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## OBJECT

See **Subject/Object**

## OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

A term redefined by T. S. Eliot for a situation or a series of ACTIONS or objects in a TEXT that can arouse an emotional reaction but that does not state the emotion explicitly. The idea has to do with Eliot's EXPECTATION of unity or balance between FORM and CONTENT. If the emotion overwhelms the words or if the words overwhelm the emotion, unity is not achieved. See **New Criticism**.

## OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Dispassionate and certain knowledge of the world and history, especially as characterized in the Enlightenment and MODERNISM, but challenged, if not rejected, by CRITICS within POSTMODERNISM who believe that all knowledge is socially conditioned and biased, always a matter of INTERPRETATION, and often used as an instrument of power.

## OBJECTIVE TRUTH

Truth that inheres in the structures of reality in a variety of domains—art, economics, politics, religion, nature, etc. According to some CRITICS of culture, the belief in objective truth existing independently of methods by which humans seek to access it is a characteristic of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment inherited by MODERNISM. As with the idea of OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE, POSTMODERNS generally argue that TRUTH is a social construct, thus opting for the idea of local truths.

## OBJECTIFICATION

In HERMENEUTICS, the idea that the AUTHOR's experience is somehow incarnated within his or her TEXT. Objectification is based upon the ASSUMPTION that it is possible for an author to inscripturate an ideational object, which can then be successfully extracted by a reader. Objectification is based upon the romantic theory that all humans share a common inner life, which allows them to understand, and be understood by, one

another. The most pronounced version of objectification may be seen in the theories of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey.

[Resources: Wilhelm Dilthey, "Development of Hermeneutics," in Dilthey, *Selected Writings* (ed. H. P. Rickman; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 149–64; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts* (ed. H. Kimmeler; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977)]

## OBJECTIVITY

See **Objective Truth** and **Objective Knowledge**

## OBJECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Also referred to as the original intentional OBJECT, in HERMENEUTICS, the mental formulation of a TEXT. The object is not synonymous with the text and is not the same as AUTHORIAL INTENTION. The text is the concrete LITERARY product of the author's object of consciousness, an ideational object. For every literary text, there must be an originating moment when the AUTHOR conceives of the literary object and perceives it to be a certain way. On the one hand, since perception takes place through time, the object of consciousness undergoes a perpetual redefinition from moment to moment. On the other hand, this object (regardless of the author's literary purpose) receives concrete expression at a particular time in the form of an inscription (i.e., the text). Many literary scholars argue, consequently, that there is no way to guarantee a one-to-one correspondence between the ever-changing object of consciousness and the permanent linguistic representation of it. They further claim that it is futile to argue for such a correspondence because there is no way to demonstrate objectively the TRUTH of such a relationship. It is impossible to enter the consciousness of another, especially when that consciousness is unavailable for questioning. Therefore, since it is the product of the author's individual consciousness, authorial MEANING is unobtainable. The conclusion to the matter, then, is that readers do not interpret authors but texts.

**OBLIGATORY INTERTEXTUALITY**

See **Intertextual Criticism**

**OCCASIONAL LETTERS**

A term referring to the nature of most of the LETTERS in the NEW TESTAMENT, especially those of Paul. The description assumes that although Paul employed LITERARY and rhetorical strategies current in letter writing at the time, his letters were occasioned by specific problems in specific congregations at specific times in the life of the infant church. Consequently, scholars point out that since Paul addressed problems and questions within the social structures of a time centuries removed from modern church life, his solutions (e.g., on slavery, family structure, the role of women in the church) must be carefully and critically examined before applying them universally.

**ODE**

From the Greek for “song,” a lyric poem on a single THEME in exalted and elaborate language and complicated in FORM. Most readers are familiar with modern odes such as Keats’s *Ode on a Grecian Urn* or Shelley’s *Ode to the West Wind*. According to Soulen and Soulen (123), however, odes or references to odes occur in both the NEW TESTAMENT and the HEBREW BIBLE, especially in the Psalms. For example, Ps 139 employs exalted language and is on the single theme of the majesty of God viewed in terms of God’s omniscience, omnipresence, omnificence, and holiness. Soulen and Soulen (123) also suggest that in the LXX, thirty-six of the Psalms are classified as odes (e.g., 4, 17, 29, 38, 44, and 47). In the New Testament, the word is used twice in Col 3:16, twice in Eph 5:19, and once each in Rev 5:9 and 14:3.

[Source: Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001)]

**OLD COVENANT**

A TRANSLATION of the Greek *diathēkē* (“COVENANT”), translated as *testamentum* in the VULGATE and subsequently used by Christians to refer to the OLD TESTAMENT. In another SENSE, however, the term within Christianity refers to the covenant that God made with Israel and serves as a foundation for the NEW COVENANT in Jesus (e.g., 2 Cor 3:14; Heb 8:6–7).

**OLD TESTAMENT**

A term long used by Christians to designate the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew SCRIPTURES as distinct from

the books of the NEW TESTAMENT. Many scholars have argued that the term “Old Testament” should be limited to use on those occasions when a Christian perspective on the canon is addressed. But even in Christianity, there is a difference between the Protestant or REFORMATION CANON of the Old Testament and the CATHOLIC CANON. The Catholic Old Testament includes twelve books called the DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS and not in the Reformation Canon. Protestants refer to these twelve books as the APOCRYPHA.

**OMNISCIENT NARRATOR**

See **Narrator**

**OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW**

See **Narrator**

**ONOMASTICA**

Lists of names or vocabulary which serve as aids to MEANING. Some biblical texts may have used onomastica (e.g., animals in Job 38–39).

**ONOMATOPOEIA**

A FIGURE OF SPEECH in which the MEANING of a word or word cluster is reflected in the sound. Many slang words are onomatopoeic (e.g., “pop,” “zap,” “woof”). In TRANSLATION, the force of the figure is usually lost, as in the RSV’s rendering of Isa 5:24, “the tongue of fire devours the stubble.” The translation does not capture the hissing and crackling sound of the fire burning dry wood in the Hebrew. The description of the earthquake in Isa 24:19–20 is also difficult to capture in translations, but Schökel gives an interesting attempt: “the earth shivers and staggers, stumbles and tumbles, quivers and quavers and quakes, jars and jerks and jolts” (Alter and Kermode, 182).

[Sources: Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1987)]

**OPEN-ENDEDNESS**

In POSTMODERN literary theory, the idea that some TEXTS do not end with a DENOUEMENT that neatly ties up all the loose ends, i.e., that some texts do not have CLOSURE. Some biblical texts are open-ended; for example, if the Gospel of Mark ends at 16:8, then it does not bring things to closure. Second Kings may also be seen as open-ended, as may Acts.

**OPENNESS**

See **Open Texts**

**OPEN TEXTS**

According to some contemporary LITERARY theorists, a characteristic of all literary TEXTS. Umberto Eco argues that due to the nature of language, every literary text is open to an unlimited number of readings. Any text succeeds aesthetically insofar as it generates openness and AMBIGUITY. This is especially the case with poetic texts that, through the poetic use of language, frustrate the normal REFERENTIAL QUALITY OF LANGUAGE. In other words, by OVERCODING the CODE of the NATURAL LANGUAGE with literary ones, the literary text vitiates the possibility of a univocal DECODING. The literary text becomes self-referential, drawing attention to its POETICS. As such, the text does not point to some ontological reality beyond itself but demands that the reader approach it as the originator of a field of possible decoding activities. Because literary texts demand the cooperation of the reader in formulating MEANING, Eco can make the claim that all literary texts are subject to a multiplicity of meanings. No single reading can actualize all the possible readings that the text is capable of admitting.

Wolfgang Iser, a German literary CRITIC, accounts for the openness of texts with his concept of GAPS OF INDETERMINACY on several levels: SYNTAX, SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS, CHARACTERIZATION, ACTION, and NARRATIVE flow (165–69, 171–72). He also argues that there are gaps between competing POINTS OF VIEW, literary gaps, poetic gaps, even grammatical gaps in a text, which the reader attempts to fill. Obviously, the theories of both Eco and Iser place an emphasis on the activities of readers in filling these gaps. The Gospel of Mark, when read with openness in mind, reveals several kinds of gaps that the reader must fill. These include gaps between the perspectives of the NARRATOR, PLOT, IMPLIED READER, and characters, gaps created by ALLUSION to other texts, and gaps created by INTERCALATION, to name a few.

[Resource: Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978)]

**ORACLE**

Generally any communication of a deity to a human. Although there may have originally been a difference in the Bible between a priestly and a PROPHETIC ORACLE, recent scholarship tends to think that the distinction

may be superficial because both PROPHET and priest were closely associated with the Israelite cult, that is, with Israel's whole system of religious beliefs and ritual.

**ORALITY**

A criterion for determining the authenticity of Jesus' words. When attempting to determine if a SAYING in the GOSPELS is actually from Jesus, scholars attempt to determine if the saying has the quality of orality. In other words, given that Jesus' teaching was entirely oral and was transmitted orally for some time before it was written down, then, to be remembered and passed on by word of mouth, Jesus' sayings would probably be brief, catchy, and quotable. Examples are "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27) and "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (Mark 6:4; Matt 13:15; *Gospel of Thomas* 33).

**ORAL TORAH**

See **Torah**

**ORAL TRADITION**

Technically, any information passed from one generation to another by word of mouth. In the study of the biblical texts, oral tradition relates to both the HEBREW BIBLE and the NEW TESTAMENT because, prior to being recorded, much of the material was passed on orally for varying periods of time. Such material in the Hebrew Bible as the stories of the patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, and the exodus circulated as oral tradition long before they became the basis of the written forms we find in the PENTATEUCH. In New Testament studies, scholars assume that the SAYINGS OF JESUS were originally oral and orally transmitted by his followers for some decades before becoming the basis for the GOSPELS. New Testament scholars also argue that oral tradition lies behind the STORY of the church in Acts. See **Form Criticism**.

**ORDER**

In NARRATOLOGY, the time order of the STORY. It may operate by ANTICIPATION, FLASHBACK, or discordances between story and PLOT. Both flashback and anticipation are found in the story of Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22; Micaiah, in flashback, anticipates in 22:17 the defeat of Ahab's army and Ahab's death, which actually happens in 22:29–38.

**ORGANIC UNITY**

The assumption, especially in most types of FORMALISM (NEW CRITICISM, NARRATIVE CRITICISM, and some

versions of READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM), that a TEXT is a unified LITERARY object in which all the parts fit together and must be understood in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of its parts. Thus the MEANING of a literary text derives strictly from its FORM and CONTENT rather than from extratextual considerations.

**ORIGINAL LANGUAGE**

The language in which a TEXT was first written. The original languages of the HEBREW BIBLE were Hebrew and Aramaic, while Greek was the original language of the NEW TESTAMENT (though some argue that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic).

**OVERCODING**

*See Ideological Overcoding and Rhetorical and Stylistic Overcoding*

**OXYMORON**

A FIGURE OF SPEECH that juxtaposes incongruous or contradictory words or objects for effect, such as “an honest thief” or Romeo’s “O loving hate.” Given the early church’s understanding of Jesus as the Christ, God’s anointed Messiah, Paul in 1 Cor 1:23 probably intended that the phrase “Christ crucified” be oxymoronic, as may be the beloved’s description of her emotion in Song 5:2 (“I slept, but my heart was awake”).