figure.
Kermode speaks for Unity

Kermode tried to clarify the symbolist theory of language. He argues that the human mind longs for a unified view of the world it inhabits. My view is that the human mind is inclined to make connections. I am, therefore, led to ask the value of constantly disrupting connection, if what the human being needs is the opposite process. I would point out that there is a creative and a destructive aspect of disrupting strategies. To assail all connections, and all meaning, is sheer madness. To disrupt the connections in unjust socio-political structures as also disrupting connections through art-work is a worthwhile strategy, when it leads to new insights and creates fiction. These fictions may be escapist, but they may also be useful in actually uncovering hard truths and in exploring our own purposes in life, as well as creating the future.

Kermode explored the relations between author, text and reader. He asserted that the author cannot be allowed absolute control of the text, that the reader's response is important, and changes with time, leading to multiple interpretation. The reader, he said, is an active participant in the creation of the reality of the text. Allowing the author to exercise all control of a text is, according to him, "totalitarianism". It is quite clear here that Kermode was undermining the autonomy of the author, and relocating some of it in the readers' response.

Hartman: Early Deconstructive Strains

Geoffrey Hartman swerved away from the New Criticism's emphasis on the literariness of imaginative texts, and its
formalism, which he objected, severed art from life. In New Criticism we can see formalism supporting the autonomy of a text. Hartman endorsed criticism which related individual artworks to greater imaginative structures, and hence agreed with the views of Frye and the early Roland Barthes. He considered not only the text in question to be important but also the interpreter's presence. Although he did not accept Jacques Derrida's views fully, his thinking did have some deconstructivist strains.

Hartman did not accept the division between creative writing and criticism, and hence probably rejected the idea of a meta-language, or meta-narrative. Criticism has traditionally been viewed as a discourse by itself, apart from literary discourse, the latter spanning various creative texts. Discourse about literary texts has been viewed as a language about language or meta-language, having an autonomous position and function, and special characteristics. Like the metalanguage of literary criticism, aesthetics as a philosophical discourse about art, has stood apart, too.

When the boundaries that separate criticism and literature, or criticism and art, are done away with, the autonomy of criticism obviously gets dissolved. Hartman, however, believed a creative-critical activity to be possible, beyond the storms of skepticism and deconstruction. This can be seen in his work, "Criticism in the Wilderness" (Hartman, 1980, pp.189-213).
The method of New Criticism was to view the work of art as self-sustaining, and to ignore the author's or artist's intention, apart from that which his work conveys. I tend to agree with this view. The intention of the author must be sought in the work itself. But many thinkers perceived a hermeneutical lacuna here, and went on to formulate new theories.

The Phenomenological view-point in Aesthetics

There were attempts to assimilate the insights of phenomenology into the understanding of art. Attention was turned from the objective to the subjective or creative, consciousness which produces art. Some antecedents of such studies may be traced in the works of Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre, as well as the Romantics' interest in the creative inspiration and the poetic process. These thinkers have been known as modern critics of consciousness. They study the creative activity of writers and artists as an important aspect of human being and living. Literary phenomena are to be distinguished from natural phenomena in that they are specifically human.

According to these theories, art was to be understood in existentialist terms, and as acts and creations of cognition. In the light of existentialist theories, every reading is an act of empathy. Art was not to be reduced to an extreme, solipsistic subjectivity. The understanding of art, according to these theories, is an inter-subjective process.

Explaining the phenomenological view of art, Sethuraman writes,
"Literature is indeed made of words, but these words embody states of mind and make them available to others. The task of the critic is to identify himself with the subjectivity expressed in the words and to relive that life from inside and to constitute it anew in his criticism." (Sethuraman, 1989, p.8).

I note, therefore, that the phenomenologist does not get caught in the study of signs alone. He explores the subjective states which words of a language express. Here, meaning of a work of art is linked to subjectivity as well as intersubjectivity. The autonomy of art as an objectivity is denied. Another point to be noted here is that phenomenological theories of art and literature recognized the creative and constitutive role of criticism. Meaning of a work of art, then, is constituted or reconstituted, in criticism.

We must speak here of the relation between the question of the autonomy of art and the experience of the work of art. A work of art is experienced as autonomous when it is viewed objectively. The work contains within itself the expressed intentions of the artist. It is the product of an intending subjectivity. But when this subjectivity creates a work of art, certain intentions pass from subjectivity into objectivity. To my understanding, a generalization of subjectivity occurs here. The critic re-lives what he finds in a work of art, by opening his or her own subjective life to it. Then she constitutes it
anew in her criticism. Again, her subjectivity passes into objectivity.

The work of art expresses something of the artist's subjectivity and then relates to the viewer's subjective world, but both these relations depend on what is actually present - the intentions caught in the work, as Sethuraman says - and in this sense, the work of art retains a degree of autonomy. To my understanding, the phenomenological critic refused to lose sight of the meaning of words as signs, and of the intentions expressed in a work of art. This theory explored the links author-work-reader.

Psychical Evolution in Art

Among the critics of consciousness have been those who concerned themselves with the metaphysical biographies of artists, and held that each work of art is a point, a landmark, in this psychical evolutionary journey. Sarah Lawall says works of art reveal this process of the artist's growing self-recognition. Tied up with growing self-knowledge is an evolving world-view. The work of art is thus interesting because it is part of the story - a narrative, by itself - of a human psyche, and a developing, philosophical system. Here the autonomy of the work can be seen to be subordinated to an interest in a particular human psyche, and the development of a world-view.

The body of work which an artist produces in his lifetime may be taken, on this view, to be a cartography of his psychic life. It may be said that the concern for the subjective life of the artist, in such theories, was a romantic one. The
literary work now loses its autonomy to the overall ideological development and position of the author. Sethuraman mentions the American Critic, J. Hillis Miller, as an important thinker who held such a theoretical position. But his later work showed a leaning towards Derrida's deconstructive and subversive thought. His allegiance shifted from the Geneva to the Parisian school of literary criticism, as reflected in his essay of 1970, "Geneva or Paris?" (Sethuraman, 1989, p.9). The literary critics who assimilated much of phenomenological studies into literary criticism were known as the Geneva School. Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and others constituted the Paris school.

The Importance of the Reader

The New Critics had shifted some attention from the author or artist to the reader or viewer of art, in the appreciation of art-works. The Germans called reader-response theories Reception Theories. Roman Ingarden is an important exponent of such a theory. His thinking on art was largely philosophical with a strong influence of Husserl.

Ingarden pointed out that the reader sees the difference between phenomena that occur in real life and those that occur in works of art. (Sethuram, 1989, p.10). Fictional objects are surrounded by areas of indeterminacy, which the reader experiences and fills in, in his own way. Thus the work is concretized by the reader. I may add, sometimes the indeterminacies or gaps in works of art cannot be filled in at all, and such works have to accepted as open-ended. We see here
that indeterminacy loosens the structure of a work of art, and makes space for reader participation. This indeterminacy is, to some extent, inherent in a work of art, because the work is an artefact. But some works are made with a greater degree of structure, while others have more open spaces. The ruptures, spaces, gaps or seams and faults in a work of art tend to obscure its meaning and lend themselves to interpretation, and work against the autonomy of the art-object.

The Geneva school, or the critics of consciousness, had already said that a literary text opens itself to the subjectivity of the reader, who realizes the text. Hans Georg Gadamer developed this theory further, exploring its implications. (Gadamer, 1986, pp. 70, 73). He pointed out the historical nature of understanding, the prejudices and presuppositions that the reader brings into the constitution of a text, pre-suppositions that he himself, or she herself, has acquired from the total cultural complex of his or her time in history, and place, are themselves important to our understanding of a text. They are not elements to be sifted away. All understanding has something of prejudice in this sense, said Gadamer. (Sethuraman, 1989, p. 10).

On this view, much of the autonomy of the work of art is seen to be dispersed in historical phenomena. The work of art does not retain an identity of its own which is resistant to historical change. Rather, it changes constantly, with changing human history. This view clashes particularly with the one which
holds that a work of art is a unit of formal elements, and has an unchanging or timeless essence.

If the work of art is constituted only in its interpretation, it is not an entity in its own right, but a series of changing entities, constituted by various interpretations.

The Work Reads the Reader

It is perhaps a mirror, in which each historical period, and each culture, sees its own presuppositions reflected. There is no such thing as the autonomy of the work of art on this view. Its being is scattered into endless interpretations. As Barthes said about photographs, the work of art, as a mirror, reads the reader, that is, it elucidates the reader's world.

The Opening of the Political Dimension

A political dimension now enters the constitution of the work of art. Since a work can only exist in the viewers' interpretation and the viewer brings to it his or her own presuppositions, and these are to be prized rather than sifted away, an interpretation necessarily reflects, or reveals the viewer's cultural context, which includes his or her political position. Interpretation thus becomes a site, a place, where aesthetics and political philosophy meet. Interpretation reveals the viewer's positionality as a politically oppressive or oppressed subject.

I would like to add here, that art need not reveal only political experience, that this must remain one of many aspects of a culture. The political experience must be seen as one of
many human experiences. Thus, while a text may reveal a political position, surely it may speak of many other aspects of human life as well. I would therefore resist submitting the work of art to the autonomy of the political.

Returning to Gadamer, we see that he valued the prejudices and presuppositions in a culture. He said, understanding of a work of art is built on these, as a basis. He held, further, that the Cartesian dualisms of subject-object, being-thinking, etc., must be rejected. Thus, the object, in the case under consideration, the work of art, is not separate from the subject, but rather, what the subject himself constructs. The boundaries of subject and work of art overlap.

Husserl’s concept of a transcendentally timeless subject is opposed by Heidegger and Gadamer, who see all being as placed within an historical period, explains Sethuraman. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.11). That is, abstraction, timelessness, enduring essences, are opposed by the cultural practices, concepts or presuppositions of an historical period.

The work of art as timeless would maintain an autonomy of its own. The work of art as historical changes constantly, is constituted anew constantly, by changing cultural norms. The autonomy of art is lost to changing historical norms, on this view.

A Circularity of Autonomy

E.D. Hirsch Jr. is a literary critic who restored the role of the intention of the author. He held that a work of art conveys

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meaning which is intended by the author, and which inheres in the work objectively. But the work has a significance for the reader, which the reader constructs out of an interaction, or relationship, between his or her own subjectivity and the text. (Sethuraman, 1989, pp. 188-194). However, the interpreter or critic can undertake various researches relating to the text, and the total work of an author, and on the basis of these, decide which is the most convincing interpretation. This means that the critic may look beyond the text, to understand it better. In Hirsch Jr's theory, we would find, therefore, a circular locus of autonomy. The author intends meaning and succeeds in expressing it in his work. Here autonomy rests with the author. But meaning is also seen objectively in the work of art, and hence the work stands autonomous. The reader's subjectivity enters into interaction with the work of art, as a sign-system. The work acquires significance for the reader according to his or her subjectivity. Here reader-subjectivity or reader-response gains autonomy. Finally, Hirsch Jr. admits that a wider study and interpretation of the work, in the light of the author's biography and complete works, is possible and worthwhile. Autonomy has returned to the author here, in the form of a particular kind of research.

Modes of Reception

Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser are prominent critics who uphold the reader-response or reception theory. Jauss said that literary history and the exploration of particular texts are both important. The first kind of study tells us about literary
forms in general, and what we might expect in a particular form or genre. The second shows us the uniqueness of a work, the strategies employed within it. He speaks of "the horizons of expectations", "the aesthetics of reception" and the "primary unity of understanding enjoyment" and "enjoying understanding". (Sethuraman, 1989, p.11). I also refer here to Ramon Selden's "Contemporary Literary Theory" (Seldon, 1989, pp. 119-123).

Jauss' concern was to reconcile historical criticism with formalist criticism, and my own effort is of a similar kind. Jauss' theory polarises the tension between the autonomy of general literary forms, or structures, or genres, as they have come into existence in an historical series, and the autonomy of particular works of art. The polarized concepts represent two different kinds of literary study, or criticism: one might study general forms and hold them to be all-important, analysing particular works to show how they exemplify the general form; or one might focus attention on particular works without much concern for general forms. In the first case, the general forms, often called archetypes, exercise an autonomy; in the second, works of art as individual particulars do so.

Jauss tried to reconcile these two positions, and I would follow him in such an effort.

Wolfgang Iser drew upon New Criticism, narratology and phenomenology, particularly the theory of Roman Ingarden. Like Ingarden, Iser held that meaning in a work of art is constituted through an interaction of the text and the subjectivity of the
reader. Iser saw the text as a skeleton, with the reader constituting its meaning by filling it out. But I would like to put forward another metaphor here. The text is an ocean, for its potential for meaning is vast. The reader crystallizes some of this potential. The ocean throws up a pearl of interpretation, in the reader's response.

In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" of 1974, Iser writes:

"The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents..... This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and 'imagination'." (Con Davis [Ed.], 1986, pp.379-8).

Stanley Fish: Interpretive Communities

Stanley Fish raises the problems of the plurality and fixity of a text, interpretation, and the problem of relativity and absolutism, which as Sethuraman holds, relate to the ethics of reading. I refer here to an essay by Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum" (1980) published in "Contemporary Literary Criticism", edited by Robert Con Davis. (Con David, 1986, pp. 393-408).

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It is quite clear that these problems are related to the question of the autonomy of a work of art. We can see that the problem of the autonomy or individuality, or specificity of a work of art has not been dismissed with the supercession of formalist theories in the early part of this century by interpretive theories, but continues to lurk in all theories which attempt to understand literary texts and other forms of art. It is a constant dialectical opponent against which various theories of interpretation are formulated. And therefore, I am beginning to suspect that the concept of the autonomy of a work of art will never be discarded altogether by aesthetic thinkers. It will always be part of our understanding of the phenomenon of art, and will be held in tension with other, opposing concepts and theories.

I had expected that my study of hermeneutical theories would, perhaps, lead to the insight that it is not possible any more to speak of the autonomy of a work of art. I find rather, that the question I have raised continues to be a most relevant one and that something of a work's autonomous being does survive through interpretations, and therefore, in aesthetic theories.

Fish believed that the human mind does not acquire comprehension in isolation, but that understanding is always contextual. This, to my understanding, means that Fish does not speak for abstraction. He does not see the text as an isolated entity, an autonomous entity in its own right. But, in Sethuraman's words, he also "does not subscribe to the
deconstructionist debunking of the 'presence' of meaning in a text". (Sethuraman, 1989, p.12).

In his later critical writings, Fish took a stronger stand, holding that reader-response is all-important, that all reading is "temporal", that the text is created in the flow of reading, and that the structure of the text is constructed in the act of reading.

I would assert here that surely the structure which is realized by the reader is first created by the author, and does exist as such in the text. Without the first construction there would be no text.

Meaning in a Text

Fish said it is better to ask, 'What does this sentence do?' rather than "what does this sentence mean?" Now here, one would have to say that autonomy has shifted from meaning to function. But I would prefer to say that the work of art has a functioning meaning: it has meaning, and the meaning does things, or functions, in certain ways.

Influenced by linguistics, Fish spoke about the surface structure and deep structure in a text. The surface structure unfolds in time, and we constantly check it against the deep structure. One is not more important than the other. Fish said, further more, that since meaning is constituted in temporal interpretations, it is a changing, advancing thing, as he puts it. It is, as we see, a mobile phenomenon. When Fish describes it as "advancing", there is not only a dynamism posited, but an open-ended movement, an advancing but not an arrival, not an end.
Fish thus moved away from the formalist New Critical position, in his later works. As Sethuraman explains, he attributed a dynamic role to the reader in the making of meaning, by remaking the text.

Even so Fish zealously guarded against arbitrariness and subjectivity. He did not posit the text as an object, with the reader as knowing subject. He held rather, that every reading is intersubjective, in that, though every reader is an individual, he is also the exemplar of social and cultural patterns of thought.

The Problem of Individuality

I have been troubled by this circumstance that what an individual knows and feels as his peculiarly individual self should be, in fact, a tangle of external, that is, social factors. My reflection on this strange circumstance leads me to suggest that when these external influences have been deeply internalized, they become a private, an inner way of being for the individual. The threads that tangle up to form a knot of individuality must be treated as a unique, individual, inner world. The proof of such individuality lies in the fact that the human being does not easily give up this world. He or she feels it and lives it as his or her own. He or she does not submit it to modification easily.

Interpretive Communities

Fish posited the existence of "interpretive communities" who form the contexts in which texts acquire meaning.
I would clarify here that the author himself is also aware of the cultural context into which his text will be released. He speaks in the language which will receive his text. He, therefore, knows to a greater or lesser extent the meanings that his text will create in the given context and can therefore exercise his intentionality successfully, to some extent.

Fish was anxious to avoid equating understanding with subjectivity and solipsism. Belief and meaning are both supra-personal knowledge. Fish's effort was to overcome the opposition between subjective and objective criticism, and to create a unified version of meaning in the event of the encounter between text and reader.

We see, therefore, that the question of how the meaning of a text, or any work of art is constructed, is inseparably tied up with the question of the autonomy of the work.

In Sethuraman's view, Fish is unwilling to posit an ontology of a text, but willing to posit an ontology of meaning.

We must ask here that when autonomy of a text is denied, does an ontology of the text become impossible? Does the text have no being? The author created some marks or signs in a material medium. But these, as physical signs, are hardly a work of art. The being of the work of art comes into existence fully, when a reader or viewer constructs the meaning of these marks or signs. The author or artist does not usually create these signs as a nonsensical group of marks. He uses them intentionally, within a social sign-system. He intends meaning. In some cases, he intends to assail meaning in a common, social sign-system,
when he uses defamiliarization devices. Even in defamiliarization events, there are acts in relation to a commonly understood sign-system, though the relation is one of opposition, or dialectics, or deconstruction. Thus, meaning floats across from knowing subject to knowing subjects, through the sign-system of the work of art, which is part of a larger, socially constructed sign-system. But in the floating across of meaning, there is some degree of indeterminacy. A degree yes, but not complete free-play of meaning.

Fish was aware of the need to prevent irresponsibility in reader-response criticism and theory. As we see it, he located the check to such irresponsibility in the "interpretive community". Thus we see that the control on freplay is exercised communally. However, this too is not a rigid but a nebulous control. But what do we do with 'context' according to these theories? To my understanding, we deny the historical context of the given text, and give it our own. For instance, Kalidas belonged to a certain historical period. Instead of trying to reconstruct the meaning of his works according to his time, we read them, according to these theories, with the presuppositions of our own time.

This requires some clarification. When a writer or artist of our own time and culture presents his work to us, a direct, unproblematic communication is possible. But what is a reader to do with texts of a different historical period and culture? A scholarly research would be required to understand what this text
is meant to convey. Or one may read into the text the culture of one's own times.

A tussle for autonomy occurs here between two historical matrices. There are some theories which hold that the original historical matrix is lost forever, and can never be recovered. For, we have only one way of knowing anything, the way that is constituted by the cultural presuppositions of our own times.

**Style and Structure**

Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson gave importance to stylistics in literary criticism. (Sethuraman, 1989: 107-125). I also refer here to Raman Selden's "Contemporary Literary Theory". (Seldon, 1989: 15 and 52-55). There exists, according to Sethuraman, a link of researches going back from stylistics to Prague linguistics to Russian Formalists. All these researches were concerned with linguistic structures as they occur in literary works. But the study of style goes back even further in history, to the thinkers such as Longinus and Horace. It is, Sethuraman informs us, as old as the study of rhetoric, and part of it. Traditional rhetoric distinguished between matter and manner, what is said and the way of saying it. The study of style has generally been part of the study of language. It has meant studying the choices of lexical and syntactical resources of a particular language. It has been usually opposed to scientific, positivistic, philological researches of language.

According to Russian formalism, a literary work had structure, which was made up of devices such as phonetic patterns, rhyme, rhythm, metre. These gave it the quality of
literariness and made it unique. Through these devices, a work of art defamiliarizes realities that have become jaded to our perception. I would add, they also familiarize the unknown or little observed world, and offer new vision. The Russian formalist, and the American New critics saw the work of art as autonomous and self-reflexive.

The Prague School

The Prague school of linguistics perpetuated most of these tenets. Jan Mukarovsky and later, Roman Jakobson were its prominent proponents. Mukarovsky spoke of "the aesthetically intentional distortion of the linguistic components" as Selden quotes (Seldon, 1989, pp. 20, 21). They emphasised the structure and functions of language. Language, they said has a coherent structure, and several functions. We are concerned here with the poetic function, which is expressive and least referential. It is a deviation from the normal usage and has its own form, with inter-relationships.

We can see here a theoretical foundation for and elucidation of the assertion that a work of art is autonomous. A work of art stands apart on the basis of its style, its own peculiar form.

Here, stylistic studies link up with Saussurean linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure rejected the diachronic study of language for a synchronic one. He preferred to see language as a present and living entity, rather than a fossilized one, which requires unearthing and researching of ancient and dead structures. He
saw it as a system of living relationships, as Sethuraman explains.

Saussure also distinguishes between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, the former referring to sequential or combinatory relationships in a language, the latter to associative relationships, suggesting similarity and paradigms. Jakobson developed this theory further. He said every linguistic message involves two processes - selection from related items, and combination, which creates a sequence. The first process is characterised by contiguity, the second by similarity or equivalence. He spoke of the terms metonymy and metaphor to describe these relationships.

Metonymy is syntagmatic and "horizontal", as Sethuraman explains, and metaphor is associative and explores a language's 'vertical' possibilities.

Jakobson and Levi-Straus pointed out the correspondence between the phonological and the semantic structure in poetry, particularly Baudelaire's "Les Chats", which they analysed. In my view, this is an important lead in the study of language. To my understanding, not only is there a phonological quality in literature as it is present to us, but there is an important onomatopoeic aspect in the development of language, which can be witnessed in the present, which bears testimony against the assertion that linguistic signs signify meaning in an altogether arbitrary manner. For example, the word, 'tremble'. The 'tr' sound is related to the phenomenon, and has an equivalent in Hindi, "thar thar kampana".
The foundation of Jakobson's theory of poetics is the assertion that binary structures are objectively present in the linguistic features of a literary work. I.A. Richards and Michael Riffaterre criticized Jakobson's poetics, from within the position of New Criticism. I refer here to Richard's theoretical position as given in "Chief Difficulties of Criticism," his essay of 1929, which appears in "Contemporary Literary Criticism", edited by Robert Con Davis. (Con Davis, 1986, pp.89-92). Richards said he emphasized the phono-grammatical structure, however brilliantly, in a work, and did not pay enough attention to its thematic aspect. Riffaterre objected that he did not pay enough attention to the reader's role in concretizing a poetic work. He argued that a study of grammatical structure cannot lead beyond grammar, whereas a literary work conveys something beyond its linguistic features, and this is perceived by a sensitive reader, "who can bridge the gap between a poem's linguistic structure and the effect of surprise it holds", as Sethuraman writes.

In Jakobson's theory we can see the usefulness of linguistic or structural study of a work of art, and in Riffaterre's objections, its limitations. Graham Hough, writing in the sixties, said stylistic studies do give us knowledge up to a certain point, but can never create the capacity in readers to receive intuitions from works of art.

Leo Spitzer, of the early German hermeneutical school, pointed out the importance of the "intuitive leap" that every
reader makes in his or her experience of a work of art. Spitzer thus gave importance to interpretation and did not submit criticism completely to linguistic analysis. His method was to examine syntax, imagery and other devices, as well as readers' intuitions, checked against linguistic features, in a work, and was closely related to the manner of formalists in their criticism.

M.A.K. Halliday, on the other hand, relied largely on critical studies of linguistic structure to bring out the meaning or effect of a work. He avoided interpreting linguistic features in terms of tone and emotion, as Spitzer did. But the British critic, Roger Fowler, drawing on Rifatterre and the affective stylistics of Stanley Fish, tried to combine linguistic study with interpretation.

The stylistic studies of narrative lead to the development of early structuralism. They concerned themselves with "large units", as Sethuraman says, such as plot, character, etc.

The Autonomy of Structure

We can see here the development of the autonomy of structure in literary and aesthetic criticism. A work of art is viewed here with a concern for an underlying basic structure, and style, grammar and Aristotelian dramatic categories such as plot and character, that is, thematic elements. All these characteristics of a work were studied as making up its structure.

Vladimir Propp saw the fairy-tale as the prototype of all narrative. In all his studies, he examined literary works for their structures and saw them as variations of a master-structure
of narrative. (Selden, 1989, pp. 56-60). The characters in a work served the narrative in some way or other, according to their varying functions. His interest was in the narrative and not in aesthetic quality. We can see that these are different ways of approaching a work of art. But they are both within the formalist tradition, and related to the Saussurean model of language as a systematic whole.

The stylistic or linguistic approach pays close attention to surface details of a work. The structuralist approach studies the deeper, more abstract pattern of a work, the larger plan that holds it together, and this pattern can be related to those of other works and perhaps to a general pattern. Within the formalist tradition, we see that linguistic study emphasizes individuality of a work, and structuralist study emphasizes general patterns.

Roland Barthes did not care to study style and positively emphasized the role of patterns or codes, or deeper structures, in works of art, though he himself was an extraordinary stylist. He did not think rhetorical features, (related to style), important.

In my view, an artist somehow functions on both levels, creating a stylistically as well as a structurally interesting work. On both levels, the work may be said to retain its autonomy. Its stylistic features give it an individuality. Its structure makes it complete in itself, even if the structure is a general or abstract form that recurs in other works.
We see that Roland Barthes ignored the importance of style in literary works in favour of the "codes" exemplified by them. Later, however, he changed his position, as we shall see.

**Russian Formalism**

We must examine the main tenets of Russian Formalism to understand the early as well as the later developments of contemporary criticism. Russian Formalism was preoccupied with the "literariness" of literary works. We might say, among the contemporary schools of criticism, this school was the most concerned with the aesthetic nature of art-works. It opposed the literary qualities of literary works to "extrinsic" considerations and favoured the aesthetic attitude which explores literary qualities.

For this thesis too, we find that most of the arguments and elucidations in favour of the autonomy of the art-work have been formulated by the Russian school of formalism.

Corresponding to literary qualities of a literary text, we may speak of aesthetic qualities of other works of art.

Russian formalists saw the literary work as self-contained. In their view, it was primarily a linguistic or semiotic entity – a system of signs. To my understanding, when anyone speaks of "system", he or she refers to a closed organization. If she says, furthermore, that it is a "complete" system, the closedness is further emphasized. Closure is linked with the autonomy of a work of art. Autonomy, in fact, is based on and depends on closure.
Russian formalism anticipated American Formalism, but it had within its tenets also some strains of thought that linked up with later developments, which we know as structuralism and post-structuralism.

Both Russian and American Formalism rejected Romantic theories about the creative process, and the creative genius. They seem to have concentrated their attention on the work itself and although they saw it as a "made" or "shaped" object, an object which is "artificial" in the good sense, they still refused to give importance to the maker, and making process, through which the work of art comes into being.

The Russian Formalist saw the poet as manipulating language rather than representing reality. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.20) The American New Critic, however, was willing to concede that art images reality in certain ways, though he was also primarily concerned with how the sign-system of language works, in poems and other literary forms.

In the literary qualities, Boris Elchenbawn, one of the major Russian formalists, said, lie the distinguishing features of a literary work. They constitute a major mode of discourse, setting apart the literary text from other texts. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.20). The Russian formalist did not consider metaphors and images very important, as did the American New Critic. All literary devices, the Russian formalist, said, were "contrivances super-imposed on ordinary speech" and had the important characteristic of rhythm. He also pointed out that form in a
work of art was deliberately tampered with, or "impeded", that there was both deformation and organisation in a work of art.

Both Russian and American formalists saw the work of art as an organic unity, in which form and content were merged inseparably. The form integrated and controlled the work, and also generated meaning.

It has been held that the closedness of form of a work of art, and its function of controlling the materials within the work are related to closed systems in the socio-political world, but I am not entirely assured of this connection. Could not the closed and complete form of a work of art be created in an otherwise fluid social political reality? It is my view that life itself is a series of closing operations. We undertake tasks and hope to arrive at some sort of completion of these tasks. Very often we do succeed. But on the whole, our living experience is open-ended. Our lives are complete, in a sense, only in death, which we cannot experience and contemplate upon, for it is the end of consciousness itself, in the ordinary sense of the word. The history of humanity, as also the larger history of all creation, is open-ended. Perhaps we try to fix and preserve in art, what we experience as fleeting, mortal, impermanent in life. We also try to complete in art, what we experience as incomplete in our living. We create the closure absent in life.

When faced with the death of fellow human beings, we rebel against the nothingness to which life has been reduced. Then we recreate the life that has been lost in the form of a narrative.
In this is seen a desperate attempt to create continuity. Yet, the experience of death, of void, of irreparable loss, is never overcome. It lurks as a shadowy presence, a haunting experience, in the crevices of the narrative we create.

Roman Jakobson, who associated himself with Russian Formalism, later moved to Czechoslovakia and helped in the formation of the Prague Linguistic Circle. His work became a bridge to New French structuralism.

Mukarowsky and Jakobson did much to bring poetics and semiotics together. Gradually, interest in the study of poetics shifted from aesthetic qualities to structures, that is, from formalism to structuralism. This was the beginning of the end for theories of the autonomy of art.

Structuralism

Saussure and Levi Strauss are well-known as the most important structuralists. Saussure spoke of the potential of human speech as langage, the actual sign-system in use as langue, and individual utterances as parole. Most of his ideas are compiled into a famous work, "Course in General Linguistics", first published in Paris, in 1915. Here I refer to Sethuraman's explanation (Sethuraman, 1989, pp 21,22) and Raman Seldon's (Seldon, 1989, pp 51-53). Saussure showed through his researches that individual utterances are governed by a greater system, the langue.

Ferdinand Saussure saw the linguistic sign as a complex consisting of a sound image and a concept. The sound image was
the **signifier** and the concept was the **signifie**. What the
signifier denotes is not, according to Saussure, a thing in
reality, but its concept. Saussure noted that the relationship
between the sound image and the concept it signifies is an
arbitrary one, within empirical reality, but not culturally
arbitrary.

But I am of the view that this is not entirely true, for at
least some words develop as related to reality. I am speaking
here about onomatopoeic development of words.

Saussure noted that signs refer to things arbitrarily and
they are significant only within a culture. He also noted that a
system of signs is like a system of rites in a culture.

Claude Levi-Strauss also worked on the basic assumption that
the linguistic sign-system in a culture is akin to its system of
habits, customs and rituals. He said cultural systems work like
linguistic systems. The anthropologist must discover the grammar
of the system, which is its basic structure.

Levi-Strauss' essay, "The **Structural Study of Myth**" of 1963
is an interesting example of the process of structuralist
analyses. We can see Levi-Strauss examining a number of folk-
tales or myths here, and revealing the basic forms common to
them. I refer to this essay published in "**Contemporary Literary
Criticism**" (Con Davis [Ed.] 1986, pp 308-322). Levi-Strauss writes,

"............ this apparent arbitrariness is belied by
the astounding similarity between myths collected in
widely different regions............our method
eliminates a problem which has been so far one of the
main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies, namely, the quest for the true version, or the earlier one. ... Our method... enables us to perceive some basic logical processes which are at the root of mythical thought......probably corresponds to a universal way of organizing daily experience..... the kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and that the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied.....the improvement lies, not in an alleged progress in man's conscience, but in the discovery of new things to which it may apply unchangeable abilities." (Con Davis [Ed.], 1986, pp 308-322).

We see here that the universal structure is foremost in Levi-Strauss' concerns, and that the particular exhibits an essential truth, according to his theory. He extends the universality of myth-structure to all forms of human thinking, right up to the modern, technological age. This is a thorough-going autonomy of structure, and of universalism.

Saussure saw the synchronic rather than the diachronic study of culture and language as important. This is the approach which led structuralism to study a work of art on its own terms, rather than in terms of its origins, its roots in history, the author's intentions and so on. Also, the work of art was seen as related to the overall structure of the language in which it is created.
Saussure's insights were systematized into structuralist theories by Nikolai Trubetskoy and Emile Benveniste. Trubetskoy saw structuralism and universalism as more important than individualism. Benveniste pointed out the possibility of self-reflection in language. Noam Chomsky's ideas of universal grammar and of competence and performance helped the development of structuralism. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.23). I note here a basic tension in structuralism in that, while it insisted on studying a text on its own terms, and therefore favoured a certain individuality, it also insisted on relating the text to a general structure and thus surrendered its individuality to a universalism. It was, however, definitely a revolt against diachronic or historical scholarship as applied to literary texts.

The difference between Formalism and Structuralism, though both were concerned with the form of a work of art, was that Formalism gave importance to the uniqueness of form and structuralism to its other qualities, which could be related to a general, ideal structure.

Sethuraman emphasizes that the aim of structuralism was not interpretation. It was a poetics which studied the structures of sign-systems, which make a range of meanings possible. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.23). This interest in signs rather than the signified, or meaning, strikes me as an interest in crockery rather than the meal served in it.

We see that the formalists, Russian as well as Anglo-American, were truly interested in the individuality or
uniqueness of a literary work, while the structuralists eventually privileged structure or langue over individual utterance or parole. We can see here the autonomy of the individual work of art shifting to the general, overall structure of the system within which it is created.

Poetics for the structuralists was thus the study of language as well as literature seen (on the Saussurean model) as a system of signs, or conventions, which makes meaning possible. Sethuraman quotes Anne Jefferson as saying, "......the linguistic model is triply pertinent to literature, to its material (verbal), to its formal organization (semiological) and to its themes (linguistics)". (Sethuraman, 1989, p.21)

Structuralists posited a metalanguage which acts as a critique of language.

Literature, they said was a sign-system like language. Literature had a grammar, as does language. We see that on this view, literature as a whole is a system, of which an individual work is an instance. The work speaks the system. The system speaks in the work. We see an embeddedness posited here. The individual literary work is embedded within a greater culture. We see structure posited here, and the individual work is part of this.

This systematization or, we would say, structuralization of language and literary discourse - led to the systematization or structuralization of critical discourse as well.
Rolland Barthes: Varieties of Reading

Roland Barthes made a number of distinctions in discourse, in his "Critique et Verite" of 1966, as Sethuraman informs (Sethuraman, 1989, p.24). There is a difference, he said, between a reading and criticism and an even further category apart from these two, that of poetics. All these, we see, are distinctions within interpretation or reader-response, or receptivity to a work of art.

Reading, he said, is a passive activity. Criticism, according to Barthes and other structuralists, cannot decipher or uncover the essential meaning of a text, for there is no such meaning. Criticism, rather, constructs or creates a meaning for the text.

We must note, with Sethuraman (Sethuraman, 1989, p.24) that this strain of thought in structuralism had roots in the older New Criticism, which had spoken about multiple interpretation, and ambiguity in critical discourse. The structuralists went further, in that they developed theories of multiple meaning, and attacked authorial intention. Their position, as Sethuraman rightly points out, was more iconoclastic. The important concept they were attacking was that of coherence and organic unity, which was at the heart of New Critical poetics, Sethuraman explains.

Thus, literary works were thrown open. We see that while structuralism was in one sense formalistic, it was also pluralistic, in its semantics. Meaning or meanings, arise out of the rules and conventions of different signifying systems, said
the structuralists. Meaning, we note, becomes plural, according to this theory, because sign-systems are plural.

The Shaping of Human Consciousness

There is a most interesting and important aspect of structuralism, which we must note here, with Sethuraman. According to this theory, human consciousness is shaped, is the result, rather than the creator of signifying systems. From questioning the author's intention, all human consciousness as a creative agency is now challenged. Human consciousness as a centre is questioned. As I understand it, the functions and capacities of the individual, qualities like creativity and intention, are now attributed to the system or structure, the culture and language to which the individual belongs. On my part, I do not accept this position entirely.

When the author of a text or the artist as the creator of a work of art was denied any creative function, individual creativity was submitted to the form and qualities of the work itself. Now, general human creativity is submitted to the structure of language, or the medium in which a work of art is created.

It is my view that any artist working in any medium will testify to a degree of individual creativity without which the practice of the art would be impossible.

Structuralists held that poetics, the science of critical discourse, elaborates the different literary systems which can generate meaning, but they emphasized the signifier rather than
the signified, the system rather than the meaning. In structural poetics, the Saussurean sign, which was complex, consisting of a sign as well as a concept, was deconstructed into signifier and signified. The signified was said to be tyrannical. The signifier was released from tyranny.

We can see here that the system was favoured or privileged over the individual. Individual autonomy was under assault. He, or a literary text, was seen as a centre which could exercise power. Structures were posited, but without centres of power.

The Narrative: A Long Sentence

In Barthes' poetics, a narrative is like a long sentence, and literary structure is like linguistic structure, but the former does not necessarily (though it may) posit a reality. Barthes emphasized the self-reflexive quality of narratives. There is here a radical rejection of referentiality. The movement away from mimesis, or representation of, or reference to, reality, was an important development in art as well as aesthetic theory, and occurred just prior to structuralism.

An autonomy of art in the sense of breaking loose from the representation-of-reality function is posited here. The creation of aesthetic form is a creation of structure and, in my view, has both a unique and a general aspect.

Genette's "Narrative Discourse" of 1980 describes the different aspects of narrative, (Sethuraman, 1989, p.25). Genette also emphasized that narrative is not referential but is governed by its own internal laws and logic. I suggest here that
the internal laws of a work of art could correspond to a psychological process, both in the artist and the viewer, that is, to an aesthetic-creative requirement of the human mind. However, when we take a formalist or objective position, it is possible to speak of these "internal" laws as inhering solely in the work of art.

Seldon points out how, in an essay titled "Frontiers of Narrative" of 1966, Genette posited binary opposites in narratives, and then showed that the distinctions were untenable. For instance, "narrative" and "discourse", are terms which distinguish the presence or absence of a recognizable story-teller. Genette said there is no pure narrative, free of subjective colouring. This tendency to dissolve distinctions relating to literary texts oriented criticism towards deconstructive thought such as Derrida's. (Seldon, 1989, pp 60,61).

Genette, however, conceded that the individual text may be a modification of a narrative model or structure. The New Critics had also admitted such a modification of genres, in individual instances. As in much of this present study, here also we see, not a clear autonomy posited but its shiftiness.

This study reveals the distribution of autonomy over various fields or aspects of literary discourse and other art-forms.

Genette was particularly concerned with the nature of narrative, and of the point of view from which a narrative unfolds.
The site, or point of view, or aspect from which narrative unfolds, thus becomes most important, we may note. The point of view is the place from where the speaker is speaking, and is related to the overall orchestration of social relations.

Genette's essay, "Structuralism and Literary Criticism" is remarkable for its lucidity.

Genette says,

"If the writer questions the universe, the critic questions literature, that is to say, the universe of signs." He says further, "Literature had long enough been regarded as a message without a code for it to become necessary to regard it for a time as a code without a message," and "......structural analysis must make it possible to uncover the connection that exists between a system of forms and a system of meanings, by replacing the search for term-by-term analogies with one for overall homologies..." I quote from the above mentioned essay published in Sethuraman's anthology, "Contemporary Criticism." (Sethuraman, 1989 pp. 197-201)

We see the focus shifting here, from signs to overall sign-systems, but we notice also that Genette does not deny meaning altogether.

Structuralism held poetics to be privileged over reading as well as criticism, positing universalism at several levels. It gradually became, as Sethuraman explains, an orthodoxy, leading to post-structuralist reactions.
Todorov: Absent Meaning

Todorov, a structuralist critic, was concerned with the absence of meaning in texts. Now, it is one thing to say that a text has no meaning except what a reader reads into it, or constructs, and another to say that meaning is what is absent. In the latter case, to my understanding, all that is absent from the signs can be presented as the meaning of the text, which makes it too loose and obscure, almost nonsensical.

Todorov said further that art is not mimesis, subscribing to the older formalist view. But Todorov's position is more complex than this. Literature, according to him has no relation to reality, and is about itself. Literature exemplifies not reality but poetics. For Todorov, narrative is self-reflexive. We see Todorov's thought closely related to that of other structuralists like Levi-Strauss and Genette. In fact, he is considered a pioneer in this field. Structuralism, on this view, is an exploration of the various dimensions of the autonomy of art, particularly literary discourse.

In "Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1969), Todorov says: "The work will be considered as the manifestation of an abstract structure, merely one of its possible realizations: an understanding of that structure will be the real goal of structural analysis". (Con Davis [Ed.], p. 324).

Further on in the essay, Todorov acknowledges that this is the method of modern science, applied here to the study of literary discourse.
Barthes held the structuralist position but also went beyond it, in that he said criticism must reveal not only the large structures but also explore the minute details, "the capillaries of meaning", Sethuraman quotes from Barthes' essay "S/Z" of 1975. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.27). He enumerated five kinds of codes, formulae or structural elements that inform a literary text: a code of actions, of puzzles, cultural codes, constitutive codes and symbolic or thematic codes.

Here we can see an engagement with both the larger structures and the details of a work, but the details are analysed according to general codes, hence a formalism, an autonomy of general structure and its various elements, prevails. The Pleasures of the Text

Barthes said further that readers are free to open and close the signifying function of the text as they wish and take what pleasures they wish from the text. Earlier theories which had spoken of the "death of the author" helped Barthes formulate this position. Furthermore, Barthes' own theory held the seeds of developments, which later came to be known as "post-structuralist". In "S/Z" of 1975, he challenged the foundations of structuralism itself.

Barthes spoke of lisible and scriptible texts. The lisible is what we know as models in the narrative tradition. The unknown in terms of tradition, is scriptible, calling for readers' interpretations or constructions. The former are read, the latter created by readers. Here, literary texts themselves
are categorized into those which adhere largely to already established structures and those which, moving away from archetypal structures, are open to interpretation. The Barthesian position becomes most subversive when Barthes questions not only the ontology of the text but also that of the sign-system, language, itself, which structuralism had upheld.

Thus, Barthes gradually moves away from the structuralist position. His theory now recognizes that all literary texts do not necessarily exemplify certain basic forms of narrative discourse. Here the autonomy of basic, general forms is seen to break down, gradually. But Barthes' theory, I note, does not apply to all literary texts. He says that some texts follow the tradition, while others open it up. The post-structuralism of this theory is therefore a contingent one, depending on the actual nature of literary works.

This is the general tendency, we may note, of every sceptical discourse. Once one begins to question, and to open up a discourse, one eventually reaches an extremely radical and thoroughgoing sceptical position.

**Marxist Literary Theory**

Marxist literary critics brought over their basic political-philosophical tenets to aesthetics. In their theory of society they posited a base and a superstructure, the former consisting of the material, economic structure and the latter consisting of the politics, religion, art and philosophy prevalent in a society. They held that the base produces the superstructure,
and political philosophy, which they referred to as ideology, is part of the latter.

Art, including literature, reflected the dominant ideology of a society at a particular point in history, Marxist critics held. But it had the power, also, to reject an ideology. Marxist critics thus examined literary texts for these characteristics. The more radical among them expected a text to expose the exploitation and tyranny prevalent in a society and to posit the future one, for which they believed human beings to be destined, in which all men would find happiness.

Clearly, the autonomy of art is lost to political philosophy, on this view. But the matter is not so simple. One can see that first and foremost, the autonomy of art in general and of particular works is lost to basic materialist-economic reality, on this view. For, all culture including art depends on this basic reality, Marxists hold. Secondly, a particular work reflects the social class of the writer or artist who created it. Thus the autonomy of the work of art is lost to socio-political conditions. But Marxists also hold that some works, I understand, are critical and creative in that they can expose the class divisions and other injustices in society. Here autonomy is restored to art.

Marx himself however, did not take a narrow view of art. He never said that literature is only of interest to the age that produced it. I quote Sethuraman (Sethuraman, 1989:29). This points to a lasting, essential quality in art.
Christopher Caudwell did hold the view that literature, especially poetry, had a role to perform, for it could change people's feelings. He also believed that art imposed form on an otherwise chaotic content. Sethuraman explains that in general, Marxist critics preferred to see the relationship between form and content as dialectical, while giving primacy to content. Since this content was expected to pertain to actual social conditions, the theories tended to be mimetic, the autonomy of art as self-reflexive being submitted here to one or another form of realism.

George Lukacs believed in an ontology as well as aesthetics of totality, harmony and wholeness. An aesthetics of unity would posit completeness of works of art, as I understand the concept and would tend to favour an autonomy of art. But Lukacs also held that art is intimately related to social reality, or should be.

Ramon Selden holds Lukacs to be the first major Marxist critic. Lukacs applied the Hegelian notion of dialectical tension in society to aesthetics, in the sense that he held that works of art reflect the dialectical development of society. (Selden, 1989, p. 29).

Gradually, Marxist criticism also moved closer to the post-structuralist position. These later Marxist critics were concerned to examine the very language structures which expressed various ideologies. The text was no longer seen as a unit, but to have conflicting ideologies and tensions within it. Language-centred approaches were popularized by the Bakhtin School and Julia Kristeva. Psychoanalysis has also played a role in
criticism of texts at this juncture. Here, in one way or another, the isolation, the separateness, the autonomy of art was opened up to admit other concerns — threads in the texture, other than aesthetic or formal and literary.

Sethuraman himself holds the view that,

"It is, however, wrong to conclude that Marx was simple enough to think that all literary works reflected the social and economic development of the society which produced them. The quality of Greek art and of the works of Shakespeare, for example, is far superior to the quality of the civilizations which produced them. Greek art had little to do with the slave-owning oligarchy that produced it even as Shakespeare's plays had little to do with the bourgeois capitalism. Marx also never said that literature is only of interest to the age that produced it." (Sethuraman, 1989, p.29).

The Creative Power of Art

Sethuraman's argument on the whole is that Marx saw that certain works of art produced by a society go beyond its socio-economic and more importantly, its ideological limitations. They have not only an aesthetic, creative power but also an ideological, creative power. Christopher Cauldwell supported this view of Marx.

On this view, art including literature, goes beyond its historical determination. It is accorded an autonomous, creative potential. Perhaps it is to be expected that the man who held
that the world has had enough interpretation from philosophers and that, the point is, rather, to change it would acknowledge the creative power of art.

Thus, while Marx's followers tended to submit the autonomy of art to the view known as historicism, Marx's own view remained, to a great extent, formalistic. On his view, some art rises above the age that produces it and has timeless qualities which hold the interest of all ages. Here, form, aesthetic qualities, timelessness, and finally an autonomy of art are upheld. It is to be noted that the formalist view tends to support the idea of creativity active in individual works of art.

There are important implications of this view, which I will go into only briefly here: Marx and his followers would look at the form as well as content of a work of art as important. The form would show literary qualities. The content would concern the historical-political struggle of oppressed masses. But since at least some art rises above its historical circumstances to interest all ages, its form and content would have general, and timeless interest for human beings. Thus, a timeless quality of form, and with it, timeless values particularly political, here--as expressed in the content--are posited in Lukacs' theory, all of which strengthen the case for the viewing of art as, in some ways, autonomous.

Harmony, Unity, Autonomy

George Lukacs saw in art an aspiration towards harmonious reality. He held that realism in art is concerned to remedy the alienation and fragmentation of capitalist society. Realism as a
genre in literature reflects the tensions in a given society, providing valuable insights. It differs from naturalism in that the latter merely reflects surface phenomena. Lucien Goldman says further, that a literary text must be examined for the world-view which it exemplifies. Goldman, however, believed that world views are the products of social structures, which however are changeable, and are always in a state of flux. He did not give importance to individual genius. He posits "trans-individual mental structures". (Sethuraman, 1989, p.30).

Lukacs, to my understanding, upheld the formalist, autonomy-oriented, view of art, which sought and found completeness and harmony in a work of art. Perhaps here one could say that human beings long for the experience of harmony and completeness and failing to find it in life, create it in art. Lukacs' formalism is, however, tempered by his interest in realism. He saw the aesthetic need for harmony reflected in the realistic-political quest for harmony.

In the literary genre of realism, as well as in the realism of other art-forms such as painting, we see socio-political concerns growing, and compromising the autonomy of art, that is, compromising the view of art as a purely aesthetic phenomenon.

In line with this development, in Lucien Goldman, the world-view expressed in a work of art becomes all-important. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.29). Aesthetic qualities, which make a work stand autonomous, are viewed as subordinate, here, to political philosophy.
Since Goldman pointed to the connection between political philosophy and social structure, saying that the former arises out of the latter, we see here the autonomy of art being subordinated to a kind of structuralism, different from linguistic structuralism. Here the structuralism is socio-political. Goldman's later writing drew a simplistic analogy between literary and economic structures. Selden explains that though it skirts the pessimism of the Frankfurt School, it also lacks their rich insights. (Selden, 1989, p.39).

Althusser, an eminent French Marxist-structuralist, was also concerned with the relationship between art and ideology. Art, he said, elucidates situations (of reality) and gives us a fuller understanding of them. But Althusser went further and saw social organization (as reflected in art) as decentred, with its various parts in tension and conflict with each other.

Althusser made important contributions to Marxist literary theory. He tried to dissociate it from the Hegelian notion of totality, which pervades all the parts of a form. He avoided terms like "social system", preferring "social formation". Literary formations, and social ones, he said, do not have a governing principle, or origin, unlike living things. Rather, they are marked by conflicts and tensions. Art, he said, sunders the veil, and reveals the real relations operating in society. I refer here to Selden (1989, p.40).

To my understanding, the decentering of structures was undoubtedly a movement against essentialism, with the latter's connections with the formalist-autonomous view of art. The
center of a structure represented meaning, or an essence, an abiding, eternal meaning. In decentralist theories, such meaning is negated. The centre of a structure also constituted political power, and this power was theoretically deconstructed, by decentralist theories.

Thus, we can see, meaning and power, or essentialism and power, were connected. I do not know whether this connection is defensible logically or persuasively and whether it is correct to deconstruct meaning while deconstructing power.

Macherey: Incompleteness in Art

In Pierre Macherey can be seen the complete break-down of the elements of formalism which I see informed Lukacs' aesthetics, survived in Goldman's theory and survived as traces in Althusser's. Mackerey explored the qualities of incompleteness in a work of art. Like Althusser, he said, works of art are not organic unities. Furthermore, they yield a multiplicity of meanings. The incompleteness of a work of art relates it to reality, as completeness had made it different from reality, distanced it from reality, and aided its position as autonomous. The critic's work, Mackerey held, is to dwell on this incompleteness, to explore why and how it occurs. Mackerey clearly rejected the view that works of art are eternal, transcendent, entities and said that they are, rather, produced by historical conditions and re-interpreted according to new historical perspectives in different epochs. Mackerey also considered a study of language important. The languages of
dominant and dominated social segments differed from each other, he said. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.30)

Transformation in Marxist Criticism

Mackerey was certainly part of the post-structuralist tradition. We can see clearly, in his poetics, the link between Marxist criticism and post-structuralist thought. We can see here Marxist concerns transforming into post-structural thought. In my view, it is important to keep in mind that post-structuralism has at least some of its roots in Marxist thought. I quote Sethuraman verbatim here:

"From a standard whereby it could estimate the value of a work of art as reactionary or progressive as it expressed world-views which are or are not in accord with the destiny, recent Marxist criticism has shifted to a study of internal contradictions and discovering and revealing hidden elements within a text which are in conflict with its own dominant ideology. The work of art is no more a unified coherent object and the interpreter's duty is to get out of it whatever he thinks is hidden by way of ideology". (Sethuraman, 1989, p.31).

As I understand the development in Marxist literary criticism, it was for long concerned to examine texts for their allegiance to the destiny, in the sense of desired socio-political-humanist goals, of human beings. This criticism transformed itself into the post-structuralist concern of taking apart texts to reveal tensions and conflicts, and the
machinations of dominant political powers. The effort now was to open up or deconstruct the structure of a text.

We can see that some of the fundamental Marxist concern persists in post-structuralist criticism, while the methodology changes.

Psychoanalysis of Art

According to Sigmund Freud, human beings find an outlet in literature and other arts for their repressed, erotic impulses and other desires hidden in the unconscious. The unconscious presents repressed desires in disguised form, and distanced, in art. According to Freud, the attraction of literature lies in the satisfaction it affords to the unconscious.

There is here a reductionism, in my view, which does injustice to the aesthetic nature of human beings— their love of creativity as well as the many concerns and needs, apart from "unconscious" and repressed drives, they express in art.

I quote Freud from a passage in an essay by W.H.Auden, in The Psychoanalysis of Culture: Vol III. Freud says:

".........There is, in fact, a path from phantasy back again to reality, and that is—art. The artist has also an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become neurotic......" (Laurence Spurling [Ed.], 1989, p.292)

Auden reports that this passage infuriated many artists!

Freud conceded that the artist employs symbolism in language or other media of communication, and has an admirable insight
into human nature, has access to its workings, which others do not. But he remained concerned with the content of art and paid little attention to form, technique and style.

It is rather clear that Freudian analysis of art compromises its autonomy, reducing it to disguised presentations of repressed, basic human drives.

Adler and Jung followed the Freudian way of psychoanalytical interpretation of art. Adler, however, thought that the will to power rather than sex was the dominant impulse expressed in art, and that the superiority and inferiority complexes were of greater influence in human life and art than the oedipal and electra.

Jung put forward the ideal of the racial collective unconscious, which he derived from myths as well as dreams. He likened the artist to the ancient tribal priest, speaking the language of his tribe or civilization. This theory was closely related to social anthropology. (Sethuraman, 1989, pp. 31,32).

Since I see art as many-faceted, I would avoid speaking in favour of one kind against all others. In my study of contemporary criticism, further possibilities, more aspects of art, are revealed to me and I am inclined to affirm these and not to close the critical-interpretive doors which lead to them. Perhaps some works of art do yield insights into the human unconscious, and into the collective unconscious. Psychoanalytic interpretation would be appropriate in these cases. It is my view, however, that all art is not an outlet for the unconscious, repressed drive and that psychoanalytic interpretation can be
misplaced, and in the worst case, an injustice to human being. For the human being, art is more than its basic, sometimes repressed desires.

New Turns in Psychoanalytic Literary Theory

Norman Holland gave a new turn to psychoanalytic interpretation, taking into account the shift in literary criticism from author to reader. He said the text is the scene where the author and reader come into confrontation. The reader sees or hears in the text, the hidden realities he wishes to see or hear.

Jacques Lacan gave yet another turn to psychoanalytic criticism. In Sethuraman's words, Lacan "sees the unconscious as coming into existence simultaneously with language". Lacan admitted, rather paradoxically, that language may not be adequate to express the unconscious clearly. (Sethuraman, 1989, p.32). Obviously, we would ask here, if language is held to create the unconscious, how does it become inadequate to it?

On the other hand, I would agree with the psychoanalytic insight that the unconscious is a kind of language itself. It has perhaps a grammar, a structure, and it uses symbols which have meaning. However, this pertains to the study of the psyche more than it does to aesthetics.

Language, Lacan held, aims at structuring desire. Lacan was deeply interested, Sethuraman points out, in the study of language and "its uncertainty". (Sethuraman, 1989, p.32).
Post-structuralist thought

It seems to me that just when various important contributions to structuralist thought had been made, instead of a consolidation, a counter-questioning of the theory began. This study shows that rather than a rigid division between structuralism and post-structuralist thought, the latter develops out of the former, taking up certain of its strains.

Structuralism, as Sethuraman points out, "had already done away with the author and his intention". (Sethuraman, 1989:29). For our purposes here, this shows a movement towards the autonomy of a work of art. When the author is no longer important after he has presented the work, (to the intersubjective community) it is the work itself which becomes all-important.

But there is a twist, a complexity, here. The structuralist now asserts that the text or work of art speaks the language, or culture, of which it is a part. The text reveals the system, the culture. I would respond tentatively to this tenet of structuralism by suggesting that this is an aspect of a work— a valid or acceptable aspect, but it is only one way of critical viewing or reading. For, a work may do more than speak the language.

With regard to meaning, structuralists held that the overall, conventional sign-system makes meaning and therefore individual texts, possible.

I would elucidate that signs have meaning within a culture, but cultures change, however gradually, which means that sign-
meaning complexes of a system (a language) change. At this point, there is a creativity involved, conscious or unconscious. The culture which changes is a living, growing phenomenon. Then, new texts speak these changes.

This is not to say that a culture which does not change is not a living thing. A culture may persist for long periods without major changes, and yet be a living thing, meaningful for the human beings who participate in it. And in the very speaking, the voicing of a way of life, a text is creative. This creativity implies autonomy.

Mackerey held that a literary work is not bound to the material conditions in which it is produced, that it goes beyond its historical realities. Mackerey is referring here to the creativity of a text, in its ability to be and speak more than its given historical realities. This is an important testimony, in my view, to the autonomous, creative power of a work of art.

Michel Foucault, as Sethuraman quotes him, said:

"discourses are indeed composed of signs but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to language (langue) and to speech (parole)."

(Sethuraman, 1989 : p.33)

Thus, here, Foucault also resists reductionism of art, and speaks of its "going-beyond", "exceeding" ability or competence.

Advancing Deconstruction

Indeed, to say that a text speaks a language-system is a reductionism. As for the autonomy of the text, we see that on
this view, it is completely compromised. Structuralism thus first deconstructed the autonomy of the author, and then of the work of art itself and further, even of the reader, and asserted the autonomy of structures, of sign-systems, of whole cultures.

The stress has been, here, one might say, on intersubjectivity. Autonomy is vested in the intersubjectivity of communities. But, an intersubjectivity cannot be a living entity, without a creative power residing in the individual subjects who constitute it. These subjects may remain anonymous, yet their creative competence cannot be denied. Therefore, in my view, the creativity of the individual author, the fact that a work of art has some individual and specific texture of its own, and the creative response of a reader, all have a place in the ontology of a work of art.

Regarding meaning, where structuralism stressed the conventions that make it possible for literary texts to speak at all, I would like to bring up the question of other media of art. In music and painting there are basic sensory elements which are meaningful in various ways to human beings, where sign-systems do not exist. A sound or a colour conveys something by itself, without an intervening sign-system. Structuralism is inadequate, in my view, to explain this phenomenon. We must then accept the limitations of structuralism in this sense. Meaning in art-forms other than literary may not be as arbitrary as in linguistic sign-systems.
Sethuraman explains that for Foucault, signifiers refer to "the unspoken archives" of rules and conventions in a culture. He neither privileges the author nor the text. He does not see signifiers as giving rise to a free-play of meaning either. He is concerned with the general system of rules and constraints, the permitted and the censored, the privileged and the condemned, in a culture. These are largely unspoken conventions. In my view, they are inarticulate but articulable. Foucault was concerned to point out that these cultural conventions govern or control the discourse of a particular historical period. We see that Foucault moved from the dimension of language-structures to the further dimension of the overall culture.

Jacques Lacan questioned the association of the signifier and the signified. He pointed out that a door may be marked "Ladies", and an identical door may be marked "Gentleman". Two different signifiers thus point to the same kind of thing - the door.

As I understand the argument, these signifiers are used in a time-space cultural specificity. We know that the signifier "Ladies" on a door means a space beyond that door to be used by ladies. It is fixed, culturally and contextually. To someone outside the cultural context, these signs will seem arbitrary.

Lacan contributed to literary and language theories by making people re-examine the relation between signifier and signified. He himself wished to show that signifiers are culturally meaningful.
Lacan also held that signification is arbitrary and that signifiers "float". Even the "I" which a human being develops since infancy and retains through life, has no fixed, essential meaning, but is an arbitrary signifier. The arbitrariness of the signifying process throws it open to creativity, I would point out here.

Here then the autonomy or tyranny of certain fixed meanings is being deconstructed. Creativity is released in proportion to the break-down of autonomy, or fixity, it is seen here. The Creative Constitution of Signs

I tend to the view that freedom and creativity are possible, and happen, in the signifying process, even as we accept and use the tradition of signifying that we inherit. The process of constituting signifiers (that is, constituting the meanings of signs) is a creative one, at least in part.

Lacan says there is no "uncontaminated" signifier to begin with (Sethuraman, 1989, p.33). He refers, as I understand him, to the tradition, the conventions, behind signifiers, which make them meaningful. It is strange here to speak of contamination. The very function of a signifier is to point to a meaning. How can this meaning be its contamination? My own reaction to signifiers has often been one of joy - a celebration of the rich inheritance of meaning.

Perhaps Lacan refers here to the accumulated, historical meaning of signs contaminating the present or contemporary one. In this sense, we can never be naive, and our gaze can never be
innocent. We are always born into a culture. We can celebrate the past creativity of signification, and also welcome and celebrate the present creativity that is possible and realized. The critical discourse about "floating signifiers" refers to this creativity of signification, to my understanding. It refers to the flux of meaning, across long historical periods, underlying the use of signs. This flux of meaning is intimately tied up with the flux of cultures in societies, with the changeable character of societies.

The "floating" nature of signifiers brings into question the autonomy of works of art. Works of art may also be referred to as "floating signifiers". They are certainly the most complex kind of signifiers, but they may also be said to "float" across history. When we say here that the autonomy of a work of art is under assault by the concept of "floating signifier", we mean that it has no fixed meaning, in fact, no essential being of its own. Its meaning, its very being, is constituted anew by changing cultural perspectives.

The work of art seems to lose its autonomy to a flux of meaning, on this view. It loses its autonomy to the culture which appropriates it. Does it lose its autonomy entirely?

We shall keep this question at bay for the present.

Post-structuralism and Deconstruction

Jacques Derrida carried to the extreme the logical consequences of later structuralist thought. Derrida obliterated the distinction between philosophy and literature, arguing that all disciplines of knowledge employ language, and all language is
indeterminate. With the distinctions between philosophy and literature breaking down here, one can no longer think of either as autonomous. One might have taken this to be a reductionism to language, with language gaining an overriding, autonomous importance, but vigorous skeptic that Derrida is, he undermines even the ground on which language could stand as autonomous.

Both Western and Eastern philosophy have posited a greater or lesser degree of certainty in knowing the external world. Derrida's position goes against both these traditions.

We find Derrida's position disturbing because, as Sethuraman writes,

"we are committed in other words to a belief in some ultimate word, presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language and experience in a meaning that is anterior to language". (Sethuraman, 1989, pp.33-34).

Most of us hold the belief that meaning, thought and language are inseparably fused with each other. Derrida questioned both logocentrism (the possibility of meaning or knowledge) as well as phonocentrism (the primacy of speech). He questioned the relationship between language and knowledge of reality. We may note that Derrida's assault on the autonomy of language becomes an epistemological question.

Saussure had pointed to the arbitrariness of the sign's signification, but he posited the existence of reality. Derrida emphasizes, rather, that Saussure saw the tenuousness of
reference and said that in language there is a positing only of differences and not of positive terms. Language only distinguishes things.

Language shows differences and it defers meaning, Derrida held. For, a signifier can never produce the signified. The "real" meaning is constantly deferred. The essence of a thing is always escaping the sign-system, it is forever elusive.

Saussure had already spoken of language as pointing out difference, and even of the absence of the signified. Derrida developed these positions further.

In my view a sign-system is, in fact, a referential system and no more. It is like a map, and can never capture fully, the reality it refers to. I do not find this state of affairs disturbing or problematic.

Derrida stressed that meaning is always absent from the sign. Or, one might say, the meaning of a sign can not be fixed. For a sign to function as such, it must have a conventional meaning. But the sign can always be reproduced in a different context, and then its meaning changes, at least partly.

Derrida said that the presence of an author behind a literary text is an illusion.

The Text Flows into Criticism

Critics like John Hillis Miller at first posited the presence of the author, but later took up deconstructive criticism, and said there is no definite meaning of a literary text, nor the definite presence of an author behind it. Endless interpretation is possible. Miller also held that the text
becomes a host and the critic a parasite upon it. But gradually deconstructivists obliterated the distinction between text as produced by an author and interpretation as produced by a critic, or reader.

Miller puts it beautifully in his essay, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, II" : 

"..........A poem, for example Stevens' "The Rock", is entirely self-sufficient. It does not need to have one word added to it. Why does it nevertheless call forth so many supplementary words ?...."

He answers the question he has raised :

"......Criticism is a continuation of that activity of the poem. If the poem is a cure of the ground which never succeeds, criticism is a yielding to the temptation to try once more.......... They never get it right, however, neither in poetry nor in the criticism of poetry ... The work continues, and the world keeps fluently turning, never called by name, never fixed in a definitive formation .....". (Con Davis [Ed.], 1986, p. 416)

Thus, in deconstructive literary criticism, we can see that the humanist as well as Romantic traditions of privileging the ego and the literary text were under attack, yet we see a kind of humanism posited, for every interpretation becomes acceptable.

Miller held that in the absence of meaning, a literary text is rhetorical : it is persuasive and beguiling. But I would
point out here that meaning exists in persuasion and beguilement as well, though not of a definite kind.

Harold Bloom, supporting and adopting deconstructive critical strategies, however, continued to be interested in the poet's creative impulse and the psychic drama that Freud had pointed towards. I would point out here that if anything of Freudian theory is to be accepted in aesthetics, it is the psychic drama, the play of powerful, conflicting forces and their happy resolution or tragic failure of resolution, within the human psyche, given aesthetic form or representation.

On the basis of Bloom's theorizing, it becomes clear that where deconstruction negates the subject, Freudian theory posits it. For what could be brought under psychoanalytical study, if there is no such thing as a subject?

In his later works, such as "Poetry and Repression" (1976), Harold Bloom

"searches for a rhetoric which will not end in affirming a negative epistemology but will empower the poet to reinstate his imagination," in Sethuraman's words (Sethuraman, 1989, pp.42).

I suggest that it is possible to posit a knowing subject, without positing rigid structures of consciousness within it. We can see that the inadequacy of language point to an incompleteness in a work of art as well as an inadequacy of the knowing subject. For, the development of language is the development of a consciousness. The failure of language is
experienced as an inadequacy. But failure of language is inevitable.

Yet despair must be avoided, for endless development is possible.

**Language free from Referential Function**

Paul de Man, in his "Allegories of Reading" (1971) pointed out that the understanding of language as rhetorical or persuasive marks a reversal of the traditional position that posited language as an adequation to an extralinguistic meaning, or external reality. To my understanding, when the referential function of language is denied, language gains a kind of autonomy, being set free, so to say, from reality. This is parallel to the autonomy of art gained from its freedom from mimesis of reality.

Paul de Man has distinguished between referential and figural meanings possible through linguistic signs. He also stressed the subversive nature of the rhetoric of a literary text which, in his view, simultaneously asserts and denies its own rhetorical mode, thus deconstructing its own assertions.

At the end of his essay, "Semiology and Rhetoric", Paul de Man says:

"Any question about the rhetorical mode of a literary text is always a rhetorical question which does not even know whether it is really questioning. The resulting pathos is an anxiety (or bliss, depending on one's momentary mood or individual temperament) of ignorance, not as an emotive reaction to what language
does, but as an impossibility of knowing what it might be up to ...." (Con Davis [Ed.], 1986, pp 478-9).

Earlier, in this essay, de Man argues that it is impossible to choose between the grammatical and figural meanings of a literary text.

The deconstructivist takes a new look at what the New Critics had seen as irony and paradox. In fact, as Sethuraman points out succinctly, the New Critic's "insights" become the deconstructionist's "blind spots", the latter reading seeming to be pessimistic (Sethuraman, 1989, p.43).

To my understanding, then, the same text may be taken to be either pessimistic or enlightening and hopeful, in relation to meaning. This has an important consequence for this study: it leads to the insight that the autonomy of a text, when based on whether or not a final meaning is posited therein, depends on the view one takes of it.

De Man not only doubts the finality of intention but even its very existence in a text. Although, at first, he was concerned to show "intention" in speech and texts, he was later persuaded to the deconstructivist theoretical position.

This then is the development towards deconstruction which has been our concern in this part of this study. Sethuraman's essay is a survey, and I have engaged with the ideas in this essay which are pertinent to my present research. I shall proceed to look at the work of some contemporary literary theorists in some detail, in the following chapters.
Feminist Criticism

Feminist literary criticism has been allied with deconstructivist criticism, and has been liable to the criticism that it is political rather than literary.

It has questioned orthodox traditions in literary criticism on the grounds that these have largely been phallocentric and phallogocentric, that is, producing male-centred cosmology and literary discourse. For the purpose of this thesis, then, one might say that feminisit critical theory rejects the autonomy of art which supports male-centred ideologies, and seeks to construct an autonomy of art which supports feminist ones.

Feminist critics have been concerned to undo and expose what they call "patriarchial metaphysics". Thus, it is not only literary discourse, but the philosophical foundations of this discourse, which feminist critics have been at pains to deconstruct.

We see then, that feminists bring their own reasons to the deconstructive activity which has been undermining the orthodox autonomy of art. Simone de Beauvoir was one of the first among contemporary feminist critics to point out that in most of our discourse, man is at the centre and the woman is considered the other.

The nouns "man" and "human" have tended to exclude realities concerning women, Beauvoir held. Women have been made inferior through cultural practices, she said. (Selden, 1989, p.135)

Kate Miller scathingly attacked patriarchy and its subversion of womanhood for centuries, and distinguished between
sex and gender. Sex, she said, is biological while gender is a cultural construct. (Selden, 1989, p.138).

Millet undertook deconstructive criticism of the novels of D.H. Laurence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet, to show that they discriminated against women on the basis of sex. (Selden, 1989, p.139).

Elaine Showalter held that while there is no such thing as a specific female sexuality or female imagination, there is still a great difference between the writings of men and women. In the early phase of modern women's writing, 1840-80, which includes George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, women internalized the dominant aesthetic mode of men's writing, Showalter held. In the "feminist" phase of 1880-1920, women protested against the male-dominated tradition, and put forward their own world-views. In the third phase, one of self-discovery (Feminism) that is, 1920's onward, the earlier ideas were developed further, according to Showalter's schema.

Feminist aesthetics and theory have been concerned to resist male-dominated art and theory, by opposing its own formlessness, its rambling nature against what they see as a male requirement to create form. They are thus in agreement with deconstructivists. They are partly in agreement with Marxist literary critics, who are concerned with women's emancipation and equality. They are sometimes supportive, sometimes highly critical of psychoanalytical literary theories.
On the whole, feminist criticism is aligned with post-structuralist theory, because feminists see their own discourse as oriented towards a free-play of meaning and resistant to closure, characteristics which post-structuralists have been positing about art, as it is in the later twentieth century, and as it should be, in their view.

A wealth of Feminist literature and criticism exists today, and this is not monolithic, but shows varying positions, around the more important ones I have touched on briefly here. I refer here to Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa", 1976, in which she writes:

".....The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability, the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural....... I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge....... This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive.......is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture-inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden. I wished that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other

Feminist criticism thus affords a whole new dimension of literary-aesthetic criticism. It is an instance of art, criticism and political theory coming together. While the autonomy of male-centred discourse is deconstructed, an autonomy of art comes into being here, I would say, which resists the domination of male-centred discourse.

I quote Amy Mulin, writing in the Journal, "Meta philosophy":

"Feminist skepticism and feminist art do not make the abstract conceptual point that our horizons are always limited and we move within a hermeneutic circle. Instead they make specific points about how those horizons are limited and how those limits are painful and harmful." (Armen [Ed.], 1996, p.140)

**Concluding Remarks**

This then is the development of literary theory in the twentieth century, from a position in which the work of art was viewed "objectively" and could be said to be autonomous, to a view in which its ontology as well as epistemology are seen as problematic. The ontology of a work of art is closely tied up with its epistemology. The being of a work of art is not confined to its physical existence. A poem is not the marks a poet makes on a sheet of paper. A sculpture in wood is not a piece of wood. The being of a work of art exists fully in the world of meaning, or in our knowledge of it.
But deconstructionists question the possibility of knowing a work of art, in the sense of grasping its meaning in a definite and final way. The meaning of a work of art is always elusive, always deferred, they hold.

The autonomy of the work of art comes into question if its ontology and epistemology have a strong element of uncertainty.

I have engaged with the ideas presented in Sethuraman's essay at the beginning of his work, "Contemporary Criticism", wherever they have been pertinent to this study. I have also referred to several other texts, and put forward my own views. In the following chapters, some of the theorists mentioned here will be considered in somewhat greater detail.