



Twentieth century criticism: Traditions and concepts

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Abstract

Literary theory involves questioning of the most basic assumption of literary study, speculative practice, accounts of desires and language. Theory has brought many ideas from other field of knowledge to engage in a discussion on humanities, art and literature and different issues like race, identity, mythologies, signs and many other issues that are not directly linked to literature. Theory has made literary discourse interdisciplinary by welcoming ideas from other discipline. So, literary theory is not something that has been developed in a vacuum but has arisen for the most part in response to the problems encountered by readers, scholars and critics in their practical contact with the text. It also provides excellent tools that can not only show us our world and ourselves through new and valuable lenses but also can strengthen our ability and with a good deal of insight. Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Post structuralism/ Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Reader Response, Colonialism and New Historicism are the major theories discussed in this article.

Keywords: theory, criticism, defamiliarization, text, interpretation, gender, meaning, context

Introduction

The twentieth century encountered intensification of rationalization, urbanization, secularization, increasingly practical development of science and technology, the growth of middle class, the history of women's rights, growing colonization as well as decolonization, growing interest of class, gender, race, nation and religion have greatly influenced the thinkers, scholars, philosophers and readers. As a result of these broad tendencies and movements in the field of literature and criticism, different literary theories and criticism have been envisioned and applied in interpreting text. This article tries to present a bird's eye view about major trends and movements of the twentieth century literary theory and criticism namely Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Post structuralism/ Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Reader Response, Colonialism and New Historicism. Representative theorists' essays' crux and the core concepts have been encompassed.

Russian formalism

Russian Formalism is a school of literary theory and analysis that emerged in Russia around 1915, devoting itself to the study of literariness. Originated in Russia in the second decade of the 20th century, especially with Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915) and OPOYAZ - the society for the study of the Poetic Language (1916), this criticism valued defamiliarization. The pioneers of Russian Formalism are Victor Shklovsky. Boris Eichenbaum, Jan Mukarovsky, Roman Jakobson, Yury Tynyanov and Rene Wellek. Habib views, "The formalists, focusing on artistic forms and techniques on the basis of linguistic studies, had risen in pre-revolutionary Russia but now saw their opposition to traditional art as a political gesture, allying them somewhat

with the revolution" (603).

Russian Formalism was a departure from the prevailing Romantic Symbolism and Futurism. It attempted to introduce a scientific description of literature as a special use of language with observable features. Russian Formalists deliberately disregarded the context of literary works. They had strong disapproval from Marxist criticism. Russian formalists differentiate between the poetic use of language and ordinary practical use of language. Poetic use of language is oriented towards the words themselves rather than any goal to accomplish. Newness in the way of expression resulted due to deviated form of phonology, morphology and syntax. Poetic language values the language itself that creates literariness in language. Russian formalists are the scientists because they did emphasis on observation, experimentation and evaluation of formal aspects of language and try to offer special mode of expression that renews our perception and hence creates defamiliarization. Jeremy Hawthorn clarifies, "The autonomy in which Russian Formalists are interested in less of the individual work and more of literary studies in general and of literariness" (303).

Victor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as Technique" gives emphasis on process of perception, technique of art to make objects unfamiliar and way of experiencing the artfulness of an object. Boris Eichenbaum in his essay, "The Theory of Formal Method" deals with the idea of literary object as unified technical accomplishment. He values the examination of specific material in its specific context and recognition of theoretical facts of literary art.

Jan Mukarovsky in his essay, "Standard Language and Poetic Language" argues that poetic language is not simply a special brand of standard language, for it has at its disposal all the forms of the given language in addition, to some of its own.

Nevertheless, poetic language is closely related to standard language because the latter is background against which poetic language is foregrounded. It is in this context that poetic language can be seen as intentionally violating the norms of the standard language in order to create defamiliarization.

Roman Jakobson in his essay, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles' distinguishes metaphoric and metonymic poles. He views that all language production falls on vertical axis of selection and horizontal axis of combination. Selection deficiency gives birth to contiguity disorder which ultimately lengthens the process of perception and hence defamiliarization created.

New criticism

New criticism was a movement in American literary criticism from 1930s to the 1960s concentrating on the verbal complexities and ambiguities of short poems treating them as self-sufficient objects. This movement originated with the works and ideas of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, I A Richard, William Empson in England and J.C Ransom Allen Tate, W.K. Wimsatt, M.C. Beardsley, Cleanth Brooks in America. It arose against the biographical, historical, psychological, romantic and impressionistic theory and criticism.

New criticism insists that the proper concern of literary criticism is not with the external or extrinsic circumstances, elements or effects of a work but with a detailed consideration of the work itself. Its intrinsic elements are closely studied, analyzed, examined and evaluated. New critics developed doctrine of the text's objectivity. Culler points out, "Opposed to the historical scholarship practiced in universities, New Criticism treated poems as aesthetic objects rather than historical documents and examined the interactions of their verbal features and the ensuing complications of meaning rather than the historical intentions and circumstances of their authors"(124). They treat literary text's objectivity. They treat literary text as an independent, self-sufficient, autonomous, organic unity of verbal object having its own value.

I.A. Richards in the essay, "Four Kinds of Meanings" says that poetry is pseudo-statement the value of literature as a whole lay entirely in the use of emotive functions of language which has several tasks to perform simultaneously. Richards points out four kinds of meanings that is sense, feeling, tone and intention which the language has to perform. W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in their essays, "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy" reject the usefulness of the author's intention, design or purposes as well as the effects and results of a work upon the readers. They asserted an author's intended aims and meanings in writing literary work, whether these are asserted by the author's or merely inferred from the reader's knowledge of author's life and opinion, as well as impressions upon the readers are irrelevant and useless. The meanings, structure, value of a text are inherent within the finished, freestanding and public work of literature itself.

Structuralism

Structuralism is a modern intellectual movement that analyses cultural phenomenon according to the phenomenon derived from linguistics. Structuralism views language as the first

order system and literature as the second order system. Literature uses language as its medium and itself to be analyzed on the model of linguistics. It is opposed to mimetic, expressive criticism and to any forms of view that literature is a mode of communication between author and reader. Structural critics study, observe and analyze the materials, formal organization and the linguistic aspects of a text. Structural critics are primarily interested not in what makes an individual literary work unique but in what it has in common with other literary works. They look for the codes and conventions that are in operation within.

Structuralism diverged sharply from the Romantic notion of the author as the source of meaning. It shifts emphasis from authorial or effectiveness on the broader and impersonal linguistic structures as a whole which produces the meaning. Dutton presents, "The implications of structuralism are far-reaching in many fields not only linguistics and literature, but anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, even physics"(76). Ferdinand de Saussure in the essay, "Course in General Linguistic" explains that it is langue, not the acts of speech, must be the object of the scientific investigation. Saussure attacks the conventional theory of meaning where by language is viewed as a naming process, each word corresponding to the thing it names. He asserts the arbitrary nature of sign. Sign designates the whole construct, signified the concepts signifier designates the sound image.

Roland Barthes in the essay, "Structuralist Activity" presents structuralism as an activity, the activity to reconstruct an object in such a way as to manifest the rules of functioning of the object. Structuralists take the real, decompose it, and then recompose it. Dissection and articulation are the two processes of structuralist activity.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction or post-structuralism is a theoretical movement emerged during the 1960s with the assumption that the world is unknowable and language is unstable, elusive and unfaithful. Deconstructionists seek to show that the literary work inevitably is self-contradictory. They questioned logocentric and phonocentric tendencies, hierarchy, structure, centre, sign, bricolage and engineer, author as catalyst or medium and language as a means of communication having certain pattern. Chris Barker argues that "Derrida deconstructs the binaries of the western philosophy and attacks the metaphysics of presence" (88).

Deconstruction is valuable because it encourages close, rigorous attention to the text. Furthermore, in its rejection of the claim that a work has a single, stable meaning deconstruction has had a positive influence on the study of literature. Again and again it tells how a text is incoherent and heterogeneous. The text is only marks on paper and therefore so far as the reader goes, the author of the text is not the writer but the reader. Texts are indeterminate, open, and unstable. But the author could not see how his text is fundamentally unstable, self-contradictory and elusive. Lois Tyson remarks, "In order to understand how deconstruction reverses the hidden work of ideology in our daily experience of ourselves in our world, we must first understand deconstructionist's view of language" (241).

"Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human

Sciences” by Jacques Derrida challenges the interpretation of text based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, of the language and meaning. For Derrida there is nothing outside the text and textuality governs all interpretative operations. Roland Barthes in the essay “The Death of the Author” states that writing is the destruction of every voice, every point of origin. It is neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away; the negative where all identity is lost. He views that a text is made of multiple writings. This multiplicity is focused on the reader, not the author. The text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. He insists that “The birth of the reader must be required at the cost of the death of the author” (1133). Barthes made the text as the site of free play and differences between work and text, writer and reader.

Feminism

Feminist criticism is a mode of literary and cultural discussion and reassessment inspired by modern feminist thought during 1970s. Feminist brought to literature a suspicion of established ideas which made their approach truly revolutionary. They were interested in literature creating a powerful means of perpetuating belief system. The first task of feminist criticism was to disapprove the conventional literature and present the plausible reason for the absence of women from literature. Most of the studies are aimed at recovery and reassessing works by women authors, evaluating the female image as portrayed by male authors, analyzing sexism and gender privilege in language, evaluating critical methods devised by males and developing a body of feminine consciousness. The goal of feminist criticism is to establish a tradition of literature and literary criticism by women to counter balance the male tradition.

Virginia Woolf raised the central issue of feminist studies such as social and economic context of women’s writing, the gendered nature of language the need to go back through history, need of establishing female literary tradition and societal construction of gender. In her famous essay “A Room of One’s Own”, she claims that women need financial and psychological independence in order to exercise their creative potentials. A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* laid the foundations for much of the feminist theory and political activism that emerged during the 1960s in Western Europe and America. The book’s central argument is that throughout history women have been made occupy secondary role in relation to man, being relegated to the position of other. Women have remained as a slave within the code of duties imposed by her maternal and reproductive functions. Essence of women is created by traditional, cultural, economic, political and religious interests of men. In the chapter “Myth and Reality”, she observes that the myth of women exerts an important influence not only in the world of literature but equally in everyday life. She points out that the myth of man is a static myth. It is so because this idea is beyond or above the realm of actual experience, it is endowed with absolute truth.

Elaine Showalter developed gynocriticism, a criticism concerned with the specificity of women’s experience and

their writing. The program of gynocriticism is to construct a female frame work for the analysis of women’s literature that Showalter asserts in the essay “Towards a Feminist Poetics”, “Gynocritics begin at the point when we free ourselves from the liner absolute of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition, and focus newly visible world of female culture” (1227).

Psychoanalytic criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism is an approach to literary criticism that is influenced by Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. This literary theory sees literary work as an expression of the unconscious, of the individual psyche of the author or the collective unconscious of a society or of the whole human race. Sigmund Freud, C.G. Jung, Jacques Lacan, Ernest Jones and Norman Holland are the critics. Klarer defines, “Psychoanalytic Criticism, a movement which sometimes deals with the author, but primarily attempts to illuminate general psychological aspects in a text that do not necessarily relate to the author exclusively” (86).

Freud’s contribution was to open up the entire realm of the unconscious to systematic study and to provide a language and terminology in which the operations of the unconscious could be expressed. Freud postulated that we bear a form of the motives of an author, of readers and fictional characters, childhood memories, relationship to parent, the nature of the creative process, the psychology of reader’s response to literary text and the functioning of language in the constitution of the conscious and unconscious. Sigmund Freud in the essay “Creative Writers and Day Dreaming” presents the idea that the grown child rather than playing with the dolls fantasies. He begins to build a castle through day dreaming. The motive forces of fantasies are unfulfilled wishes, and even single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality. The wishes become different on the basis of sex, characters and circumstances. These wishes are either ambitious wishes or erotic wishes.

Disciple of Freud, C.G.Jung broke with his master when he concluded that Freud’s system was excessively reductive and monolithic in referring neurosis to experiences of children, especially sexual experiences. Most important to literary criticism was his theory of archetypes which depends on his theory of collective unconscious. In the essay “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry” Jung says, “ Art by its nature is not science, science by its nature is not art... art and science would not exist as separate entities” (784).

The work of Jaques Lacan centres around his extensive re-reading of Freud in the light of insights furnished by linguistics and structuralism. He reinterpretes Freudian concepts. He presents three states of mental dispositions: the imaginary, the symbolic and real.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonial criticism aims to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized, to determine the economic, political and cultural impact of the colonialism on both the colonized and colonizers, to analyze the processes of decolonization, and above all to participate in the goals of political liberation.

The struggle of post- colonial discourse extended over the

domain of gender, race ethnicity and class. They question the literary and cultural canon in the western institutions through what is loosely called multiculturalism. Post-colonialism is thus a name for a critical theoretical approach in literary and cultural studies. It is also designates a politics of transformational resistance to unjust and unequal forms of political and cultural authority which extends back across the twentieth century. Habib views, "Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims: most fundamentally, to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers;" (739).

In "The World, the Text and the Critic" Edward Said argues that critical theory has retreated into a labyrinth of textuality. The text should be regarded as a living being in a particular historical circumstances without which the text becomes disrupted from the real world.

Reader response theory

Reader response theory focuses on the response of the reader rather than on the text as the source of meanings in literary work. A work of literature rather than being considered a fixed and stable entity with a single correct meaning is an activity or proceed that goes on in readers' experience, anticipation, frustration, retrospection and reconstruction. In a sense, literary work has its existence in the mind of readers, not in the printed pages so that the reader participates in its creation. Some prominent figures in different forms of reader response theory are Wolfgang Iser, Jonathan Cullar, Stanley Fish and so on. Iser draws attention to two important features of reading process. The first is that reading is a temporal activity and it is not linear. The second is that when we are confronted with gaps we attempt to search for consistency.

Stanley Fish argues that what constraints interpretation is not fixed meaning in a linguistic system but in practices and assumptions of an institution. According to him competent readers belong to "interpretive communities' that determine the meaning. Meaning is generated by means of the negotiation of the text with well informed readers. Tyson says, "Whatever kind of analysis is undertaken, however, the ultimate goal of reader response criticism is to increase our understanding of the reading process by investigating the activities in which readers engage and the effects of those activities on their interpretations" (175).

New historicism

New historicism developed during the 1980s that emphasized the historical nature of literary text and at the same time the textual nature of history. As part of a wider reaction against purely formal or linguistic critical approaches such as the New criticism and deconstruction. Klarer says, "One of the latest developments in the field of contextual approaches has been New Historicism, which arose in the US in the late 1980s" (90). New Historicism drew new connections between literary and non-literary texts. This is less a system of interpretations than a set of shared assumptions about the relationship between literature and history. Rob Pope says, "The aim of New Historicists is to recognize the power relations in play both in a text's moment of production and in its subsequent

moments of re-production" (106). This criticism asserts that texts cannot be torn from history and analyzed in isolation, outside of the historical process. Habib points out, "The New Historicists tended, then, to view literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses, insisting on engaging with this entire complex in a localized manner, refusing to engage in categorical generalizations or to commit to any definite political instance" (762). Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault are the major critics of this criticism. Greenblatt likes to establish relation between art and society. Art is the result of the negotiation between creator and communally shared conventions.

Conclusion

Nearly all of these critical movements: Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Feminism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Post-colonialism and Reader Response see human subjectivity as a function of language, as a position within a network of signs which spreads ultimately across numerous registers-of language, culture, politics, aesthetics, ethnicity, class and gender. However during the late 20th century historicity in both time and space emerged. Institutions of language take a turn and move towards social subjectivity and local concern.

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