Chapter 2

Approaches to the Study of Literature
CHAPTER – TWO

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

Although methods of teaching based on pedagogic theories would make a literature class interesting, a sound objective like training the students to read a literary text on their own with understanding and appreciation can be achieved only when texts are taught with the right approach. Critics who have given some thought to the 'aimlessness' of literature teaching in India recommend that the teacher introduce her/his students to the major schools of critical thought and demonstrate the working of these on the same text. In this way the teachers will be able to give the students a glimpse of the rich literary, approaches and then the student may be left to decide upon the approach they would like to follow in their reading.

Not two individuals can think alike. Similarly, it can be argued that no two teachers can teach alike. In other words, each teacher ought to have an approach to the teaching of literature if s/he has taken his/her job seriously.

The literary scene is chaotic with innumerable concepts of life leading to equally innumerable concepts of literature. These concepts of literature in turn bloom into various approaches to the study of literature. Thus, there are as many approaches to the study of literature as there are individuals. Exaggerated as this inference may seem some critics even claim that each and every work of art has to be approached from a new (suitable) point of view. These totals to as many approaches as there are teachers multiplied by texts. Yet another observation often made by experienced teachers in the context of the study of a
popular author like Shakespeare (and certain religious texts too) that each and every reading of (at least some of) his plays has something new to give adds another dimension to our complicated literary scene.

However, for the sake of a study of the approaches to the study of English literature we are forced to identify, name and categorize a variety of approaches.

EXTRINSIC AND INTRINSIC APPROACHES

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren’s Theory of Literature (1963) is a landmark in a critical study of approaches. They divide the literary theories into two broad conventional categories, namely, the extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to the study of literature. Their approach to the problem is useful to the present discussion which aims at showing an underlying unity in the variety and diversity of approaches to the study of literature.

THE MORALISTIC APPROACH

This term is one that includes the attitude towards literature of writers, critics and thinkers even as early as Plato and Horace, and as recent as T.S. Eliot. This approach claims that the significance of literature lies not in merely how something is said but also in what is said; in what is said’ being a criticism of life; and its effect on the reader. T.S. Eliot declares without mincing words in his Religion and Literature that “Literary Criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint. And to him this point of view is Christian. I am not concerned herewith religious literature but with the application of our religion to the criticism of any literature (N.D.
Although many English writers like Sir Philip Sydney, Dr. Johnson and Mathew Arnold are concerned with the moral function of literature, the Moralistic Approach acquired a narrow (but definite) meaning when Eliot substituted the word Christian for the word moral in the 1930s.

**THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This approach is often included under the Historical approach. However, the term Socio-historical approach explains it better. According to this approach the relationship between art and the society that produced it must be understood if a work of art is to be appreciated. The work of art records the writer's response to the societal forces of his/her times. While contemporary literature can be understood with contemporary society in mind, literature of the past can only be as meaningful to us as it was to its first readers in the light of a knowledge of the society that produced it. For instance the sociological approach attempts to arrive at Shakespeare's concept of man through a study of Hamlet. Thus sociological criticism does not believe that the human mind has a permanence and universality against time and place.

**THE ARCHETYPAL APPROACH**

This is also called the Tolemic or Mythological or Ritualistic Approach. Carl Gustav Jung's famous psychological concept of the collective unconscious is the basis for it.

This collective unconscious is "that civilized man preserves, though unconsciously, those pre-historical areas of knowledge which he articulated obliquely in myth" (ed. Wilber Scott: 248). A writer is a myth-maker "speaking
out of his unconscious a primordial truth” (249). And a writer brings out the remembrance of this collective unconscious through archetypes. Leslie Fielder defines as “archetype” in

“Come of beliefs and feelings so widely shared at a level beneath unconsciousness that there exists no abstract vocabulary for representing it, and so ‘sacred’ that unexamined, irrational restraint inhibit any explicit analysis. Such a complex finds a formula or pattern story, which serves both to embody it, and, at first at least, to conceal its full implications.”

In Leslie fielder there is a modified version of archetypes. While the Theory of Jung goes back in time, the just quoted definition of an archetype of Fielder is forward directing.

Thus the Archetypal approach is basically inter-textual analysis. Such an approach presupposes timelessness in art and consequently it is non-historical. It is psychological by appealing to an audience and sociological as it looks for basic cultural patterns.

RUSSIAN FORMALISM

This school of critical thought claims to fill a long existing void in literary criticism. While other schools of criticism depend upon non-literary material for a study of literature this one aims to speak about literature in its own terms. It replaced the symbolist School of Criticism in Russia which
existed between 1907 and '12. Being a reaction to the contextual approaches to literature it took an extremely puristic stand on the opposite side.

According to Victor Shklovsky, (Art as Techniques”. Russian Formalist Criticism Four Essays. Ed Paul A. Olson. 1965) art is technique. Defamiliarization of the mundane makes it an art. Tolstoy adopted this technique often. In the delineation of plot violation of its unity (which makes the element of style conspicuous) makes it artistic. Even in the question of theme a conscious selection, say Boris Tomashevsky, (Thematics.” Russian…) makes a work interesting. In execution the artist does not distinguish theme, plot and motif. One ought to be represented in other terms, Russian Formalists speak of art in terms of defamiliarization and motives thereby not only prescribing the limits for analysis but also creation.

In this school importance is given to the influence of one work on another. Boris Eichenbaum in “The Theory of the Formal Method” (Russian…) says that a work’s form has to be studied in relation to those of other works.

Leo Trotsky evaluates this school in Literature and Revolution (1957). As a study of the techniques of a work of art it is valuable, he says, but as a complete system of literary study it is valueless. This method which existed between 1910 and '23 was replaced by the Marxian Approach.

THE FORMALISTIC APPROACH

This has been (variously) called the Aesthetic, Textual and Ontological Approach. Dominant critics and writers like T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, James Smith,
Elder Olson, William Empson and R.S. Crane can be brought under the broad group called Formalists. This approach was a reaction to the moral use of literature of Victorianism and Neo-Humanism; and above all the traditional historical scholarship. It does not recognize even the concept of literary forms as they are extraneous to the study of works of art. All works of art are at once similar and different in that they are to be viewed alike, that is, in accordance with their own laws.

The interest of the Formalists lies in the (inseparability of the) form (meter, image, diction) and contents (tone, theme...). These two inseparable constituents of art present a complete picture in the mind of the reader from which she/he constructs his/her meaning. The critic being interested only in the text, it alone is his/her object of analysis. This approach identifies the artistic technique with structure and structure with meaning.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF CRITICISM

In the University of Chicago in the middle of the 1930s “a group of critics literary scholars and philosophers” (A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms. Ed. Roger Fowler. 1987:29) came together to derive a literary ontology. They were R.S. Crane, Elder Olson, W.R. Keast, Richard McKeon, Norman MacLean and Bernard Weinberg. They set two main tasks before them. The first was “a close analysis, historical and synchronic, of criticism itself, to find out the kind of thing it was and the kind of thing it was studying; the second was an attempt to derive from that analysis a usable coherent poetics”. As opposed to the piecemeal analytic approach of the New Critics, Chicago critics
practice a holistic approach to art with Aristotle’s Poetics in mind. At a still higher level it is typificatory-concerned with general characteristics of seemingly diverse works. The strength of this school lies in its dependence on the vast body of existing literature for this poetics.

THE NEW CRITICAL SCHOOL

John Crow Ransom, Alan Tate, Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks were the major contributors to a magazine entitled Fugitives during the mid 1920s. Since then a critical movement began to rise, which, with the publication of understanding poetry (1976) in 1938 by Brooks and Warren, was assured the status of a serious school of critical thought in American schools and universities.

Similar to Formalism this school too believed in the autonomy of art. T.S. Eliot voices this idea in his writings often. They went to the extent of disregarding the genre of the work too. Further, they emphasized a close reading of a work of art. In this context I.A. Richards’ experiments in literature teaching which influenced this school ought to be critics and the eclectic stand of a critic like T.S. Eliot too have to be acknowledged.

THE READER-RESPONSE APPROACH

Stanely Fish’s “Is there a text in this class?” (1980) helps us tie up the loose threads of diverse critical schools in one particular way. Fish is one of the successful champions of the Reader response approach to literature. According to him the act of interpretation cannot be separated from that of reading. In fact, the meaning making process which moves forwards and backwards, making,
unmaking and qualifying meaning results in various moods (states of mind) at every movement. And this process of meaning making does not lead to an end as all processes do but is an end in itself. The reading experience is itself the meaning (interpretation). Fish strongly believes and consistently asserts that when readers who share a common attitude towards literature (how a text is written) read a text they finally end up writing texts which are identical and describe a common experience. As long as this experience is taken as the interpretation there would not be unwarranted differences among critics (but these groups are volatile). This process, up to now, is objective for the norms adopted (Interpretative strategies) in reading are fostered in the minds of a (gradually moving) group and not in a single mind.

Fish in careful enough not to discuss the best “strategies” an interpretative community should have. His interest lies only in its volatile nature. Further he does not tell us about an ideal reader. At the most he approves the use of his/ her knowledge of history, genres, linguistics and so on if s/he could make an analytic use of them. Thus, while other approaches speak about the “strategies” with which a reader ought to approach a text and then the way of interpreting/judging it Fish is only interested in the act of reading. All strategies of the reader come into play only now and in the interaction between “meaningful” units and the strategies that these units call into being an experience is born, which is itself the interpretation. Fish plays the experienced skater by avoiding thin ice when he convincingly leaves the question of the qualities of the reader un-discussed.
RECEPTION THEORY

The term ‘reception’ (Rezeption) was introduced to German readers even in the early 1970s. And at present this theory is so developed that “No area of literary endeavour has been untouched by” it, “indeed traces of this method have affected disciplines like sociology and art history as well” (Robert C. Holub, Reception Theory A Critical Introduction. 1984:XI). Wolfgang Iser defends and spells out the objective of this theory in The Implied Reader (1974) thus: Such a theory of literary effects if it is to carry any weight at all, must have its foundation in actual texts, for all too often literary critics tend to produce their theories on the basis of an aesthetics that is predominantly abstract, derived from and conditioned by philosophy rather than by literature... Thus between texts and theories there has arisen a broad stretch of no-man’s-land, and it should now be the task of literary hermeneutics to map the topography of this region” (xi-xii). Although the Reader-Response Theory of America too is interested in basing its aesthetic theory on the text and reader, the Germans denying any American influence on them try to show that they are different. However, when they look at the problem historically they sound different as in Hans Robert Jauss and Felix Vodicka. But when they view it at the level of text-reader interaction as in Wolfgang Iser they are very close to Fish. This paradoxical situation ought to be kept in mind in the study of this theory.

I will bring out at least three different views of this school. To Vodicka much more than the interaction between the text and the reader, certain
aesthetic norms which are peculiar to every age form the background against which the reader foregrounds the text. And as each reader foregrounds the same text against a changing background the text lends itself to an endless interpretation. The fundamental difference between Vodicka and Wolfgang Iser is that the former though trusts the potential of the text to lend itself to responses, argues that the responses themselves come from the reader who is placed in a cultural milieu. In specific reception, which is traced to social consciousness, is affected by readership, book publishing and distribution, and political ideas (F.W. Galan. “Is Reception History a literary theory?” in the Structure in the Literary Process. 1982).

Jauss was influenced heavily by Russian Formalism. He believes that the artistic character of a work can be determined by the nature and extent of its influence on its audience. According to him ‘defamiliarization’ is an artistic quality (and this is a key term in Russian Formalism). However, his interest is in the influence of a work on society. To him it is the work that dictates reception.

Iser draws his ideas from phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). The latter advocated the study of a phenomenon neither from the point of view of objective reality nor objective response. Iser speaks of two poles.

Literary work

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“From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie half way between the two. Note how the work is ideal, the text of the author is less ideal. The blanks presented by the text of the author are filled in by the reader as s/he reads. Thus as a result of text-reader interaction response is born.

Although this is not the place to dwell deep into the arguments of each of these theorists the above account is sufficient to prove the diversity of this school. From this it is clear that like the Reader Response School the Constance (reception) School too is multi-faced if not self-contradictory. Whatever be the relationship between this and other schools, none can deny that this school has attempted to describe the meaning making process with the help of a variety of terms.

STRUCTURALISM

In An Anatomy of Criticism Northrope Frye being suspicious of the objectivity of and the presence of a system in (Formalistic) criticism gives a call for a poetics of literature i.e., “a totally intelligible structure of knowledge attainable about poetry, which is not poetry itself, or the experience of it, but poetics”. While Frye feels the necessity for a poetics, Roland Barthes, the French critics, in his S/Z (1970) locates the area which can accommodate a literary text and provide it its right meaningful environment: “the primary evaluation of all texts can come neither from science. … Our evaluation can be linked only to a practice, and this practice is that of writing” (1970:4). Thus, out of the suspicion of the objectivity of the study of literature and from an
equally strong desire to systematize this field began the search for a poetics for literature on the Chomskean model. Taking the lead from Ferdinand de Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson (Pioneer of Russian Formalism), Roland Barthes and others began to apply linguistics to literature in the 1960s. Since then literature has been viewed as a part of a larger system within which alone it gains meaning. This relationship was at once established at the level of the smallest unit, namely “word” and the largest, the universe, thereby extending the borders of this concept in all possible directions.

Roland Barthes in his Critical Essays (1972) written piecemeal in the 1960s comments on the scope of Structuralism; “the approaches which it might include are extremely varied, both in their conception of criticism and in their use of linguistics.” According to Robert Scholes in his Structuralism in Literature (1974), Structuralism attempts to work out the structure of the discipline literature and use it as a parameter for individual works. This structure which discovers sub-structures between words, sentences, individual works, genres and literature as a whole, is in fact a part of the larger system of human culture. The reason for studying a literary work in terms of its structural relationship with lesser and greater elements in that (Structuralists like Roland Barthes and Jonathan Culler believe that) meaning does not exist in isolation. It exists only within a structure in relation to other elements. Even the simplest sequence of events in a plot forms a meaningful structure as each even is a careful selection from a variety of options. According to Barthes the message of literature is the functioning of the codes and conventions of writing and
there is nothing like a communication between a reader and a writer (Barthes, Critical Essays: xi). (1972)

Jonathan Culler defines Structuralist Poetics in his Structuralist Poetics, Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature – a book where structuralism was applied to literature for the first time thus:

“Structuralist Poetics is the science that explains how literature gains the potential to accommodate meanings. It is not interpretation of meanings. This is a theory of literary discourse. It does not concern directly with interpretation and less with interpretation of individual texts” (1975: 118)

In lighter moments, wanting to simplify the claims of structuralism that it underlines the truth that acquaintance with literature gives one the competence to read, he only raises more problems. How to read one’s first book with experience? Moving from Barthes to Scholes to Culler at least three varied points of view can be noticed; structures as gaining meaning in the reader’s mind, Structuralism viewed purely in terms of structures and finally Structuralist Poetics as a theory of literary discourse. However, the following are a few basic concepts of Structuralism.

Structuralism which depends upon the co-relation of elements to form structures for meanings of works of art bestows an active role on a critic. The critic is not a passive agent. Nor is his/her mind a ‘tabula rasa’ (a clean state). *S/he goes to a text with more than linguistic competence. S/he knows the*
literary conventions to be followed in reading. The series of elements (like
genre, theme, plot, events, sentences and words) are selected and structured.
And now his/her active role begins with the help of his/her inbuilt literary
conventions. As competence is gained through experience a structurlist reading
is always comparative.

DECONSTRUCTION

Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, struck a fatal blow to traditional
Western thought in the late 1960s when he called all readings misreadings (see
on De-Construction, Jonathan Culer).

Derrida’s philosophy takes its birth in the traditional misconception
about language and communication of the West. When something is written it
loses qualities which communication has and this difference is essential to
literature. The West always mistook, argues Derrida, writing to be the record of
speech. Derrida who calls the finality of reading a myth in his preface to Of
Gramatology also says that far from illustrating a new method of reading a text
he is interested in highlighting the problems of critical reading.

Jonathan Culler explains this point more clearly in his Structuralist
Poetics, Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of literature. To put one’s
trust in the text and then interpret it so as to arrive at an acceptable
interpretation is only to fall a victim to logocentric or theological fiction. Thus,
the act of interpretation itself is the end and not the interpretation arrived at. A
literary text which so deconstructs itself reveals an important quality of
language, i.e., no sign-meaning relationship can exist. And a text is
deconstructed the moment we reveal the unlimited interpretations it lends itself to.

In his preface to Of Grammatology, Jacques Derrida argues that “reading should free itself, at least in its axis, from the classical category of history – not only from the categories of the history of ideas and the history of literature but also, and perhaps above all, from the categories of the history of philosophy” (1974: LXXXIX).

Derrida says about interpretation that it is not a matter of recovering some meaning which is behind the work and serves as a center governing its structure, “it is rather an attempt to participate in and observe the play of possible meanings to which the text gives access.” We find this idea expressed in slightly different and concrete terms by Barbara Johnson in her essay “Teaching Deconstructively”, who writes

“the poem is not about something separate from the activity required to decipher it. Simplification, doubt, distance, and desire— all are acted out by the reading process as well as stated in the poem.... One’s struggle with ambiguity and obscurity ceases to be obstacles to reading. They become the very experience of reading. Meaning is not something ‘Out there’ or ‘in there’, to be run after or dug up. It inhabit the very activity of the search” (1985: 145).
NEW HISTORICISM

The latest critical theory seems to be New Historicism. As the very name suggests this is a modification of the historical approach so widely accepted prior to the advent of Russian Formalism (1910s) and New Criticism (1920s).

“New Historicism has an openness to the theoretical ferment of the last few years which the positivist historical scholarship of the early 20th century did not have”

(The New Historicism ed. H. Aram Veser, 1989: XXII). Veser introduces this school in different terms too:

“New Historicism is as much a reaction against Marxism as a continuation of it” (XI).

In this volume explaining the scope of this new approach the editor says:

“Far from a single projectile hurled against Western Civilization, New Historicism has a portmanteau quality. It brackets together literature, ethnography, anthropology, art history, and other disciplines and sciences, hard and soft. It scrutinizes the barbaric acts that sometimes underwrites high cultural purposes and asks that we not blink away our complicity. At the same time, it encourages us to admire the sheer intricacy and unaboidability of exchanges between
culture and power. Its politics, its novelty, its historicality, its relationship to other prevailing ideologies all remain open questions (XI)

The publication of this volume being the first attempt to gauge the scope of this approach we will have to wait for a few more years before we can apply it to interpret a literary text.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED

In semiotic, a sign is generally defined as,

"................ something that stands for something else, to someone in some capacity." (Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron, “Analyzing Cultures”).

Signs are not just words, but also include images, gestures, scents, tastes, textures, sounds – essentially all of the ways in which information can be processed into a codified form and communicated as a message by any sentient, reasoning mind to another. The two dominant model of what constitutes a sign are those of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirre. Saussure offered a ‘dyadic’ or two-pat model of the sign. He defined a sign as being composed of:

- A ‘signifier’ (significant) – the form which the sign takes; and
- The ‘signified’ (signifie) – the concept it represents.

Thus, a sign must have both a signifier and a signified. You cannot have a totally meaningless signifier or a completely formless signified (Saussure
A sign is a recognizable combination of a signifier with a particular signified.

Saussure was focusing on the linguistic sign (such as a word) and he 'phonocentrically' privileged the spoken word, referring specifically to the image acoustique ('sound-image' or 'sound pattern'), seeing writing as a separate, secondary, dependent but comparable sign system (Saussure 1983, 15. 24-25, 117: Saussure 1974. 15. 16, 23-24, 119). Within the ('separate') system of written signs, a signifier such as the written letter 't' signified a sound in the primary sign system of language (and thus a written word would also signify a sound rather than a concept). Thus, (for Saussure), writing relates to speech as signifier to signified. Most subsequent theorists who have adopted Saussure's model are content to refer to the form of linguistic signs as either spoken or written.

Thus, for Saussure the linguistic sign is wholly immaterial - although he disliked referring to it as 'abstract' (Saussure 1983, 15; Saussure 1974, 15). The immateriality of the Saussurean sign is a feature which tends to be neglected in many popular commentaries. If the notion seems strange, we need to remind ourselves that words have no value in themselves - that is their value. Saussure noted that it is not the metal in a coin that fixes its value (Saussure 1983. 117: Saussure 1974. 118). Several reasons could be offered for this. For instance, if linguistic signs drew attention to their materiality this would hinder their communicative transparency (Langer 1951, 73). Furthermore, being immaterial, language is an extraordinarily economical medium and words are always ready-to-hand. Nevertheless, a principled
argument can be made for the revaluation of the materiality of the sign, as we shall see in due course.

As for the signified, most commentators who adopt Saussure's model still treat this as a mental construct, although they often note that it may nevertheless refer indirectly to things in the world. Saussure's original model of the sign 'brackets the referent: excluding reference to objects existing in the world. His signified is not to be identified directly with a referent but is a concept in the mind - not a thing but the notion of a thing. Some people may wonder why Saussure's model of the sign refers only to a concept and not to a tiling. An observation from the philosopher Susanne Langer (who was not referring to Saussure's theories) may be useful here. Note that like most contemporary commentators, Langer uses the term 'symbol' to refer to the linguistic sign (a term which Saussure himself avoided): 'Symbols are not proxy for their objects but are vehicles for the conception of objects... In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves: and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly mean. Behaviour towards conceptions is what words normally evoke: this is the typical process of thinking'. She adds that If I say "Napoleon", you do not bow to the conqueror of Europe as though I had introduced him, but merely think of him' (Langer 1951, 61).

We seem as a species to be driven by a desire to make meanings: above all, we are surely Homo significans - meaning-makers. Distinctively, we make meanings through our creation and interpretation of 'signs'. Indeed, according to Peirce, 'we think only in signs' (Peirce 1931-58.
2.302). Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning. 'Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign', declares Peirce (Peirce 1931-58, 2.172). Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something - referring to or standing for something other than itself. We interpret things as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions. It is this meaningful use of signs which is at the heart of the concerns of semiotics.

Saussure argued that signs only make sense as part of a formal, generalized and abstract system. His conception of meaning was purely structural and relational rather than referential: primacy is given to relationships rather than to things (the meaning of signs was seen as lying in their systematic relation to each other rather than deriving from any inherent features of signifiers or any reference to material things). Saussure did not define signs in terms of some 'essential' or intrinsic nature. For Saussure, signs refer primarily to each other. Within the language system, 'everything depends on relations' (Saussure 1983, 121; Saussure 1974, 122). No sign makes sense on its own but only in relation to other signs. Both signifier and signified are purely relational entities (Saussure 1983, 118: Saussure 1974, 120). This notion can be hard to understand since we may feel that an individual word such as 'tree' docs have some meaning for us, but its meaning depends on its context in relation to the other words with which it is used. Together with the 'vertical' alignment of signifier and signified within each individual sign (suggesting two structural 'levels'), the emphasis on the relationship between
signs defines what are in effect two planes—that of the signifier and the
signifier. What Saussure refers to as the Value' of a sign depends on its
relations with other signs within the system—a sign has no 'absolute' value
independent of this context (Saussure 1983, 80: Saussure 1974, 80). Saussure
uses an analogy with the game of chess, noting that the value of each piece
depends on its position on the chessboard (Saussure 1983. 88; Saussure 1974.
88). The sign is more than the sum of its parts. Whilst signification—what is
signified—clearly depends on the relationship between the two parts of the
sign, the value of a sign is determined by the relationships between the sign and
other signs within the system as a whole (Saussure 1983, 112-113: Saussure

To think of a sign as nothing more would be to isolate it from the system
to which it belongs. It would be to suppose that a start could be made with
individual signs, and a system constructed by putting them together. On the
contrary, the system as a united whole is the starting point, from which it
becomes possible, by a process of analysis, to identify its constituent elements.
(Saussure 1983. 112; Saussure 1974,

As an example of the distinction between signification and value,
Saussure notes that 'The French word mouton ma]' have the same meaning as
the English word sheep; but it does not have the same value. There are various
reasons for this, but in particular the fact that the English word for the meat of
this animal, as prepared and served for a meal, is not sheep but mutton. The
difference in value between sheep and mutton hinges on the fact that in English
there is also another word mutton for the meat, whereas mouton in French
covers both' (Saussure 1983, 114; Saussure 1974. 115-116).

Saussurc's relational conception of meaning was specifically differential:
he emphasized the differences between signs. Language for him was a
system of functional differences and oppositions. ‘In a language, as in every
other semtioiogical system, what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it.
(Saussure 1983. 119; Saussure 1974. 121). As John Sturrock points out, 'a one-
term language is an impossibility because its single term could be applied in
everything and differentiate nothing: it requires at least one other term to give
it definition' (Sturrock 1979. 10). Saussure's concept of the relational identity
of signs is at the heart of structuralist theory. Structuralist analysis focuses on
the structural relations which are functional in the signifying system at a
particular moment in history. 'Relations are important for what they can
explain: meaningful contrasts and permitted or forbidden combinations'
(Culler 1975, 14).

Saussure emphasized in particular negative, oppositional differences
between signs, and the key relationships in structuralist analysis are binary
oppositions (such as nature/culture, life/death). Saussure argued that 'concepts
are defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast
with other items in the same system. What characterizes each most exactly is
being whatever the others are not' (Saysser 1983, 115; Saussrue 1974, 117).
Although the signifier is treated by its users as 'standing for' the signified.
Saussurean semioticians emphasize that there is no necessary, intrinsic, direct or
inevitable relationship between the signifier and the signified. Saussure stressed
the arbitrariness of the sign (Saussure 1983. 67. 78; Saussure 1974.67. 78).
The historical evidence does indicate a tendency of linguistic signs to evolve from indexical and iconic forms towards symbolic forms. Alphabets were not initially based on the substitution of conventional symbols for sounds. Marcel Danesi notes that 'archaeological research suggests... that the origins of alphabetical writing lie in symbols previously made out of elemental shapes that were used as image-making objects - much like the moulds that figurine and coin-makers use today. Only later did they take on more abstract qualities' (Danesi 1999. 35; see Schmandt-Besserat 1978). Some of the letters in the Greek and Latin alphabets, of course, derive from iconic signs in Egyptian hieroglyphs. The early scripts of the Mediterranean civilizations used pictographs, ideographs and hieroglyphs. Many of these were iconic signs resembling the objects and actions to which they referred either directly or metaphorically. Over time, picture writing became more symbolic and less iconic (Gelb 1963). This shift from the iconic to the symbolic may have been 'dictated by the economy of using a chisel or a reed brush' (Cherry 1966. 33): in general, symbols are semiotically more flexible and efficient (Lyons 1977, 103). The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss identified a similar general movement from motivation to arbitrariness within the conceptual schemes employed by particular cultures (Levi-Strauss, 1974. p.156).

Taking a historical perspective is one reason for the insistence of some theorists that 'signs are never arbitrary (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, 7). Gunther Kress, for instance, emphasizes the motivation of the sign users rather than of the sign (see also Hodge & Kress 1988. 21-2). Rosalind Coward and John Ellis insist that 'every identity between signifier and
signified is the result of productivity and a work of limiting that productivity' (Coward & Ellis 1977, p. 7).

This was not only the attitude of the linguist Saussure, but also of the philosopher Peirce: 'The word “man”... does not consist of three films of ink. If the word “man” occurs hundreds of times in a book of which myriads of copies are printed, all those millions of triplets of patches of ink are embodiments of one and the same word... each of those embodiments a replica of the symbol. This shows that the word is not a thing' (Peirce 1931-58. 4.447). Peirce did refer to the materiality of the sign: ‘since a sign is not identical with the thing signified, but differs from the latter in some respects, it must plainly have some characters which belong to it in itself... These I call the material qualities of the sign’. He granted that materiality is a property of the sign which is ‘of great importance in the theory of cognition’. Materiality had ‘nothing to do with its representative function’ and it did not feature in his classificatory schemes. However, he alludes briefly to the signifying potential of materiality: 'if it take all the things which have certain qualities and physically connect them with another series of things, each to each, they become fit to be signs’. For instance, if the colour of a red flower matters to someone then redness is a sign (ibid .. 5.287).

While Saussure chose to ignore the materiality of the linguistic sign, most subsequent theorists who have adopted his model have chosen to reclaim the materiality of the sign (or more strictly of the signifier). Semioticians must take seriously any factors to which sign-users ascribe significance, and the material form of a sign does sometimes make a difference. Contemporary theorists tend to acknowledge that the material
form of the sign may generate connotations of its own. As early as 1929 Valentin Voloshino published Marxism and the Philosophy of Language which included a materialist critique of Saussure’s psychological and implicitly idealist model of the sign. Voloshinov described Saussure’s ideas as ‘the most striking expression’ of ‘abstract objectivism’ (Voloshinov 1973, 58). He insisted that ‘a sign is a phenomenon of the external world’ and that ‘signs… are particular, material things’. Every sign ‘has some kind of material embodiment, whether in sound, physical mass, colour, movements of the body, or the like’ (ibid., 10 – 11; cf.28). For Voloshinov, all signs, including language, have ‘concrete material reality’ (ibid., 65) and the physical properties of the sign matter.

Poststructuralist theorists have sought to revalorize the signifier. The phonocentrism which was allied with Saussure’s suppression of the materiality of the linguistic sign was challenged in 1967, when the French poststructuralist Jacques Derrida, in his book of Grammatology, attacked the privileging of speech over writing which is found in Saussure (as well as in the work of many other previous and subsequent linguists) Derrida 1976). From Plato to Levi-Strauss, the spoken word had held a privileged position in the Western worldview, being regarded as intimately involved in our sense of self and constituting a sign of truth and authenticity. Speech had become so thoroughly naturalized that 'not only do the signifier and the signified seem to unite, but also, in this confusion, the signifier seems to erase itself or to become transparent' (Derrida 1981, 22). Writing had traditionally been relocated to a secondary position. The deconstructive enterprise marked ‘the return of the repressed’ (Derrida 1978, 197). In seeking to establish ‘Grammatology’ or the
study of textuality, Derrida championed the primacy of the material word. He noted that the specificity of words is itself a material dimension. 'The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes' - this English translation presumably illustrating some such loss (ibid., 210).

Roland Barthes also sought to revalorize the role of the signifier in the act of writing. He argued that in 'classic' literary writing, the writer 'is always supposed to go from signified to signifier, from content to form, from idea to text, from passion to expression' (Barthes 1974. 174). However, this was directly opposite to the way in which Barthes characterized the act of writing.

CONCLUSION

The major differences between the extrinsic and intrinsic groups seem to be on two points. The literature men do not appear to feel the need for "knowledge" about the literary piece. "Knowledge" about an author is essential form the teacher's point of view, if one is to have full experience of his works. This teacher-mediation is neglected by the former group.

The second difference lies in the fact that while the men of literature seem to be content with evaluation on the learner's part, the teachers want "production" from him. On other main points, excepting for the terminology, the two groups seem to agree, though the teachers are understandably more precise about their objectives than the others are.