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incorporating The Kingsman

tradition that lies behind the teaching of Coleridge and Maurice here see J. Coulson, *Newman and the Common Tradition*, London 1970; S. Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: the tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church*, Cambridge 1976; David Newsome, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought*, London 1974; Owen Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought*, London 1972; Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, London 1969; J.H. Muirhead, *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy*, London 1931; *Coleridge as Philosopher*, London 1930.

25. I have attempted to show the relevance of this tradition in epistemology to theology in *Mind; Method and God* and, in relation to ecumenical theology in my book *The Shaking of the Seven Hills: Romanticism, the Reformation and Philosophy of History*, on which I am currently working. May I also refer to my article 'Richard Hooker and John Calvin', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, (1980).

STRUCTURALISM. AN INTRODUCTION

B.L.Horne

First some remarks of a general and historical nature. The word 'structuralism' operates in much the same way as the word 'existentialism'. It is not to be thought of as an autonomous school of thought; and just as there are philosophers, historians, theologians all calling themselves 'existentialist', so there are 'structuralist' psychologists, philosophers, literary critics, Biblical scholars. Whether structuralism can be spoken of as a 'philosophy' or 'ideology' at all is an issue which is hotly debated in structuralist circles. Robert Scholes, for instance, in the closing pages of his book *Structuralism in Literature*[1], makes remarks which clearly show that his own understanding of structuralism is that of its being a philosophy, a 'Weltanschauung'. Raymond Boudun, on the other hand, in his book *The Uses of Structuralism*[2] is intent on demonstrating that structuralism can only properly be described as a method, and dismisses curtly, almost contemptuously, those who foolishly believe that structures exist in reality and that structuralism can offer a way of interpreting the world.

The fields in which structuralism has been developed, and is now a powerful force, are linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and literary criticism. It is a relatively new discipline and can be traced back to the teachings of the Swiss philologist Ferdinand de Saussure at the beginning of this century. (I use the word 'teachings' because the substance of his thought is to be found in lecture notes collated by his students and published in 1916 under the title *Cours de linguistique generale.*) He viewed language as essentially a system of relations between elements (words, sounds etc.) each of which owed its validity to its relation to the rest and could have meaning only in that context. He described language as a social system, a system of signifiers, and insisted on the arbitrariness of the verbal sign. He also drew a distinction between certain concepts whose French names are difficult to translate into English, but which have become part of the vocabulary of structural linguistics: *la langue*, *la parole*, *le langage*. *Langue* refers to the institution of a language; *parole* to particular and individual acts of expression. Together these elements constitute *le langage*. In English we use the single word 'language' to translate both *langue* and *langage*, but we use it in two different senses. For example, the English language (*langue*) and the language *(langage*) of philosophy, poetry etc. which is the *parole*—individual utterances after a particular manner—in the given instituted language (*langue*), English. Saussure tried to discover the key principles upon which language is constructed and came up with a complicated system of contrasts, distinctions, oppositions, which need not detain us here.

Of all the linguistic philosophers who have followed in the steps of the Swiss master, the one best known in English speaking countries is the American Noam Chomsky. Much controversy has surrounded his work, especially his belief in, and search for, a 'universal grammar', for those 'deep structures' of language which underlie the surface differences between spoken languages. He has even claimed that the principles which constitute the structure of language

are so specific and so highly articulated that they must be regarded as being biologically determined; that is to say, as forming part of what we call human nature, and as being genetically transmitted from parent to child.

> My own quite tentative belief is that there is an autonomous system of formal grammar, determined in principle by the language faculty and its component Universal Grammar.[3]

This leads Chomsky on to argue strongly against both Behaviourism and also what he calls Empiricism, what we in England should probably call 'historical relativism', i.e. the belief that there is no non-trivial theory of human nature and that all behaviour, attitudes, thought patterns are determined historically. This belief in the existence of inherited structures tends to make Chomsky and many structuralist writers 'anti-historical'. I shall return to this point later.

The second important sphere of structuralist influence is that of anthropology, and here the figure of Claude Levi-Strauss has been dominant. He was born in 1908 and is still, as far as I know, teaching at the College de France in Paris. Most of his early work was done with Amerindian civilisations and he attracted a large following after the publication of his work on kinship in 1949. *Structural Anthropology* followed in 1958 and more recently he has published his *Mythologies*. Mary Douglas has pointed out that one of his novel departures (novel i.e. to the English empirical/historical tradition of anthropology and philosophy) is his treatment of all versions of a myth as equally authentic and relevant to his purposes[4]. There is no such thing as a 'corrupt' text. The original version, if it can be discovered, is simply a version. Again we should note the non-historical bias of this kind of thinking and the way in which many structuralists oppose synchronic and diachronic modes of procedure. Understanding is never increased by the discovery of 'wie es eigentlich gewesen'.

From being an empirical science much concerned with field work and the faithful recording of primitive custom, anthropology seemed to be becoming a speculative, almost a mathematical and abstract, activity—not without strong opposition in anthropological circles. In the opening pages of his book *Le Cru et le Cui* Levi-Strauss says that the object is to show how simple empirical categories of social intercourse: raw/cooked, can be treated as conceptual tools to construct abstract ideas which can be interconnected in logical propositions. So, instead of the a, b, c, or x, y, z, of mathematics, we have jaguars, boars, chickens, related to each other in a formal sequence[5]. Like structural linguistics, Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology takes as axiomatic the belief that each element of social and psychological life has meaning only in its connection with the underlying system. If we lack knowledge of that system, the particular signs, however graphic, will yield nothing. Roland Barthes has stated that the aim of structuralism is to master the infinity of utterances (*paroles*) by describing the language (*langue*) of which they are products and from which they can be generated[6].

At the mention of Barthes we move across into the field of literary criticism. It seems to me that the most influential figure here has been the French scholar, Roland Barthes, who died recently. He has been at the centre of the stage since the early nineteen fifties and his writings are gradually being translated into English. Of all the thinkers I have so far mentioned Barthes is, at least for me, the most attractive, though also, possibly, the most elusive. He would probably have denied the epithet 'structuralist', but, like all those we have been considering, he viewed human communication as, essentially, a system i.e. a collection of signs whose meanings can only be deciphered (decoded?) when they are read 'in relation' to each other. His essays are full of irony and provocation, as, for example, the article published by the *Times Literary Supplement* on 29 September, 1967, *Literature vs Science*, and he has gained a certain amount of notoriety by the eclecticism of the material he has chosen for analysis. He has scrutinised mythical material in the Bible, examined the semiotics of photograph, film and music, and found intricate sign-systems at work in the novels of Ian Fleming. A dominant motif of his writing has been his insistence that 'Literature is simply a language, a system of signs. Its being (*etre*) is not in its message, but in this system. Similarly it is not for criticism to reconstitute the message of the work, but only its system, exactly as the linguist does not decipher the meaning of a sentence, but establishes the

formal structure which allows the meaning to be conveyed.'[7]

I deemed it necessary to make some comments about Saussure, Chomsky and Levi-Strauss in order to fill in some of the background, but it is structuralist literary criticism, of whom I take Barthes to be the most stimulating and influential exponent, that touches us, whose working hours are spent in the scrutinising of texts, most deeply. So I will look more closely at two recent essays by Barthes: *The Death of the Author*, (*Manteia* V 1968) and *From Work to Text* (*Revue d'esthetique* 3 1971) both of which, if taken seriously, could, perhaps, affect the way in which we read our texts[8].

First, however, the enunciation of a few basic principles of structuralism. Raymond Boudun, whom I have already mentioned, denies that it is possible to give a simple definition, yet he quotes the French educational theorist Jean Piaget as saying that a structural method entails envisaging the analysed object as a whole, as a set of interdependent elements whose coherence must be shown, and that a structure (in its most general sense) exists when elements are united in a whole which presents certain properties as a whole and the properties of the elements are wholly or partially dependent on those of the whole[9]. So the essential qualities of the method lie in its attempt to study not, as in the cases of Source Criticism and Form Criticism, the separate elements from which the whole is constructed, but the complex network of relationships that link and unite these elements. But is not this similar to the practice of Redaction Criticism: the uncovering of the theological, philosophical and ideological plan of the author? No, it is not, as we shall see when we look more closely at Barthes's essay *The Death of the Author*. The structuralist is engaged in a much more 'mathematical' activity. So, Jean Calloud writes: 'the text is made up of units which are defined and classified and which can be defined by following a number of rules ... the question is "What happens in the text?" NOT what is the life setting of its composition .... NOT what has happened in the mind of author ... NOT what has happened in the rest of his work but in a specific text under examination ..... Logical operations, such as affirmations, negations, conjunctions, disjunctions, attributions, modalisations are, in their own

ways, happenings.'[10] And so structuralism is opposed to what I shall call hermeneutics, which I interpret as the recovery of meaning.

The word 'grammar' is one which is used either analogically or unequivocally by nearly everyone who is a structuralist thinker and it is easy to see why structuralism is, after all, the application of the rules of communicative speech; and when one analyses grammatically, one is engaged in a process of determining, by rules to which one has given names: subject, object, predicate etc., the exact relationship of the elements of a sentence to each other. One is left with a description, and that description—purely formal, for one has said nothing about the meaning of the sentence—is its structure.

Once again we should take note of the non-historical bias of the structuralist approach. And once again we can trace this back to Saussure whose intention was to break away from the language studies of the nineteenth century which were almost a branch of historical studies with their emphasis upon the charting of the change and development of a language in time. Saussure emphasised instead, synchronic linguistics and treated extra-linguistic influences as irrelevant. For him (as for Levi-Strauss in his social anthropology) each language was complete at every stage of its development. There is no such thing as progress or regress, growth or decay in the structuralist canon, only change. What is important is the observable logic of present relations; the examination of the history of a language or a text will not help us to discover its structure. So it could be said that structuralism is a descriptive science with a formalist approach. Does it ignore meaning because it concentrates on system? Does it refuse to acknowledge the cultural world beyond and within which the literary work was created? Does it see works (texts) as closed, finished, autonomous objects? Robert Scholes in his book *Structuralism in Literature* is at pains to deny this, but I do not find his denials convincing, and I can see advantages as well as disadvantages in this methodology, though, as yet, I can see the advantages as having negative significance only.

Structuralism can be used effectively as an antidote to two of the most common diseases of textual criticism: Historicism and Intentionalism. First, Historicism: at its worst this interpretative procedure leads to the dogma that the only way of understanding a text is to gather as much historical knowledge about it as possible. So, much energy is spent on discovering the date and place of composition; the outside influences on its production such as social or economic or personal factors; the audience for whom it was intended. Eventually, nothing is said about the text at all, or rather, if that is something of a caricature, the text is interpreted entirely in the light of its context. This can have the effect of locking away a text in its unreachable historical environment. Intentionalism is a very different procedure: it asserts that the proper way to read a text is to try to enter the mind of the author and discover what he intended. (I have noticed that redaction critics tend to lean in this direction.) W.K. Wimsatt in 1946 exposed the fallacies of this procedure in a famous essay called *The Intentional Fallacy*[11]. Unless the author has conveniently provided a commentary on what he has written, what he intended can only be perceived by the reader through the medium of the artefact itself. One can say what a poem means, says, is, or does, but one cannot, legitimately, say what the author intended the poem to say, mean, be, or do—that is sheer speculation. Wimsatt's essay deals, primarily, with poetry, but his argument is valid for other kinds of literature too, such as the documents of the Old and New Testaments. Structuralism, with its focus on the text itself and its disregard for provenance and authorship helps us to avoid these traps.

And now, I will look more closely at the two essays I mentioned earlier by Roland Barthes. In *The Death of the Author* Barthes's thesis is quite simple. Literature begins only when the author enters into his own death, and we, as readers, only respond to writing, as literature, when we have successfully killed the author. Barthes claims that the concept of 'the author' is a modern concept, the product of the discovery of the prestige of the individual following upon the Reformation, English empiricism and the French Revolution.

> The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions . . . the *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or

less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* confiding in us.[12]

Needless to say, Barthes is opposed to this state of affairs and he maintains (though without offering us proof in this essay) that modern linguistics has demonstrated the foolishness of this kind of reading.

Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.[13]

In the old dispensation, in which most Biblical critics have lived, the author is seen as the past of his book and we, as readers, follow the line through the book back to the author: we are conscious of St Paul, St John, or Dante or Shakespeare or Dickens. When the author has been found the text is his and all is explained, the meaning has been discovered. We see a text as a unity: of words appearing on a page and author writing those words for us to read. The case of many documents of the Old Testament raises interesting problems because we are here working with documents which have no author but arise out of the folk lore of a society. Yet even here we tend to treat the tradition as though it were, itself, 'an author'. The Biblical critic never perceives that he himself has a part to play in the creation of the text he is reading, he is content that the text should be objectified and put 'out there' with its author, and that he will decipher the meaning by discovering as much as he can about author and text. Barthes challenges this method of reading.

. . . a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focussed and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations which make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.[14]

Though I have much sympathy with this shift of focus from author to reader, I doubt whether, on these grounds, there can be any such thing as true or false interpretation of a text. The intentions of the author (even if they could be discovered) are totally irrelevant, there is only valid and invalid procedure. All we can discover is something about ourselves and so, possibly, the old concept of the Bible as a source of revelation, with God, ultimately, as its author, is destroyed. Unfortunately Barthes does not, in this essay, investigate the question of the relationship between the validity of a procedure and the meaning of a work, but then I have not discovered, so far, any structuralist critic who satisfactorily examines this relationship.

The second of the two essays, *From Work to Text*, was published three years after *The Death of the Author* and is, really, an extension of the arguments of the earlier essay. It is more difficult; denser in style and more serious in tone, lacking the lightness and irony of *The Death of the Author*. He takes up the discussion of the unity of reader and what is read, and stresses the significance of that relationship rather than the relationship between the writer and what he has written. And he does so first by drawing a distinction between the work, *L'Oeuvre*, and the text, *Le Texte*.

The work is a fragment of substance . . . the text is a methodological field: the one is displayed, the other demonstrated; likewise, the work can be *seen* (in bookshops, libraries, catalogues etc.), the text is a process of demonstration . . . the text . . . only exists in the movement of a discourse . . . the text is experienced only in an activity of production.[15]

It is clear that Barthes is trying to forward the movement from work to text in order to promote the discovery of the text and here we notice not merely a non-historical stance, but a positively anti-historical approach to reading as an act of intellectual understanding.

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be compared with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas.[16]

Does this textualisation bring about fundamental changes in reading? I can find little here with

which F.R. Leavis or any school of Practical Criticism would disagree (though Dr Leavis would, undoubtedly, have expressed himself differently). Learning to read in a class of Practical Criticism is learning to respond to a text without foreknowledge. The very ignorance of literary and cultural history plays an important part; the direct effect of the text alone is felt, and attention is focussed upon grammatical structures, upon the interplay, within the given limits, of congruity and transformation patterns, symbols and repetitions etc. This I take to be very similar to Barthes's 'movement in a methodological field . . . from work to text'.

Barthes elaborates his argument by stating that there '. . . is no vital "respect" due to the Text, it can be broken (which is just what the Middle Ages did with two nevertheless authoritative texts) . . . ' He is referring here to Holy Scripture and Aristotle. I must comment on a certain ambiguity in this statement (unless it is a fault of the translator, which seems unlikely, as he would hardly have translated *oeuvre* as text). By Barthes's own definition a text is not authoritative; it is, after all, a methodological field, not a fragment of substance; Holy Scripture and the writings of Aristotle must be *works*, not texts, and it is those works which can be broken by the exercise of textualising. Leaving aside this ambiguity, we can see how Barthes uses the possibility of 'breaking' works in his argument for the plurality of texts. Here he parts company with Dr Leavis, and indeed all the great literary critics: S.T. Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, for it seems that the logical conclusion of Barthes's argument is that a text is whatever the reader makes of it, and that there can be no valid single meaning in any work which can be perceived and extracted. This could have serious consequences for the Church which is committed to the assumption that there is such a thing as truth and that it can be perceived; that the author of the Holy Scriptures is God, however plurally and idiosyncratically His word is mediated, and that the truth about Him can be discovered by intelligent readings of the writings. Barthes would have us all participate in a kind of game in which we knew all the rules, and played the game according to those rules, while acknowledging all the while that there was no significance in the game, except as game. This, I suppose, is a perfectly valid philosophy of life, but it is fundamentally anarchic, and I do not see how it could ever be Christian.

Furthermore, such an approach to literature refuses to consider the question of evaluation and discrimination; two words sacred in the canon of Leavisite criticism. Barthes writes that the quality of the work is no concern of structural analysis, that is why so many of his own analyses are performed on trivia, like the novels of Ian Fleming, and not on established works of art. 'Structurally', he writes, 'there is no difference between "cultured" reading and casual reading on trains.' We are led to ask the question: Does it really not matter to us (and society) what we read and see? Is reading simply an activity like eating? I happen to dislike Baked Beans, you may enjoy Baked Beans, but the structures we employ in the consumption of the objects are identical. If structural analysis can do no more than test for a validity that is defined by a work's possessing a 'coherent system of signs' then there is no reason to believe that the system of signs is any less coherent, or interesting, in *Batman* and *Spiderwoman* than in *The Divine Comedy* and *The Tempest*. Values belong to ideologies not to methods. But even Barthes cannot avoid value judgements from time to time. Michael Lane has pointed out that Barthes, in his Foreword to *Sur Racine*, avers that 'without doubt Racine is the greatest French writer.' On what grounds? I suspect that structuralists, like logical positivists earlier in this century, will have to abandon some of their pristine, rigorist principles (as logical positivists abandoned the verification principle) and take more note of how human beings really behave.

NOTES

1. Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*. New Haven, 1974.
2. R. Boudun, *The Uses of Structuralism*. Trans. M. Vaughan, London, 1971.
3. N. Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*. Fontana Books, 1976, p.43.
4. See her essay in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*. Ed. E. Leach, London, 1967.
5. Ibid. Cf. G. Steiner, "Orpheus with his myths", *Language and Silence*, London, 1967.
6. R. Barthes, *Image–Music–Text*. Essays selected and

translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana Books, 1977. p.80.
7. Quoted by M. Lane in his introduction to *Structuralism. A Reader.* London 1970.
8. Both essays are included in *Image–Music–Text.*
9. Boudun, p.20.
10. J. Calloud, *Structural Analysis of Narrative.* Trans. D. Patte, Philadelphia, 1976, p.9.
11. W.K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon.* Kentucky, 1954.
12. *Image–Music–Text*, p.143.
13. Ibid., p.145.
14. Ibid., p.148.
15. Ibid., pp.156-157.
16. Ibid., p.160.