

# Critical Interpretation of Religious Texts in the West and the Reflection on the Study of the Qur'an

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## Batıda Dini Metinlerin Eleştirel Tefsiri ve Kur'an Çalışmalarına Yansıması

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**Özet:** Bu çalışmamızda, Batı yorum geleneğinde, özellikle çağdaş edebiyat eleştirilerinde meydana gelen değişimlerin Kitab-ı Mukaddes yorum geleneğine yaptığı etkiyi ve bu etkinin boyutlarını ele aldık. Çalışmada öncelikle Batı edebiyatında kullanılan eleştiri metotları tanıtılmakta ve ardından da Kitabı Mukaddes araştırmalarında nasıl kullanıldıkları değerlendirilmektedir. Burada eleştirel tefsir adıyla kullandığımız kavram, edebiyat ve sanatta belli bir eserin değerlendirilmesi ve bu eserin tarihsel kökeninin, kompozisyonunun, dil yapısının vs. bilimsel araştırılması (scientific investigation) ve yorumlanması (interpretation) anlamında kullanılmaktadır. Bunun için batıda yirminci yüzyılda gelişen eleştiri metotları edebi bir eseri üç değişik perspektiften (yazar, metin ve okuyucu) ele almaktadır. Bu perspektifler edebi eserin ne olduğu sorusunun da birer cevabıdır. Çağdaş Edebiyat eleştirisine göre edebi eser, bir üründür (product) ve genellikle adı geçen bu üç unsurdan meydana gelmektedir. Buna göre ürünün oluşum süreci yazardan başlayıp şiir, hikaye, vs. formatında oluşan metin yoluyla okuyucuya kadar gider. Metindeki anlamı bulma çabası yani criticism/eleştiri veya tefsir ise bunun tam tersine işleyen bir süreçtir. Okuyucudan başlayıp yazara doğru

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ilerler. Metindeki anlamı bulabilmek için okuyucu yazarın niyetini bulmayı yada yazarın yaşadığı tecrübeyi yeniden yaşamayı dener. İşte basitçe bu şekilde anlatılan edebiyat eleştirisi, metotlarını da bu üçlü ayırıma göre düzenlemiştir. Makalede ele alınan metotlar başta yazar merkezli olan Tarihsel Eleştiri, metin merkezli olan Formalizm, Yeni Eleştiri ve Yapısalcılık nihayet okuyucu merkezli olan Yeni tarihselcilik, Algı Hermeneutiği ve Feminist Eleştiri'dir. Edebiyatta ve felsefede ortaya çıkan bu eleştiri metotlarının batıda kutsal metinlere kimler tarafından ve nasıl uygulandığını ele aldık. Çalışmamızın ikinci kısmında ise Kitabı mukaddes yorum geleneğini etkilen eleştiri metotlarının, İslam yorum bilimini nasıl etkilediği konusu incelenmektedir. Buna göre İslam yorum bilim tarihi içerisinde, özellikle çağdaş dönemde meydana gelen batılılaşma ve paradigmal değişimler değerlendirildikten sonra Fazlurrahman, Abu Zayd, Farid Esack, Fatıma Mernissi gibi Müslüman araştırmacıların eleştirel tefsir metotlarını Kur'an'a uygulamaları değerlendirildi.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eleştiri, Edebiyat Eleştirileri, Tarihsel Eleştiri, Feminist Eleştiri, Kutsal Kitap eleştirisi, Yapısal dilbilim.

## Introduction

Before interpretation began to play such a prominent role in literary criticism, it was in the sphere of religion that the major debate over interpretation took place. Indeed, *Hermeneutics*, the science or theory of interpretation had its origins in the interpretation of religious texts. Hermeneutics is a term for any formal methodology, rather than the practice, of the interpretation of texts. The word "hermeneutics" was derived from *Hermes*, the name for the messenger of gods in Greek mythology. Greek *hermeneuein*, as a verb, is meaning "to announce", "to interpret", and "to translate" and *hermeneia*, as a noun, is meaning "interpretation". The first reference to the "hermeneutics" is the Aristotle's *Organon* (335-323 B.C.) in the passage "On Interpretation" (*peri hermeneias*). Borrowing from Aristotle and other classical authorities, the early Christian commentators on scripture developed hermeneutics for the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a steady shift of emphases in hermeneutics, especially since the Reformation. The Roman Catholic assertion that

<sup>1</sup> McCulloh, Mark R, (1999) "Hermeneutics", *Encyclopaedia of Literary Critics and Criticism* p. 519.

the revelation testified to in Scripture can only be understood in light of the tradition presented by the church, which became for the Catholics a partial solution to the hermeneutical problem, was rejected by the Reformers. Against this view of tradition the Reformers posited the principle of *sola scriptura*, maintaining that Scripture has its own illuminating power.<sup>2</sup>

The modern period has seen a series of developments of fundamental importance to Biblical studies. The rise of Enlightenment<sup>3</sup> worldview led to a sharp conflict with traditional way of reading the Bible. Having been used almost exclusively to refer to interpretation of Biblical texts, hermeneutics since the nineteenth century has been applied to texts other than the Bible, especially to modern literatures and became the theory of understanding itself.<sup>4</sup> Schleiermacher is the main figure in the history of hermeneutics, because he extended hermeneutics outside the sphere of religion with the result that it could be applied to the interpretation of texts in a more general sense. Schleiermacher changed the focus from reading texts and directed attention to the conditions and theories of interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Schleiermacher developed a new approach to textual interpretation that emphasized the experience of the human being in relation to the text and the author. Schleiermacher argued that the interpretation has two aspects: *grammatical* and *psychological*. *Grammatical interpretation* states that a specific purpose of any point in a given text must be determined on the basis of the use of language which is familiar to the author and his original public and the meaning of the word must be determined by the context in which it takes

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<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, Duncan S., (1987) *Biblical Hermeneutics*, London: SCM, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> See further information about the Enlightenment and its influences on the Christianity: Alister E. McGrath, Alister E., (1994) *Christian Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 89-98.

<sup>4</sup> McCulloh, Mark R, Ibid: 519.

<sup>5</sup> Newton, K. M, (1990) *Interpreting the Text: a Critical Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Literary Interpretation*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf , p. 41.

place. *Psychological interpretation* consists of two methods: *divinatory* and *comparative*. *Divinatory* reading projects a meaning not yet expressed in the text. As a result of Schleirmacher's influence, Werner claims,<sup>6</sup> hermeneutical thinking has been developed on two levels:

- Hermeneutics as a general philosophical discipline
- Hermeneutics as a sub-discipline of those disciplines among the humanities.

The second crucial figure, in "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik", Wilthem Dilthey characterises modern hermeneutics as "*liberation of interpretation from dogma.*"<sup>7</sup> Dilthey sees as the fundamental principle of modern hermeneutic theory: texts are to be understood in their own terms rather than those of doctrine so that understanding requires not dogma but systematic application of interpretative rules. He criticises the theological reading as a dogmatic and thereafter articulates new hermeneutic principles: reading the individual books of the Bible in the light of differences in context and linguistic usage. Dilthey applied the science of hermeneutics to all humanistic disciplines. He believed that hermeneutics could provide a common methodological basis for all the humanities, including everything from literary criticism to sociology. Dilthey made a distinction between the human sciences and the natural sciences. To Dilthey, while the natural sciences can be explained, the human sciences can be understood. Hermeneutical understanding was considered by Dilthey as the effort to understand the meaning of the text, which was written by someone else.

As a result of his objective-idealist approach to text, Betti triggered new discussion in hermeneutic tradition. Betti, like Dilthey, accepts that knowledge is not a passive mirror of reality; its objects are determined by the way we comprehend them. Betti considers

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<sup>6</sup> Jeanrond, Werner G., (1990) "Hermeneutics", *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* London: SCM Press, p. 282.

<sup>7</sup> Dilthey, W., (1976) *Selected Writings*, ed. H. P. Rickman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p. 235.

'objective interpretation' as the only valid form of interpretation and the best rendering of the term may be 'interpretation'.<sup>8</sup>

With Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), twentieth century Hermeneutics is no longer concerned with the understanding and interpretation of written documents or speech. Twentieth century Hermeneutics moves from the epistemological arena into the area of ontology. This means that we are not concerned with understanding something; rather understanding is grasped, as we exist in the intellectual activity.<sup>9</sup>

Bultmann and Karl Barth apply Heidegger's existential hermeneutics. Both agree that Biblical interpretation ought to be more than the purely historical and philological analysis of Biblical text; both scholars emphasize the faith response provoked by the texts as the primary concern of the Biblical interpretation.

Bultmann accepts Heidegger's analysis of the hermeneutical circle and stresses that exegesis without presupposition is impossible. Moreover, he followed Heidegger's existentialist concerns and language by demanding that the act of Biblical understanding ought to become an act of eschatological decision for Christian life. His particular phrase '*demythologisation*' aims at translating into a modern horizon those Biblical passages, which reflected the worldview of a past era and therefore were no longer able to challenge the self-understanding of the modern reader. Thus, he suggests that we should not ignore the mythological parts of the Bible, but we interpret them.<sup>10</sup>

Gadamer's contribution to Hermeneutics is the concept of "*philosophical hermeneutics*", which has been adopted and applied by numerous scholars. Philosophical hermeneutics purposes to evalu-

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<sup>8</sup> For further information Betti's objective interpretation see: Josef Bleicher, (1980) *Contemporary Hermeneutics* London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 27-31.

<sup>9</sup> Jeanron, Werner G., *Ibid*: 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*: 284.

ate problems that arise when the reader tries to understand a text.<sup>11</sup> Gadamer is currently influencing Biblical scholars by drawing his attention to the need to interpret the Biblical texts as works rather than accumulations of individual sentences. His main emphasis is that reading Biblical texts cannot be considered a neutral activity; rather, it participates in the effective history of these texts.<sup>12</sup>

The central conclusion that comes from this brief survey is that the Hermeneutic tradition in modern Biblical studies attempt to liberate Biblical interpretation from dogmas. In the hermeneutic tradition there was a theological and doctrinal conflict between historical critical reading and the dogmatic tradition of the church. Historical reading of the Bible originated in the opposition between church dogma and the new liberal political philosophy of emergent modern Europe in the seventeenth century. This in turn led to a concerted effort in the eighteenth century to uncover the original message of Jesus apart from church tradition. Historical criticism in the Enlightenment tradition relies on rational, scientific investigation to reveal the content of scripture. However this kind of criticism is under the attack of postmodernism which refute all Enlightenment and modern values. According to postmodernism, it is impossible to be absolutely objective and to exercise a disinterested awareness, uncover the facts, and achieve the true meaning.

Biblical studies, in the second part of the twentieth century, have tended to be in dialogue with various contemporary literary critical theories which are concerned with such questions as the cultural and historical context of the Bible, the meaning and significance of the sacred text, its structure, the relations between the reader and the way of reading the sacred text.

This study will continue to examine some of the crucial applications of critical methods to Biblical studies. We will investigate

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<sup>11</sup> Busges, Michael J. (1999) "Hans-George Gadamer", *ELCC*, p. 417.

<sup>12</sup> Jeanrond, Werner G., *Ibid*: 284.

the Biblical applications of contemporary critical theories around the concepts of author, text and reader. It is not our purpose here to provide a precise investigation. That has been well done by several scholars.<sup>13</sup> Rather, we shall chiefly introduce the well known applications, bibliographic resources, main figures and some discussions dealing with the application process.

### **Literary Critical Readings in Biblical Studies**

Before looking in greater detail at the various aspect of the critical readings in Biblical studies, we must clarify what critical reading is meant in literature. I have used the term as used in literary criticism to define a new way of approaching to a literature. Unfortunately, there is a deep ambiguity in the term *criticism*. In the fields of art, it refers to the skills of evaluating the artistic quality of specific works. When used with reference to Biblical studies and Biblical literature, the meaning is that of scientific investigation or interpretation of the literature in the aspects of historical origin, text, composition and transmission of literary documents. Because the literature (of Bible or others) is described, for example by Roger Webster, "as a production of text which is then read by the reader."<sup>14</sup> The production and transmission process is assumed to be from the author to the reader and the ideas or meaning would seem to originate in the author's mind and are then relayed through the text in the form of a poem, novel, or play to the reader. And then the process of criticism is assumed to be from reader to author. That is, the reader will go back along this axis to discover the author's intention and to re-experience the author's experience to criticise or interpret the literature.

However, a problem then will be arose in Biblical as well as in

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<sup>13</sup> For instance see: Schwartz, Regina, (1990) *The Book and the Text; the Bible and Literary Criticism* Cambridge: Basil Blacwell; John Barton, (1998) *Biblical Interpretation* Cambridge: University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Webster, Roger, (1990) *Studying Literary Theory An Introduction*, London: Edward Arnold, p. 17.

other religious studies because of giving priority to human factors in the production of the sacred texts and having a direct impact on the issue of religious authority. This priority refers to that the Bible must be treated like any other literatures. That is offensively from the theological point of view to say that the Bible is no divine in origin but a prудuct of a human author in a certain historical time. Accordingly, Biblical criticism came to mean a method in which the critic has a right to judge the statements of the Bible. Thus, for example, an interpreter can historically criticise the Bible and may claim that it contains contradictions.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the concept of the author in literary criticism and of course in Biblical criticism has been central since the late nineteenth century. Literature was not seen as separable from the figure who produced it. Knowledge of author's education, character, age, background personal experiences, emotional state, ambitions, the circumstances that led to the writing, and the occasions for which it was to be used all help to illuminate the intended sense. The author's position as an observer, his internal consistency, his bias or prejudices, and his abilities all affect the accuracy of what he means.<sup>16</sup> However, some debates had taken place on the relationship between author and text in the late 1940s and 1950s, in particular, 1960s which have changed traditional assumptions regarding the author as the originator or producer of the literary work. The author's authority over the text and meaning has been questioned. In text-based critical theories, attention is focused primarily on the literary work or the text. Text-based theorists argue that meaning is produced not by the author but through the language of the text. And after the 1960s, a number of theorists who introduced literary theories usually known as "post structuralism", "reader response

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<sup>15</sup> For further information see: Silva, Moises, (1994) "Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation" in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* by Walter C. Kaiser at. al. Michigan: Zondervari Publishing House, p. 236.

<sup>16</sup> For further information see: Krentz, Edgar, (1975) *The Historical Critical Method*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 44.



theory", "feminist theory" etc. focused not on the author or the text, but on the reader as the central figure in the reading and critical process. The rise of the reader's importance in literary and critical theories has shifted the emphasis of criticism and interpretation away from author and text-based approaches to the reader and allowed both for a more plural set of responses to texts and also to give more attention to the complex processes of reading and interpretation. Reader-centred theory will emerge as important in relation to feminist and liberalist approaches that promote the individual and different types of readers. In one sense this shift can be seen as an ideological move away from author- and text-power to reader-power.

### *Historical Critical Reading of the Bible*

Historical criticism has been described in general as a detailed analysis of a text in conformity with the original language and the original historical situation. Historical Criticism based on the assumption that literature can only be understood through the author's intention was dominant in literary criticism and Biblical studies between mid 19<sup>th</sup> and late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historical Criticism provides valid and reliable evidence to establish the meaning of documents in their historical contexts. The historian, therefore, seeks to determine and to understand the motivation behind the text and its time and place of origin.

John Barton suggests four features of Historical Criticism to provide a general definition:<sup>17</sup>

1- The main interest of scholars who apply Historical Criticism is *genetic* questions about the text. They are more interested in the original sources of the books than the final product.

2- As Historical Criticism is interested in the original text it is

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<sup>17</sup> Barton, John, ( 1998) "Historical-Critical Approaches", in John Barton ed. *The Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. Cambridge: University Press, pp. 9-20.

interested in the original meaning (the true meaning) of the text. The Historical critic's priority is what the text meant to its first audiences not what it means to modern audience.

3- Historical reconstruction was an inevitable result for Historical critics who concentrated on the original sources and original meanings of the text and who wished to arrive at the original story: what really happened, not what the writers of those books believed had happened.

4- Historical Criticism suggests a value-neutral approach. Instead of what the text meant for me, Historical critics ask simply what it meant.

The Historical Critical method is a process for determining what really happened and what the significance of past happenings was. On the other hand, when the reconstruction of the past is presented, it is expected that this is supported with convincing reasons and persuasive data. Therefore, it is not only important to determine the author's position and intention but also to evaluate the truthfulness of the documents.

Historical Criticism is simply the study of literature which purports to convey historical information and attempt to read the text in such a way as to bring out its inner coherence, the techniques of style and composition used by the author in order to determine "what actually happened". As the Bible is a collection of ancient books written at different times, for different purposes, in different social context and by different authors, Historical Criticism is interested in the meaning, which is constituted by authorial intention, genetic contexts, and the original readers of the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

Biblical scholars use the historical critical method on the Bible to discover truth and explain what really happened. The method

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<sup>18</sup> Vorster, W.S. (1991) "Historical Criticism", in *Text and Interpretation* edited by P.J. Hartin and J.H Petzer, Leiden, New York, Kobenhavn, Koln: E.J. Brill p. 18.

uses secular sciences, such as numismatics, epigraphy, archaeology, and comparative analysis of the contemporary ancient documents. In the issue of canon, for example, the boundaries of the canon are not the boundaries of the source material for Israelite or early Christian history. Extra-Biblical literature is the basis of chronology, archaeology illuminates the daily life and cultic fixtures of ancient Israel and inscriptions give the course of world history.

Some scholars criticised the applications of the historical critical approaches to the literature in several aspects. One of the most crucial criticisms was the relation of historical criticism with Enlightenment that claims 'the neutral, scientific pursuit of truth by a disinterested scholars'. Secondly, contrary to the aim of historical criticism to recover the original meaning and intention of the author, the contemporary argument has been advanced that a text may have an implicit meaning going far beyond the author's intention that can only be understood by a later audience.<sup>19</sup> Thirdly, historical criticism does not produce adequate understanding of documents as literary wholes, since it concentrates on the pre-literary history of the text, and tends to ignore its post-history.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the critics put themselves into the past, and they criticise the past with their own historical perspective.<sup>21</sup>

There are many types of criticism that together make up the historical critical tradition peculiar to Biblical studies. *Textual criticism*, for example, seeks to establish an accurate text and has two purposes. The first is to reconstruct the original version of a book and the second is to interpret the documentary evidence of that book. The main concern of *Source criticism* is to determine the source that lies behind a particular text. Whereas both textual criticism and

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<sup>19</sup> Nations, Archiel, (1986) "Historical Criticism and the Current Methodological Crisis", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 39 pp. 61-62.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid: 62.

<sup>21</sup> Bryan, Christopher, ( 1992) "The Preachers and Critics; Thoughts on Historical Criticism", *ATR*. 74, pp. 37- 53.

source criticism look to the Bible as a written document, *Form criticism* considers that the Bible is an expression of human experience with its own oral preliterate period. Written in the language of human beings, the Bible is subject to the laws of the communication of human experience.<sup>22</sup> Biblical Criticism in the last century was preoccupied with the sources of the Gospels, chiefly the synoptic gospels. The centre of interest in Biblical criticism is moving from source criticism and form criticism to an examination of what happened at the final stage in the composition of the Gospels. *Redaction criticism* looks at the Gospel as complete documents and sees the individual comments of writers/authors/evangelists, their editorial links and summaries, and generally at the selection, modification and expansion of the material they use in order to discover how each writer understood, interpreted and edited the text.<sup>23</sup>

The common feature of above criticism is that they are the part of the historical criticism that promotes an author-based approach. However, twentieth century literary critical theories characteristically have rejected authorial control and has promoted the autonomy of the text and the role of the reader in the reading process. This is the second most crucial shift in the history of Biblical interpretation. Thus, in attempting to bring together two disciplines with a divergent aims, the pioneers of interdisciplinary approaches in Biblical studies have created a new way of interpretation of the Bible:

*Reading of the Bible from the Critical Methods of Formalism and New Criticism*

The critical movement known as Russian Formalism attempted to focus attention on the literary work itself and on the inseparability

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<sup>22</sup> Collins, Raymond F., (1983) *Introduction to the New Testament*, Garden City: Doubleday, p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> For further information see: Smalley, Stephen S., (1985) "Redaction Criticism", *New Testament Interpretation* by I. Howard Marshall, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, p. 181-182.

of form and content but not on the intention of the author or on the socio-historical conditions under which it was produced. The major work of the Russian formalists grew out of two groups of critics: the St. Petersburg Opozoy and the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The Opozoy group as its full title implies (*The Society for the Study of Poetic Language*) included Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Osip Brik and Yury Tynyanov. The Moscow Linguistic Circle was primarily linguists who were interested in extending the field of linguistics to cover poetic language and its best known member is Roman Jakobson.<sup>24</sup>

When this critical circle was suppressed by the Soviets in the early 1930s, the centre of the formalist study of literature moved to Czechoslovakia, and survived in the work of the Prague School. In the Czechoslovakia, they were, like those in Moscow, primarily linguists, and they did not significantly alter the basic groundwork of Formalist critical theory. In the 1940s both Roman Jakobson and Rene Wellek continued their influential work as professors at American Universities.<sup>25</sup>

Russian Formalism has had substantial influences on the linguistic developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, through Jakobson and Wellek's teaching and work in the United States, this theory had an explicitly influenced the Anglo American New Criticism. Secondly, Russian Formalism had a significant role in the development of Structuralism during the 1960s.

New Criticism emerged in the 1930s and played a dominant role in literary criticism until the end of the 1960s and began with I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot and was continued by John Crowe Ran-

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<sup>24</sup> For further information see: Jefferson, Ann and Robey, David, (1986 ) *Modern Literary Theory*, London: Batsford, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> For further information see: Abrams, M. H, (1993) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Fort worth, San Diego, Philadelphia, New York, Orlando, Austin, San Antonio, Montreal, Toronto, London, Sydney, Tokyo: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, sixth edition, p. 273.

som, W. K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks and Allen Tate. The foundations of the New Criticism were laid in books and essays written during the 1920s and 1930s by I. A. Richards (*Practical Criticism*, 1929), William Empson (*Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1930), and T. S. Eliot (*The Function of Criticism*, 1933). The movement did not have a name, however, until the appearance of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941, a work that loosely organized the principles of this basically linguistic approach to literature. Influenced by Russian Formalism, New Criticism was in part a reaction against the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century criticism and against the dominance of the traditional philological and historical critical study of literature. It treated the literary text as an independent object of its author and the social–historical context.<sup>26</sup>

New Critics treated a work of literature as a self-contained, self-referential text. Rather than basing their interpretations of a text on the reader's response, the author's stated intentions, or parallels between the text and historical contexts (such as the author's life), New Critics perform a close reading, concentrating on the language, and on the text. The most basic assumption of the New Criticism was that the meaning of a text is not equivalent to what the author intended when he wrote it. To get the meaning, for New Critics, the reader should engage in close analytical reading of the text itself. The New Critics not only insisted that the work was independent of the context of the author and also maintained that the work was independent of the reader.<sup>27</sup>

Amos Wilder and Nathan A. Scott are often credited with being pioneers to intertwine the literary criticism and Biblical studies as a distinct field of study. They especially appealed to New Criticism in dealing with the Biblical text. T. S. Eliot was crucial figure in development of the New Criticism and also the interdisciplinary

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<sup>26</sup> For further information see: Jefferson, Ann and Robey, David, *Ibid*: 73.

<sup>27</sup> May, Charles (1999) "Modern Literary Theory", *ELCC* p. 767 and Abrams, M. H., *Ibid*: 248.

work of Wilder and Scott. In his essay, "Religion and Literature", Eliot claimed that "literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical theological standpoint".<sup>28</sup>

As a matter of fact, Biblical studies has methodological similarities to New Criticism that promotes reading the Bible as a final corpus or canonical form of the text, which is *Canon Criticism*. Childs's approach insists that historical critical methods must be replaced by literary, synchronic analysis. Thus he employs techniques that are similar in some respect to New Criticism. Nevertheless Canon criticism and critical theories always have inhabited the same cultural environment, similarities might be possible.<sup>29</sup>

As we have seen, New Criticism treats a work of literature as a self-contained, self-referential artefact rather than basing their interpretations of a text on the reader's response, the author's stated intentions, or parallels between the text and historical contexts. The work of H. W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* illustrates the point. Frei purposes to find correct way to read the Biblical text not as a source of information but as narrative. In the discussion on Genesis 1-2, if we give an example, the chapters have been read some times as a historically accurate account of the creation and sometimes it has been suggested that they are not really historical account at all, but 'a way of saying' that God is creator. Frei in this discussion find both sides in the wrong. According to him, both sides make the mistake of supposing that Genesis must lie in the information whether historical or theological. In fact Genesis does not lie in 'information content' at all, but in narrative character.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For further information see: Mills, Kevin, (2001) "Literature and Theology", in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism volume 9 Twentieth- Century Historical, Philosophical Perspectives*. ed. by Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris Cambridge: University Press, p. 392.

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion see: John Barton, (1984) *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Studies*, London: D.L.T., pp. 140-154.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 159-164.

### *Structural Reading of the Bible*

Structuralism is an intellectual movement of which Emille Durkheim (1858-1917), the French anthropologist, and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the French speaking Swiss linguist are the central figures. Durkheim's work on 'primitive' religion and Saussure's on language directly anticipated the subsequent histories of the two academic disciplines which are directly linked with structuralism: Anthropology and Semiology.

Durkheim's major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, first published in 1915, takes as its theoretical objects first *knowledge* and secondly *religion*. In his treatment of *knowledge*, Durkheim clearly rejects the view that what we know is given by personal experience. Rather, he argues such human individual experiences are formed by and through systems of thought that are socially variable. He writes: "A concept is not my concept; I hold it in common with other men". In his treatment of religion, Durkheim introduces a further structuralist view. The "real characteristic of religious phenomena" he claims" is that they always suppose a bipartite division of the whole universe...into two classes which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other" The relation between two classes are, famously, those of the *sacred* and the *profane*. Sacred things are set apart, forbidden and defined only in relation to the profane that is not set apart and not forbidden. Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* was first published in 1916, only a year after *The Elementary Forms*. Its central thesis is that every language is an entirely separate system.<sup>31</sup>

In literary criticism, structuralism is also closely related to Formalism, as represented by both American New Criticism and Russian Formalism. The New Criticism and Russian Formalism, in short, promoted the view of literature as a system and a general

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<sup>31</sup> For further information see: Milner, Andrew, (1994) *Contemporary Cultural Theory*, London: U.C.L. Press, pp. 77-78.



linguistic approach to a text.<sup>32</sup> Structuralism emphasises that meaning is not a private experience but a product of certain shared systems of signification. Structuralism gets its motion from the methods of modern linguistics as developed by Saussure. Saussure's assertions about linguistic structuralism were that it can be summarised as several pronouncements in particular. Firstly, he emphasised that "language" should not be thought of simply as a crowd of words used for communication. Instead, language is made up of both individual utterances (Saussure called *Parole*) and the general system of language, which makes such individual utterances possible (Saussure called *Langue*). Individual utterance (*parole*) is also made up of two parts: *sound* and *concept*. Saussure calls these *signifier* and *signified*. The relationship between the two is purely *arbitrary* and conventional. Secondly, Saussure emphasise that the meaning of the words are *relational* that is to say; no word can be defined in isolation from other words. The definition of any given word depends upon its *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* relation<sup>33</sup> with other words.<sup>34</sup>

Structuralism has had a major influence on many different disciplines and schools of thought. The most important of the various schools of structuralism to be found in Europe in the first half of the 20th century have included the Prague school, and Roman Jakobson, who represents a kind of transition from Formalism to Structuralism. They elaborated the ideas of Formalism, but systematized them more firmly within the framework of Saussurean linguistics. With the work of the Prague school, the term "structuralism" comes to combine with the word "semiotics". Semiotics means the systematic

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<sup>32</sup> For further information see: Anderson, Gorton T. R. ( 1989 ) *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, London: Longman, p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Syntagmatic relation is in the sentences, whereas paradigmatic one is in the system of language.

<sup>34</sup> For further information see: Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, p. 42.

study of sign, and this what structuralists are really doing.<sup>35</sup>

Structuralism is not only about linguistic but also literary phenomena. The most notable attempt to use structuralism to apply to a signifying phenomenon other than a language was the effort of the French anthropologist Levi Strauss to understand myth. As a literary critic, anthropologist and semiologist, influenced by Saussure, Roland Barthes also attempted to analyse contemporary myths from the structural point of view. In his *Mythologies, Elements of Semiology* (1964) and *The Fashion System* (1967), elements of popular culture were examined.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of Biblical interpretation, structuralism has contributed most significantly to the understanding of narrative. As far as Biblical narrative is concerned, structural exegesis resemble either Propp's or Levi Strauss's methods.<sup>37</sup> Roland Barthes was one of the first to apply the method deriving from Propp to Biblical narrative. His essay entitled "The Struggle with Angels" was one of the most celebrated examples of structuralist literary criticism. In his earlier essay "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", Barthes asserted that all narratives obey a fundamental narrative grammar. In "The Struggle", Barthes attempted to test the implications of this grammatical approach in the context of Biblical narrative.

Whereas Barthes was influenced by Propp, Edmund Leach, the second important scholar, used the method deriving from Levi-Strauss in his *Genesis as Myth* (1969). Leach used Levi-Strauss' structural analysis of myth in order to highlight the permanent mythical structures behind Genesis. Leach asserted that myth has a binary and opposition structure. Gods and man, mortal and immortal,

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<sup>35</sup> For further information see: Terry Eagleton, (1996) *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> For further information see: Charles May, Ibid: 770.

<sup>37</sup> Stibbe, Mark, (1990) "Structuralism", *A Dictionary of the Biblical Interpretation* London: SCM Press, pp. 650-651.

male and female, good and bad are common to structural system of Genesis.<sup>38</sup> Structural analysis of the Bible has tended completely to ignore the historical and diachronic aspect of Biblical narratives. They, in fact, have neglected the referential dimension of historical narratives and the relationship between text and reality in the Bible.

Structuralism, on the other hand, allows the reader to see the Bible as a whole, rather than as a series of separate collections and compositions from different periods of history. In *The Great Code*, Northrop Frye, for example, discovers the unity within the structure of the Bible. From the beginning of the creation of the world and ending with its final transformation, the Bible, tells the story of Adam and Israel, using the recurring concrete images of city, mountain, river, garden, tree, bread, and wine.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Post-Structural Reading of the Bible***

Post-Structuralism refers generally to methods of inquiry generated by critics who have examined the social construction of "discourse" (language and other forms of representation) and the power arranged and social relationships organised through discourse. Post-structuralism, like structuralism, focuses on relationships among signs. However, while structuralists imply that a fixed relationship among signs can be discovered and then used as a basis for reliable understanding, post-structuralists suggest that relationships are contextual. That is, the relationships are never fixed or fully knowable.

In his *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*, Derrida challenges earlier philosophical notions of truth and objectivity. Derrida starts to inquire using the structuralist notion that meaning is made through relationships among signs. He remarks that the relationship-based meanings come from *logo-centrism* and therefore are not

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid: 652-653.

<sup>39</sup> Davies, Margaret, (1990) "Literary Criticism", *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* ed. by R. J. Coggins, London, p. 404.

stable.<sup>40</sup>

He alternatively suggests a *deconstructive* method to understand text. Jacques Derrida introduced his method in *De la Grammatologie* in 1967. Derrida's deconstructive methodologies, which take off from Ferdinand de Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness of the verbal sign, have subsequently established themselves as an important part of post-structural literary theory and text analysis. Deconstruction undermines "logo-centrism". It follows from this view that the "meaning" of a text bears only accidental relationship to the author's conscious intentions.<sup>41</sup>

Derrida also coined the expression "*there is nothing outside the text*". This does not, however, mean self-referential text itself as in Formalism or Structuralism. It means there is no 'world' outside the text at all. John Barton explains Derrida's saying as "everything there is, is characterised by textuality". All aspects of human culture, Barton suggests, are directly or indirectly 'texts' and everything that is signified is also a signifier, or in other words, a text reads me as I read the text: we are both caught up in the play of signification that is human life/textuality.<sup>42</sup>

The French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault is another important representative of the post-structuralist movement. He argues that language and society are shaped by rule-governed systems, and that it is impossible to step outside of *discourse*.<sup>43</sup>

The most important advocate of the poststructuralist and deconstructive Biblical studies is the works of Moor in his *Mark and Luke in Post-structuralist Perspective*<sup>44</sup> and *Post-structuralism and New*

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<sup>40</sup> For further information see: Donald E. Hall, (2001) *Literary and Cultural Theory*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, pp. 162 -163.

<sup>41</sup> For further information see: Williams Haney, (1999) "Jacques Derrida", *ELCC* p. 303 and Elizabeth Kuhlmann, (1999) "Deconstruction", *ELCC* pp. 296-297.

<sup>42</sup> John Barton, (1984) *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Studies*, pp. 221.

<sup>43</sup> Stuewe, Paul, (1999) "Michel Foucault", *ELCC* p. 395.

<sup>44</sup> S. D. Moor, (1992) *Mark and Luke in Post-structuralist Perspective*, New Haven and London.

*Testament*<sup>45</sup> and in Seeley's *Deconstructing the New Testament*<sup>46</sup>. Post-structuralist approaches to the Bible are well illustrated in succeeding applications.

### ***Reception Hermeneutics and Reader-Response Critical Reading of the Bible***

Reader Response criticism is a reaction against New Criticism and other Formalism which placed emphasis on the text: and also against historical and author-intention based approaches. Because of the rejection of the significance of the human originator of the work, structuralism is also criticized. The term 'reader response criticism' refers to how readers respond to a text. Reader response criticism developed mainly during the 1970s and 1980s when the post structuralists, such as Barthes announced *the death of author*.<sup>47</sup>

This critical theory argues that a word in any literature does not elicit an identical response in two different readers. The word "rose", for example given by Thomas Barry,<sup>48</sup> "in a dictionary has a botanical meaning; but in a poem or in a love-letter has an emotional meaning and this emotion will probably be different for every reader." So if no readers will respond in same ways to a word, it is not possible, for them, to construct a framework of responses or understanding of literature.

Reader response theory has been elaborated by Wolfgang Iser<sup>49</sup> and Stanly Fish<sup>50</sup>. The basic distinction between what the text provides and how the reader *actualises* or *realises* this are the main

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<sup>45</sup> S. D. Moor, (1994) *Post-structuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>46</sup> D. Seeley, (1994) *Deconstructing the New Testament*, Leiden: Brill.

<sup>47</sup> For further information see: A. W. Lyle, (1999) "Reader Response Criticism", *ELCC* p. 920.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*: 921.

<sup>49</sup> Iser, Wolfgang, (1974) *The Implied Reader*, Baltimore; (1978) *The Act of Reading*, London,

<sup>50</sup> Fish, Stanley, (1980) *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge.

issues of Iser's approach. This is the most important concern in reader response theory. Another crucial dimension lies in the distinction between *schematised aspect* and *virtuality*. The first refers to certain aspects of the text which guide the reader to the perception of predetermined structural patterns, elements of plot, of character or location. The second, virtuality, on the other hand refers to the uncertain dimension with individual subjectivity of the reader. However, subjectivity must be restrained and limited. This is linguistic, historical, common knowledge that the reader brings to the text to enable actualisation and realisation.<sup>51</sup>

Reader-Response and Reception Criticism have been developed with theoretical works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Jauss regards the process of reception in the past as highlighting how texts are received in any age and hence also in our own. Iser uses Reader response criticism to read contemporary textual reception. Iser's theory centres on the existence of gaps in the text. There are all the places where the reader has to supply the links between episodes, passages, paragraphs, or other units of text to invent in his own mind of assumption and convention. The reader is not as in structuralism, trying to establish how the text scientifically works. The reader will read the text within the context of expectations. The reader is not passive but active and constructive. In the context of Biblical interpretation, Reader response criticism suggests that to understand, the reader can begin to fill in the gaps because literature in the Bible does not simply tell us all about the past age or its social conditions, but allows us to experience them.<sup>52</sup>

As an example in Biblical interpretation, John Barton attempts a sample of reader response criticism on Eccles 8. Verses 10-13 speaks of god's coming destruction of the wicked and his reward for the righteous: 'though a sinner does evil a hundred times and

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<sup>51</sup> For further information see; A. W. Lyle, Ibid: 921.

<sup>52</sup> Davies, Margaret, (1990) "Reader-Response Criticism", *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* ed. by R. J. Coggins, London, p. 578.

prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God...but it will not be well with the wicked'. Verses 14-15, on the other hand note that 'there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous'; and accordingly the author commends enjoyment, 'for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat, and drink, and enjoy himself. Finally verses 16-17 argue that it is impossible to find out the work of God 'that is done under the sun. According to Barton, the gaps are understood from different perspectives. "Source critics", for instance, "would use it to argue that the book was originally composite"; "form critics" on the other hand, "would examine the oral history of each of the units"; or structuralism considers it part of the whole literature. But the Reader response critic, Barton suggests, would differ from them all in not seeing the book's inconsistencies as a problem in any case. "The text is a kind of exercise for the reader, who has to interpret it as coherent in spite of its gaps."<sup>53</sup> Barton continues:

In Eccles. 8 we might attempt a reader-response interpretation as follows. There appear to be gaps between the three pericopes analysed above, which make mutually incompatible points about human life and destiny. As competent readers, however, we can extract from this confusion (whether we call it apparent or real does not much matter) a coherent 'message', by looking for a larger context of our own in which all three sections would make sense. We live as people with a commitment to doing 'good', whatever exactly that means, and we need to do good *as though* God, the universe, or whatever we choose to call it favours well-doing over ill-doing. We cannot think of the difference between good and evil as a matter of mere indifference. At the same time, we may well be sceptical about the real ultimate destiny of mankind, for we know that 'all go to the same place', and we do *not* know whether there is more to be said, or whether death is absolutely the end. And for living our life, the best rec-

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<sup>53</sup> John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 214-215.

ipe is to live as though morality made a difference, while acknowledging that we do not know whether this is really so or not, and to accept the mysteriousness of the moral and metaphysical order, for 'even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out'.

It is the nature of the Reader Response criticism to concentrate on the text which has gaps in its argument and failures in connection between sections. But this makes this criticism sound like a technique for handling this kind of difficult text. Reader response criticism also promotes not what meanings we ought to find in obscure texts, but how we find meaning in any texts and how we remove our naive assumption that our reading is dictated by the text we read.<sup>54</sup>

### *Reading the Bible from the Perspective of Liberation Theology*

Liberation Theology is a movement centred in Latin America that seeks to apply religious faith by aiding the poor and oppressed through involvement in political and civic affairs. Liberation theologians believed that God speaks particularly through the poor and that the Bible can be understood only when seen from the perspective of the poor. The birth of the Liberation Theology movement is usually dated to the second *Latin American Bishops' Conference*, which was held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968. At this conference the attending bishops issued a document affirming the rights of the poor and asserting that industrialized nations enriched themselves at the expense of Third World countries.

Gustavo Gutiérrez<sup>55</sup>, a Peruvian priest and theologian wrote the movement's seminal text, *A Theology of Liberation*. Other leaders of the movement included Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador, Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and

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<sup>54</sup> See further information; John Barton, Ibid: 180-219.

<sup>55</sup> Gutierrez, G., (1983) *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM; (1983) *The Power of the Poor in History*, London: SCM; (1990) *The Truth Shall Make you Free*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis; (1984) *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis.



Archbishop Helder Câmara of Brazil.

In the course of the development of Liberation Theology, there has been some contribution from different theoretical circles. The different approaches which promote equality of race and gender are grouped together under Liberation Theology. The use of a Marxist analysis of social reality as a frame of reference for reading the Bible, for example, is considered.

For the liberation theologians, the church must support poor people as they demand justice. The liberationist, however, do not call for the creation of divisions in society into a wealthy elite and poor majority. They advocate class and church struggle.

Liberation Theology has not only different contents, but also has different methodology as a literary critical theory. This differences declared by a liberationist, Per Frostin in a work:

The theologies from Europe and North America are dominant today in our churches and represent one form of cultural domination. They must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must not be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the gospel and to our peoples, reflect on the realities of our own situations and interpret the word of God in relation to these realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World.<sup>56</sup>

This quotation demonstrates two crucial points about Liberation Theology. First, in this theology there is a focus on epistemology. Second, in this new methodology the experience of oppression and of the struggle for liberation are fundamental. The opening phrases of one of the first reflections on liberation theologies, Gus-

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<sup>56</sup> Torres, S. and V. Fabella (eds), (1978) *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History*, Maryknoll, Newyork: Orbis, p. 269.

tavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation*, emphasises the role of experience as the starting point for theological reflection.

In their emphasis on epistemology and the experience of oppression in the struggle for liberation and life, liberation theologies ask a question not usually asked in Western theology: who are the interlocutors of theology? Or, who are asking the questions that theologians try to answer? Liberation theology not only poses this question, it also gives a specific answer: the poor and marginalized.

The Bible is one of the basic sources of liberation theology. This is certainly the case in South African and African American black theology, and Latin American liberation theology. The Bible is read as a narrative of liberation. For the poor and oppressed people, in particular, the Bible is not only a strategic tool for liberation but also the source of God's liberation project. God, according to Liberation Theology, is on the side of those who are oppressed in society. In the Old Testament, God takes side with the exploited against pharaohs and removes the Jews from Egyptian oppression. Similarly, in the New Testament Jesus regards the poor and oppressed people as the main addressees of his message. In this attempt to understand the meaning of the Biblical message, there is a hermeneutical circle, a dialectical relationship between the poor and the world.<sup>57</sup>

However, in the well-known anecdote<sup>58</sup>, it is illustrated that the Bible occupies a central position in the process of oppression and exploitation as follows: "when the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible... and we got the better deal". This anecdote also illustrates that the oppressor and the oppressed people had been sharing

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<sup>57</sup> Sherbok, Dan Cohn, (1990) "Liberation Theology", *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* ed. 1 by R. J. Coggins, London, pp. 396-397.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted from: West, Gerald, (2002) "The Bible and The Poor", *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, Cambridge: University Press, p. 131.

the same Bible and the same faith. The main distinction between them is the experience of oppression in the struggle for liberation.

### *Feminist Reading of the Bible*

Feminist Criticism developed from the women's movement in Europe and North America in the 1960s. First wave of feminism, which began around 1860, tackled certain human rights, such as the right to education and to vote.<sup>59</sup> Feminist criticism is thankful to first wave of feminism, but the main forward motion comes from the women's liberation movements and post-structuralism. The second wave of feminism, the post-structuralist period, is characterised by the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Derrida, and Foucault. Especially Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*<sup>60</sup>, stimulated debates on the female subjects.<sup>61</sup>

Feminism in this century has naturally turned its attention to literary criticism. It is impossible to isolate feminist cultural theory from feminist literary criticism. Feminist literary criticism is an approach, which emphasises the ways in which discrimination against women is obvious and it can be restricted by the feminist perspective. Feminist literary criticism, after 1960s, argues that the established canon of literary works in Western culture was developed and maintained by males and therefore needed to be expanded to include valuable ignored works by female writers.<sup>62</sup>

In England Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* focused on some of the problems specific to the woman writer. She insisted that the lack of a 'room of one's own' and the kind of financial and social independence it represented put a brake on women's ambitions in literature. She felt that literary forms had been suffered by

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<sup>59</sup> Liladhar, Janine (1999) "Feminist Criticism", *ELCC* p. 377.

<sup>60</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, (1972) *The Second Sex*, tr. H. M. Parshley, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

<sup>61</sup> Bronwen, Martin, (1999) "French Literary Theory: Twentieth Century", *ELCC* p. 404.

<sup>62</sup> For further information see; Charles May, *Ibid*: 774.

centuries of masculine writing into something unsuitable for women.<sup>63</sup>

Feminist criticism generally seeks change for the better in terms of justice for women and tries to remove the *androcentrism*, which defines males and their experiences as the normal and neutral criterion and females and their experiences as a variation on or even deviation from that standard.<sup>64</sup> Feminist Criticism of the Bible started in the nineteenth century with the appearance of *The Women's Bible* (1890) as a result of pioneering work of Elizabeth Candy Stanton. Social and political progress, Elizabeth Candy Stanton believed, would never occur without an equivalent liberation for women from dominant and oppressive scriptural images.<sup>65</sup>

It was only after the 1960s that feminist studies really appeared on the scene. Mary Daly restarted the feminist criticism to the Biblical Interpretation in its new shape with a publication *The Church and the Second Sex* which was soon followed by numerous publications.<sup>66</sup>

Feminist criticism of the Bible offers an alternative assessment of the Biblical text as seen through the eyes and experience of women readers. Many feminist theologians have thought that the misogynist attitudes towards women have their roots in the history of Biblical interpretation rather than in the Biblical text itself. In Biblical exegesis, there is a tendency, in interpreting the creation of humans in Genesis, the church fathers mostly blamed the first woman for the estrangement between God and humanity so that Eve became the source and sign of original sin. Biblical material concerning women was either marginalized or interpreted in this context. This criticism is therefore focusing on women and the gen-

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<sup>63</sup> Blamires, Harry, (1991) *A History of Literary Criticism*, London: MacMillan, p. 374.

<sup>64</sup> Loades, Ann, (1998) "Feminist Interpretation", *The Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by John Barton Cambridge: University Press. pp. 81-82.

<sup>65</sup> Sawyer, Deborah F., (1990) "Feminist Interpretation", *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by R. J. Coggins, London, p. 231.

<sup>66</sup> Nortje, S. J., (1991) "Feminism", *Text and Interpretation* by P. J. Hartin and J. H. Peter, Leiden, New York, Kobenhavn, Koln: E.J. Brill, p. 272.

der symbolism of the Bible and the impact of gender on interpretation.

However, there are two main trends in feminist interpretation: the Radical tends to reject the Bible and Christianity in favour of alternative, essentially feminine religious experience. The most famous example of a radical feminist theologian is Mary Daly. In her first book, written as a member of the Roman Catholic Church, *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), she examined the Church's oppression of woman. Daly was critical of the Church. She was in the hope for the liberation of women. Mary Daly became increasingly radical. She began to move outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church to express her changing theology. In 1973, her second book *Beyond God the Father* was published. Mary Daly feels that Christianity is a male structure designed by men for men. According to her, 'patriarchy' is simply 'father-rule', that is, the perspective of some powerful males over some other males and over most women and children. She argues against this as follows: "When God is male, the male is God".<sup>67</sup>

The Reformist whilst rejecting most Christian tradition about woman sees the Bible as the means of reconstructing a positive Christian theology for woman. The best-known reformist Biblical scholars are Rosemary Radford Ruether, Phyllis Trible, and Elisabeth Shussler Fiorenza. They attempt to go directly to the Biblical text rather than the historical commentaries and traditions.<sup>68</sup>

In her work *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, (London 1978), Phyllis Trible applied rhetorical criticism. She describes this method as both scholarly and intuitive. She applied this methodology to the story of Eve in Genesis and she discovers that Adam and Eve were co-operative and sharing in both sin and punishment. The woman of the story is a 'helper'. She 'corresponds' to the man in full

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<sup>67</sup> Deborah F. Sawyer, *ibid*: 232.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*: 232.

companionship. Thus Phyllis Treble finds meaning within these and other Biblical texts to help restart renewed relationships between women and men.<sup>69</sup>

In the 1980s, in feminism as in other critical approaches, the mood changed. Firstly, feminist criticism became more eclectic (Marxism, structuralism, linguistics and so on). Secondly, it switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience. Thirdly, attention was switched to the need to construct a new canon of women's writing by rewriting the history of the novel and of poetry in such a way that neglected women writers were given new status.<sup>70</sup>

In 1983, with her *In Memory of Her, a Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza contributes to feminist interpretation of the New Testament. She argues that revelation and authority are found in the lives of poor and oppressed woman. This idea seems to be taken from liberation theology. For her, early Christian history needs methodical reconstruction as women's history, and the Biblical text is by no means related with human reality and history. She rejects, therefore, not only patriarchal violence against and subordination of women but also the near-eradication of women from historical and theological consciousness.<sup>71</sup>

### *New Historicism and the Bible*

The American critic Stephen Greenblatt coined the term '*new historicism*'. Most critics refer to the 1980s as the beginning of New Historicism as a theory and literary critical practice. *New Historicism* is a method based on the parallel reading of *literary* and *non-literary*

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid: 233.

<sup>70</sup> Barry, Peter, *ibid*: 123.

<sup>71</sup> Loades, Ann, *ibid*: 89.

texts, usually of the same historical period. That is to say, New Historicism refuses to give priority to the literary text: instead of a literary 'foreground' and a historical 'background' it advocates and practises a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal credibility.<sup>72</sup> H. Aram Veeseer cited from Louis A. Montrose saying 'the historicity of texts and textuality of history'<sup>73</sup>

*New Historicism*, for Robert P. Carroll, "is a turn away from theory and a movement in the direction of culture, history, politics, society and institutions as the social contexts of the production of texts"<sup>74</sup>.

For *New Historicism*, the historical documents are not subordinated as contexts, but are analysed in their own right, Peter Barry<sup>75</sup> calls them 'co-texts' rather than 'contexts'. The text and co-text used will be seen as expressions of the same historical 'moment', and interpreted accordingly. New historicism expends most of its energies on identifying and exposing different historical documents, including books, penal document, journal entries and travel narratives, as well as canonical literary text.

Two theologians, *Gordon Kaufman* and *Mark C. Taylor*, have extended the implications of new historicism to Biblical studies. Kaufman's 1981 *The Theological Imagination and Theology for a Nuclear Age* and Taylor's 1982 *Deconstructing Theology* and 1984 *Erring: A Post-Modern A Theology*. For both Kaufman and Taylor, theology is a historical discipline in the sense that it builds itself entirely within history and out of a history of thought.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For further information see: Peter Barry, Ibid: 172.

<sup>73</sup> Veeseer, H. Aram, (1989) *The New Historicism*, London: Routledge, p. 20.

<sup>74</sup> Carroll, Robert P. (1998) "Poststructuralist Approaches New Historicism and Postmodernism", in *The Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. ed. by Barton, John Cambridge: University Press, p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> Barry, Peter, Ibid: 173.

<sup>76</sup> Dean, William, (1988) *History Making History: the New Historicism in American Religious Thought*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 15.

William Dean says<sup>77</sup>:

A new historicist theology would apply the interpretive imagination to a particular religious history. Here the Christian theologian would look not just at any religious history, but also at the history of Christian scriptures, institutions, and thought. And the Christian theologian would look at that history not from an isolated interpretive standpoint, but from a standpoint in conversation with other Christian standpoints also naturally concerned with that religious history. The same conditions would apply to a Hebrew, a Native American, a Buddhist, or other religious thinker...

Since the 1970s, there have been some critical approaches to the Biblical text and archaeological materials. The first new historicist approach to the writing of such histories appeared in Thomas L. Thompson's book on the so-called patriarchs: *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: the Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin 1974) and *Early History of the Israelite People: from the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden 1992). There are a lot of books that contribute to laying the foundations of a New Historicist approach to reading the Bible. For example, Neels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society Before the Monarchy and ancient Israel: a new History of Israelite society* (Leiden 1985) and John Van Seters *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven and London 1975) and *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven and London 1983).<sup>78</sup>

In these works, the Biblical narratives have been read as textual productions of period. The Bible is now seen as the construction of writing in the Persian or Greek period. The New Historians would challenge the belief in an ancient Israelite domination of truth in the representation of its own history and they would seek to correct this mistaken belief by introducing a balancing focus on what is left out

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 17.

<sup>78</sup> Carroll Robert P, (1988) Ibid: p. 53.



of the Biblical text, what is silenced by it and also on what the material remains may be said to indicate in relation to that text.<sup>79</sup>

New Historicist approaches to the Bible seek to redress history in favour of the silenced and repressed of history. For example, Whitelam says in his *The Invention of Ancient Israel* (p. 220; cited from Carroll): "Palestinian history has been silenced by an entity which in literary terms is entirely small". It is for him a form of 'retrojective imperialism', which collaborates in the Palestinians' lack of their own ancient history.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Impact Of Western Critical Approaches To Qur'anic Studies**

#### ***The First Challenge: Modernist Reading of the Qur'an***

The tradition of Qur'anic studies since the first century of Islam has employed several interpretative methods. Until the 19th century, Arabic grammar, Muslim law (*shari'ah*), as well as traditions of the Prophet and his contemporaries (*Hadith*), and the Prophet's 'biography' (*sirah*) were the tools for Qur'anic studies. Modern Qur'anic studies traced back to the 19th century attempt to liberate Qur'anic studies from *Taqlid*, which centred on an unquestioned acceptance of the traditional understanding of Qur'an, and to turn their attention to contemporary world affairs. However, modern interpretation of the Qur'an since the beginning of nineteenth century has been under the influence of Western thought. In the light of the new Western perspective, extra-Qur'anic materials, primitive ideas, stories, magic, fables and superstition should be removed and the Qur'an must be understood using Western scientific tools. Modern Qur'anic studies can be understood as a sharp break in the traditional history of Muslim interpretation.

There has been a pronounced need to re-interpret the Qur'an in the Modern period. A crisis descended upon Islam in the encounter

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid: 54-55.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 55.

with the enlightened and more or less secularized Europe of the 19th century. The Islamic world faced both a physical and an ideological challenge. During that period Muslims no longer ruled their lands; European colonialism encroached progressively on the Islamic world. The modern exegesis of the Qur'an began, not due to academic problems, but to contemporary world affairs. It is notable that modern interpretation of the Qur'an since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been under the influence of Western thought. The impact of Western science has been, Rippin maintains,<sup>81</sup> "the major factor in creating new demands and also the element of contemporary life to which much early modern *tafsir* made its response." The Qur'an has always been regarded as one of the sources of Islam. But in the modern period of Islamic intellectualism that promotes the notion of the reinterpretation of Islam as the result of Western influences, the Qur'an is the only source in reference to the new development.<sup>82</sup> Muhammad Abduh, for instance, presents the Qur'an in a practical manner to a wide public, wider than the professional Islamic theologians, to show that the Qur'an has solutions for the urgent problems of the day. His concern was,

To liberate [exegesis] from the shackles of Taqlid, to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh them in the scales of human reason, which God has created, in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion, so that God's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human world preserved...<sup>83</sup>

With the increasingly literate public demanding answers to current problems, which the traditional commentaries did not deal with, Abduh's commentary inevitably was the main representative of modernist *tafsir* along with Indian Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Both of them were impressed by the intellectualism of Enlightenment

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<sup>81</sup> Rippin, A., "Tafsir", *ER* ed. by Mircea Eliade, p. 242

<sup>82</sup> See further information about western impact on modern Muslim interpretation: Rippin, A., "Tafsir", pp. 242-3.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted from: Hourani, (1988) *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age (1798-1939)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 141.

and by the political dominance of western civilisation in the colonial age. On this basis, they adopted a rasyonalistik approach to the study of the Qur'an.<sup>84</sup>

Because of the influence of Western technology and culture, 19th and 20th century Muslim exegetes were forced to focus, as Jansen points out, on three aspects of interpretation:

- *Scientific exegesis (tafsir 'ilmi)* seeks to draw all possible fields of human knowledge into the interpretation of the Qur'an; to find in the Qur'an that which has been discovered by the sciences of the 19th and 20th centuries. They looked for scientific evidence within the Qur'an, and sought to find parallels within contemporary Western sciences.

- *Philological exegesis* is the science of discovering what words in the Qur'an meant in the past, and what the author/God intended them to mean. In the philological genre, the *author intention* principle (*maqasid*) was only used by Muslims when trying to derive what those in Meccan and the Medinan period had meant. Amin al-Khuli got around the grammatical problems by maintaining that the Qur'an came to humanity in an Arab costume, and therefore in order to understand it we should know as much as possible about the Arabs of that time. He advocated a historical-critical study of the Qur'an; suggesting one should first study the history, society, and language of the people to whom it was addressed, and only then interpret the Qur'anic verses in the light of these studies.<sup>85</sup>

- *Practical exegesis* deals with seeking to implement the Qur'an in everyday life. Practical exegesis became an exercise in explaining to what degree one should tolerate Western influence on secular and religious life. Muhammad 'Abduh was a good example of how

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<sup>84</sup> For further information on both two scholars see: Wielandt, Rotraud, (2002) "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary". *EQ* p.126-129.

<sup>85</sup> Jansen, J. J. G., *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*. Leiden, E.J.Brill, p. 66.

one could apply a practical interpretation of the Qur'an in the world of his day. He believed that Islam not only had all the answers for humanity, but could also adopt, through *reason* and *Ijtihad*, those discoveries which were being evidenced within European and Western culture, providing a proper set of laws were enforced by a just Islamic power. There will always be a need to interpret the Qur'an for today, to explain how and where we can take its precepts and apply them to our lives.

### *Critical Readings of the Qur'an: Contemporary Applications*

In parallel to modern developments in Muslim countries, Islamic intellectualism had continued systematic attempts to reinterpret the Qur'an in the *twentieth century* in ways which reflect the realities of modern Muslim intellectualism and politics. In this period Muslim societies have experienced significant transformations. Under Western influence Muslim countries followed a path of Westernisation and secularisation as they increasingly adapted Western norms and models in politics, law and education. In the light of Western values e.g. democracy, social justice, freedom, gender and race equality, tolerance, human rights etc, the political and social spheres need re-interpretation. Since 1980, new paradigms have been intensively debated throughout the Islamic world. As a part of the academic and intellectual interaction with the West a new kind of intellectual group has emerged. These scholars are similar to and probably inspired by their Western counterparts, whom we have evaluated in the two previous chapters. These scholars have adapted *critical theories* and *methods* as new hermeneutical models of understanding the Qur'an. Their aim is to re-read the Qur'an in the light of modern textual and philosophical disciplines, such as literary criticism, epistemology, hermeneutics, structuralism and post-structuralism and to re-read the Qur'an asking the question, not what, but how do we interpret.

Parallel to the efforts by non-Muslim textual scholars to establish the critical reading of the Qur'an. Muslim intellectuals namely, Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Farid Esack, Fatima Mernissi, and Abdul-Karim Soroush, are pioneering scholars in this process. They begin with an acceptance of the authority of Western models. Their ambition is to adapt forms of literary criticism and Biblical experience to the case of the Qur'an.

Fazlur Rahman, Abu Zayd and Farid Esack in this regard, employs a particular mode of analysis focusing on sociological and historical reconstructions of the society behind the Qur'anic text. They employ the historical critical methodology for the discovery of the 'original' meaning to reconstruct the historical context of the revelation-event and to compare it with the context of contemporary readers of the Qur'ān. Having stressed - by revitalizing the *Asbāb an-Nuzūl* and *Naskh wa-Mansūkh* -the 'situational character'<sup>86</sup> and the 'progressive nature'<sup>87</sup> of the revelation process, whereby revelation takes place in a particular social situation and whereby it keeps up with the changing conditions of the Prophet's environment. They pay more attention to the historical development of interpretation of the Qur'an and to the process which serves to establish how the Qur'an takes meanings in the historical context. This then leads to contemporary context. That is to say historical focus on the Qur'an and the history of Qur'anic interpretation in contemporary times is in order to demonstrate the fact that there is a contextual gap between the contemporary reader and the historical context. According to them, Muslims should read the Qur'an in the light of today's necessities with today's categories. In the case of Arkoun and Soroush, on the other hand, the necessities and categories are composed of the totality of the human sciences, namely anthropology, history of religions, semiotics in contemporary philoso-

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<sup>86</sup> The term was coined by Fazlur Rahman in *Islamic Methodology in History*, Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute 1965, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Farid Esack, (1997) *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism*, Oxford: Oneworld, p.60.

phy and epistemology. In the case of Farid Esack, today's necessities address more specifically South African readers. Farid Esack proposes a methodology which sets out the process of interpreting how different individuals and groups have appropriated the text, and he explains this through his insights into reception hermeneutics. As reception hermeneutics asserts, Esack claims, interpretation and meaning are always partial, and every interpreter enters the process of interpretation with some pre-understanding of the questions addressed by the text, and brings with him certain conceptions as presuppositions of his exegesis.<sup>88</sup> The contexts of South Africa which engaged Esack, such as liberation injustice, division and exploitation, are employed in his approaches to the Qur'an. According to Esack, in South Africa liberation means liberation from all forms of exploitation, including those of race, gender, class and religion. Esack defines a number of hermeneutical keys and their employment within a context of oppression in South Africa. Esack reinterprets them as the basis of a Qur'anic theology of religious pluralism. The same way of reading emerges from the writings of Fatima Mernissi who actually employs a particular mode of analysis, namely feminist criticism. This critical reading focuses on sociological and historical reconstructions of the androcentric society behind the text.<sup>89</sup>

Fazlur Rahman, Abu Zayd, and Arkoun, on the other hand discover that contemporary Islamic thought must be critically rethought in the light of contemporary social and intellectual realities. For this aim, the first step they made is to accept that the Qur'anic revelation and its traditional understanding is historical not universal. According to them, the traditional perception of the Qur'an as a universal scripture caused scholars to ignore different historical socio-political contexts and eventually destroyed historical thinking (historicism) as an analytical tool for

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<sup>88</sup> Esack, F., *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism*, p. 51.

<sup>89</sup> Woodhull, W., (1993) "Feminism and Islamic Tradition", *STCL*, 17, p. 27.

understanding the Qur'an. However, they do not follow the method of historical reading on *genetic questions* about the Qur'anic text. They are not interested in the original sources of the books but rather the final product, *mushaf*. It would be parallel to the challenge of historical-critical scholarship through the emergence of structuralist methods in literary theory. Since Qur'anic hermeneutics turned towards the direction of scripturalistic reading of the Qur'an. In this regard, Muhammed Arkoun's works are the most crucial examples. Arkoun generally suggests Saussurean linguistics i.e. *Structuralism* as a critical method that is applicable to the Qur'an, instead of philology as used by the classicists. He gives Izutsu as an example who has already applied part of structural reading: semantics.<sup>90</sup> According to structuralism, Arkoun asserts that meaning in the Qur'an is not in the sentences or verbs but in the system of relationships in the Qur'an.<sup>91</sup> This would enable the reader, according to Arkoun, to see that the Qur'an is a whole. This, in turn, will open the way for new readings.<sup>92</sup> Arkoun starts with the linguistics elements, the verbal system, and, finally the syntagmatic structures. For Arkoun, the construction known as *Idafa* in Arabic grammar makes it possible to underline a close relationship between the syntax and the meaning. He believes that classical scholars, such as al-Radi, did not really appreciate the philological value of *'alamin*. To him this word is Syriac and Aramaic in origin. This explanation, as he admits, belongs to his friend, G. Troupeau. This etymological approach is quite typical of traditional orientalism and as a matter of fact it contradicts Arkoun's structuralist approach. Here Arkoun charges classical scholars with giving too much credit to the etymological approach

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<sup>90</sup> Izutsu, Toshihiko, (1964) *God and Man in the Koran: A Semantical Analysis of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, Tokyo.

<sup>91</sup> Arkoun, M, *Lectures du Coran*. Paris : Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982; 2nd ed. Tunis: Alif, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid: 44.

and forgetting the whole structure of the Qur'an. He too knowingly or unknowingly does the same.

A Turkish revivalist scholar, Yasar Nuri Ozturk's reading the Qur'an may represent the formalist approach, which is the focus on the text as it stands without taking into considerations its historical origins and the historical context of its interpretations. Having performed a close reading, concentrating on the language, the text and the relationships within the text that give it its own distinctive character or form, Yasar Nuri Ozturk, for instance, treats, as also new critics do, the Qur'an as a self-contained, self-referential source in reference to new developments. Ozturk emphasises a project, namely "Reconstruction: Returning to Qur'an" (*Yeniden Yapılanmak: Kur'an'a Dönüş*).<sup>93</sup> The method of returning to the Qur'an would seem to eliminate any reference to tradition. One of the most important examples of returning to the Qur'an is that of the Islamic state model, according to Ozturk. He believes that true Islamic belief and practice as in the Qur'an was corrupted during the Umayyad period. The system of government was changed to a monarchy in this period. He says there is no specific model of government advocated by the Qur'an. For Ozturk, a theocratic state is not suggested in the Qur'an because only the prophet can govern this kind of state. The only principle stated in the Qur'an is the *shura* which is equal to democracy in modern terms.<sup>94</sup> Having accepted flexibility in the manifestation of the divine, he reinterprets the revelation according to the reader's own social, cultural and intellectual background. Ozturk reinterprets the Qur'an, and contextualises it according to Turkish concerns. Ozturk, as a first step, turns to the past to "rediscover" Qur'anic principles and values that could be employed in contextuality as an alternative Islamic model for modern Muslim/Turkish society. This results in

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<sup>93</sup> Echoing the work of Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* Yasar Nuri Ozturk emphasises Reconstruction of Religious life.

<sup>94</sup> Ozturk, Y. Nuri, (2000) *Yeniden Yapılanma*, Istanbul: Yeni Boyut, 15<sup>th</sup> edition pp. 97-188.



the discovery of Islamic versions of democracy, parliamentary government, and secularism through critical interpretation, so that Islamic belief could be used to develop an Islamic equivalent to contemporary concepts and institutions. Thus, for example, Ozturk concludes that because of the centrality of such beliefs as the equality and brotherhood of believers, democracy and even secularism is the most important political ideal of Islam

If we look at Ozturk's contribution to the critical interpretation of the Qur'an we realize that Ozturk is one among the many contemporary Muslim intellectuals who want to write a harsh criticism of the current Islamist discourse. Like other critics, Ozturk criticizes the dominant mentality of Muslims. He emphasises the contradiction between Qur'anic discourse which is sometimes known as *real Islam* (gerçek İslam), or *Qur'anic Islam* (Kur'an'daki İslam) and traditional Islamist discourse which is called *fabricated Islam* (uydurma İslam) or *traditional Islam* (geleneksel İslam). He criticises the irrational, dogmatic and unquestioning character of Islamic tradition, the apologetic and fanatical ideology of political Islamism and the contemporary Muslims' unconstructive attitude to social reality and religious flexibility and adaptability.

Yasar Nuri Ozturk, moreover, believes that true Islamic belief and the practice of the Qur'an was corrupted during political debates in the early Islamic states and that Hadith production and social corruption also affected the formation of new (but not authentic) religious discourse.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, it became a conflict between *true Islam* (gerçek İslam) and *fake Islam; revealed Islam* (vahyedilmiş İslam) and *fabricated Islam* (uydurulmuş İslam). Therefore, the task of critical interpreters, according to Ozturk, is to clean out the extra Qur'anic materials from intellectual and also religious life.

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<sup>95</sup> Ozturk, (2000) Ibid: 17-40.

However, the critical reading of the Qur'an and historisezing religious discourse by stressing the close relationship between history and text, Ozturk wants to go one step further and to approach the Qur'an accordance to modern culture, history, politics, society and institutions which constitute the social context of the reader. This model implies, of course, that the Qur'anic text has intrinsic relationship between reader and text. Ozturk, as seen, turns away from Qur'an/text-based critical reading to the direction of modern Turkish culture, history, politics, society and institutions as the social context of readers of the text. He usually underlines Turkish contexts, westernised values, i.e. democracy, human and women's rights, Turkish national considerations, i.e. Turkish language in prayer, and finally the secular mode of Turkey.

### **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to evaluate the application of contemporary Western critical methods to the study of the Bible and the Qur'an. To do this, we have first taken into consideration the theoretical definitions, types and substance of contemporary critical theories and then carried out a detailed investigation of applications. The starting point was to present twentieth century critical theories with a special focus on literary studies. It has been concluded that literary criticism in the twentieth century has become more text-based and reader-centred and less author-based that it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then, Biblical and Qur'anic studies were discussed in the light of this contemporary literary criticism. Both areas of textual studies were clearly affected by a new approach to the sacred text through new paradigms of literary studies. Also, a number of theological discourses were culturally interwoven with literary criticism in Christian and Muslim debates in particular during the second half of the twentieth century.

In the study we first evaluated the case of modern Biblical studies whose roots can be traced back to the Enlightenment and

Reformation. We find that literary criticism in the twentieth century did indeed influence the reading of sacred texts in Christianity. For this regard, Biblical Studies first attempt to liberate Biblical interpretation from dogma which centred on an unquestioned acceptance of the Judeo-Christian understanding of God and to turn their attention to the modern thought, in particular, *historicism*. Historicism, built on the eighteenth-century rationalist attacks upon Christianity causes a sharp break in the traditional history of interpretation. The prime task of criticism was the issue of the origins of the Bible. Because of its concern for (historical) origins, Biblical criticism eventually accommodated the term 'historical criticism'. Historical criticism sought to measure the meaning of Jesus' message according to the standards of Enlightenment morality and rationality. Biblical critics eventually retreated from the claim that a neutral and objective inquiry of the Bible could be disclosed by scholarly investigation. This has resulted in the creation of complicated hermeneutical procedures. Historical criticism, however, is under the attack of postmodernism which refuse the all Enlightenment and modern values. According to postmodernism, it is impossible to be absolutely objective and to exercise disinterested awareness, uncover the facts, and achieve the true meaning. But Biblical scholars have never utterly withdrawn from the confident assumption that the historical discipline determines the standards of meaning and value that are used to interpret scripture.

During the post-war period, as the second crucial break in the history of Biblical interpretation, there developed an influential school of secular *literary critical reading* the Bible, whose main manifesto is reading the final text. Historical questions about the origin and growth of the Bible are consciously rejected; attention is focused instead on the text itself. The meaning of the text, it is argued, is not the result of the intentions of the authors, or compilers, but is generated by the shape of the text.

There are some advantages of literary critical approaches in

Biblical studies. The applications of text-based literary theories have caused more attention to be paid to the texture of Biblical literature. Structuralism, for instance, allows the reader to see the Bible as a whole, rather than as a series of separate collections and compositions from different periods of history. The application of literary criticism in Biblical studies, moreover, parallel to a development in literary criticism, has allowed more a plural and individual set of responses to sacred texts and interaction between Bible and the reader.

As the result of the academic and intellectual interaction with the West, and of course with its hermeneutical circles, Islamic intellectualism also attempts to critically interpret the Qur'an in the light of western literary criticism. This fracture has been intensively scrutinised throughout the Islamic world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Especially since the 1980s, as the second crucial break after modernisation process in the history of Qur'anic studies, there has been methodological influence from the West. Scholars have adapted *critical methods* as new hermeneutical models of understanding the Qur'an. Their aim is to re-read the Qur'an in the light of modern textual and philosophical disciplines, such as literary criticism, epistemology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, structuralism and post-structuralism.

It can be briefly and repeatedly said that the major debates in the twentieth century concerning interpretation of the sacred texts and literary critical theories have centred upon matters of language and have been mostly text and reader-centred in character, rather than author-based, in all three study areas: literary criticism, Biblical studies and Qur'anic studies. However it is also claimed that due to many factors, the application of Western literary criticism to Qur'anic studies has produced different outcomes from those in Biblical studies. Accordingly, it is impossible for Muslim thinkers to think in parallel to the principles developed in the West. These factors are as follows:

- a) The first striking difference between the two religious disciplines as far as interpretation is concerned lies in their cultural position in the application. In our analysis has clearly shown that Biblical studies have shifted the attention from author intentional reading to text and reader-centred readings in parallel to literary criticism because these distinct fields of study are culturally intertwined. Theoretical production and its application were naturally processed by Western scholars. But in Qur'anic studies, applicants, despite their Western education, mostly came from the Islamic hermeneutical tradition that is strictly theological and could not easily abandon the latter.
- b) Indeed Muslim applicants, in contrast to their counterparts in Biblical studies, were, therefore, mostly selective in their methods. Muslim applicants clearly use these methods for different purposes. Whereas in Biblical studies, the secular, scientific and critical mind is dominant, in Qur'anic studies applicants attempt to overcome contemporary problems of modern times for the sake of religious modernisation. In so doing, it is obvious that they have more theological concerns and are not purely guided by scientific/literary objectives.



## Critical Interpretation of Religious Texts in the West and the Reflection on the Study of the Qur'an

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**Citation/©:** Gökkır, Necmettin, (2005). Critical Interpretation of Religious Texts in the West and the Reflection on the Study of the Qur'an, MİLEL VE NİHAL, 2 (2), 19-64.

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how, in response to that critical readings in the Biblical studies, historical criticism, formalism, new criticism, structuralism, feminism etc have been later arisen on the agenda of Qur'anic hermeneutics – parallel to the developments in literary theory. The material which I have looked at is theoretical debates on how to interpret the Bible and the Qur'ān in contemporary world. In this regard, Biblical studies, in the twentieth century, have tended to be in dialogue with various contemporary literary critical theories which are concerned with such questions as the cultural and historical context of the Bible, the meaning and significance of the sacred text, its structure, the relations between the reader and the way of reading the sacred text. This study has examined some of the crucial applications of critical methods to Biblical studies around the concepts of author, text and reader.

**Key Words:** Criticism, literary criticism, Biblical criticism, Historical criticism, feminist criticism, structural linguistics.

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