

## **ENG 434: LITERARY ENGLISH AND THEORY**

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## **ENG 434 Literary History and Theory**

This is a course in the history of English criticism with emphasis on major themes and general critical principles and the recent archetypal, formalistic and sociological criticism. An attempt will be made to relate the readings to problems in the criticism of African Literature.

## **LECTURE ONE**

### **LITERARY HISTORY AND THEORY:**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Literary theory refers to the Body of ideas and methods we use in the practical reading of literature. By this we refer not to the meaning of a work of literature but to the theories that reveal what literature can mean.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to provide a good explanation on these concepts: literary history and theories. You should also be able to distinguish between them.

#### **Pre-Test**

Define these terms: Literary History, literary theory and literary criticism.

#### **CONTENT**

“Literary theory” is the body of ideal and methods we use in the practical reading of literature. By literary theory we refer not to the meaning of a work of literature can mean literary theory is a description of the underlying principles, one might say the tools, by which we attempt to understand literature. All literary interpretation draws on a basis in

theory but can serve as a justification for very different kinds of critical activity. It is literary theory that formulates the relationship between author and work; literary theory develops the significance of race, class, and gender for literary study, both from the standpoint of the biography of the author and an analysis of their thematic presence within texts.

Literary theory offers varying approaches for understanding the role historical context in interpretation as well as the relevance of linguistic and unconscious elements of the text. Literary theories trace the history and evolution of the different genres- narrative, dramatic, lyric- in addition to the more recent emergence of the novel and the short story, while also investigating the importance of formal elements of literary structure. Lastly, literary theory in recent years has sought to explain the degree to which the text is more the product of a culture than an individual author and in turn how those texts help to create the culture.

One of the fundamental questions of literary theory however, is “what is literature? Although many contemporary theorists and literary scholars believe either that “literature” cannot be defined or that it can refer to any use of language. Specific theories are distinguished not only by their methods and conclusions, but even by how they define a “text” comprises little more than “books belonging to the Western literary Canon. But the principles and methods of literary theory have been applied to own-fiction, popular fiction, film, historical documents, law, advertising, e.t.c, in the related field of cultural studies. In fact, some scholars within cultural studies treat cultural events, like fashion or

football riots, as “texts” to be interpreted. By this measure, literary theory can be thought of as the general theory of interpretation.

Since theorists of literature often draw on a very heterogeneous tradition of continental philosophy and the philosophy of language, any classification of their approaches is only an approximation. There are many “schools” or types of literary theory, which take different approaches to understanding texts. Most theorists, even among those listed below, combine methods from more than one of these approaches (for instance, the deconstructive approach of Paul de Man drew on a long tradition of close reading pioneered by the New Critics, and de Man was trained in the European hermeneutic tradition).

Broad schools of theory that have historically been important include historical and biographical criticism, New Criticism, formalism Russian formalism, and structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, feminism and French feminism, post-colonialism, new historicism, deconstruction, reader-response criticism, and psychoanalytic criticism.

## **HISTORY OF LITERARY THEORY**

The practice of literary theory became a profession in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it has historical roots that run as far back as ancient Greece (Aristotle’s poetics is an often cited early example, ancient India ( Bharata muni’s Natya Shastra), ancient Rome (Longinus’s

On the sublime and Horace's *Ars Poetica*) and medieval Iraq. The theory and criticism of literature are, of course, also closely tied to the history of literature however, the modern sense of "literary theory", dates only to approximately the 1950s, when then structuralist linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure began strongly to influence English language literary criticism. The New Critics and various European-influenced formalists (Particularly the Russian formalists) had described some of their more abstract efforts as "theoretical" as well. But it was not until the broad impact of structuralism began to be felt in the English-speaking academic world that "literary theory" was thought of as a unified domain.

In the academic world of the United Kingdom and the United States, literary theory was at its most popular from the late 1960s (when its influence was beginning to spread outward from elite universities like Johns Hopkins, Yale and Princeton through the 1980s (by which time it was taught nearly everywhere in some form) During this span of time, literary theory was perceived as academically cutting-edge, and most university literature departments sought to teach and study theory and incorporate it into their curricula. Because of its meteoric rise in popularity and the difficult language of its key texts, theory was also often criticized as faddish or trendy obscurantism (and many academic satire novels of the period such as those by David Lodge, feature theory prominently). Some scholars, both theoretical and anti-theoretical, refer to the 1970s and 1980s debates on the academic merit of theory as "the theory wars".

By the early 1990s, the popularity of theory as a subject of interest by itself was declining slightly (along with job openings for pure “theorist even as the texts of literary theory were incorporated into the study of almost all literature. As of 2004, the controversy over the use of theory in literary studies has all but died out, and discussions on the topic within literary and cultural studies tend now to be considerably milder and less acrimonious (though the appearance of volumes such as *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Assent*, edited by Nathan parker, may signal resurgence of the controversy. Some scholars draw heavily on theory in their work, while others only mention it in passing or not at all; but it is an acknowledged, important part of the study of literature.

“Literature theory” sometimes designated “critical theory” or “theory”, and now undergoing a transformation into “cultural theory” within the discipline of literary studies, can be understood as the set of concepts and intellectual assumptions on which rests the work of explaining or interpreting literary texts. Literary theory refers to any principles derived from internal analysis of literary texts or from knowledge external to the text that can be applied in multiple interpretive situations. All critical practice regarding literature depends on an underlying structure of ideas in at least two ways: theory provides a rationale for what constitutes the subject matter of criticism- “ the literary” – and the specific aims of critical practice the act of interpretation itself. For example, to speak of the Unity” of Oedipus the king explicitly invokes Aristotle’s theoretical statements on poetics. To argue, as does Chinua Achebe, that Joseph Conrad’s *The Hearts of Darkness*, fails to grant full humanity to the African it depicts is a



perspective informed by a postcolonial literary theory that presupposes a history of exploitation and racism. Critics that explain the climactic drowning of Edozie Patellar in *The Awakening* as a suicide generally call upon a supporting architecture of feminist and gender theory. The structure of ideas that enables criticism of a literary theory within the academic discipline of theory literary studies continues to evolve.

Modern literary theory gradually emerges in Europe during the nineteenth century. In one of the earliest developments of literary theory, German “higher criticism” subjected biblical texts to a radical historicizing that broke with traditional scriptural interpretation. “Higher”, or “Source criticism” analyzed biblical tales in light of comparative narratives from other cultures, an approach that anticipated some of the method and spirit of twentieth century theory, particularly “structuralism” and “New Historicism”. In France, the eminent literary critic Charles Augustine Saint Beuve maintained that a work of literature could be explained entirely in terms of biography while novelist Marcel Proust devoted his life to refusing Saint Beuve in a massive narration in which he argued that the details of the life of the artist are utterly transformed in the work of art. (This dispute was taken up by the French theorist Roland Barthes in his famous declaration of the “Death of the Author.” “Structuralism and poststructuralism.”) Perhaps the greatest nineteenth century influence on literary theory came from the deep epistemological suspicion of Friedrich Nietzsche that facts are not facts until they have been interpreted. Nietzsche’s critique of knowledge has had a profound impact on literary studies and helped usher in an era of intense literary theorizing that has yet to pass.

According to Peter Barry:

The growth of critical theory in the

post-war period seems to comprise a series  
of 'waves', each associated with a  
specific decade, and all aimed against  
the liberal humanist consensus,  
which had been established between  
the 1980s and the 1950s (1995:32).

The current state of theory is such that there are many overlapping areas of influence, and older schools of theory, though no longer enjoying their previous eminence, continue to exert an influence on the whole, the once widely-held conviction (an implicit theory) that literature is a repository of all that is meaningful and ennobling in the human experience, a view championed by the New Criticism in Britain, may no longer be acknowledged by name but remains an essential justification for the current structure of American universities and liberal arts curricula. The moment of "Deconstruction" may have passed but its emphasis on the indeterminacy of sign (that we are unable to establish exclusively what a word means when used in a particular situation) remains significant. Many critics may not embrace the label "feminism" but the premise that gender is a social construct, one of theoretical feminisms' distinguishing insights, is now axiomatic in a number of theoretical perspectives.

Whilst literary theory has always implied or directly expressed a conception of the world outside the text, in the twentieth century three movements- “Marxist theory” of the Frankfurt School, “Feminism” and “postmodernism” – have opened the field of studies into a broader area of inquiry. For example, Marxist approaches to literature require an understanding of the primary economic and social bases of culture since Marxist aesthetics theory sees the work of art as a product, directly or indirectly, of the base structure of society. Feminist thought and practice analyzes the production of literature and literary representation within the framework that includes all social and cultural formations as they pertain to the role of women in history. Postmodern thought consists of both aesthetic and epistemological strands. Postmodernism in art has included a move toward non-referential, non-linear, abstract forms, a heightened degree of self-referentiality; and the collapse of categories and conventions that had traditionally governed art. Postmodern thought has led to the serious questioning of the so-called metanarratives of history, science, philosophy, and economic and sexual reproduction under postmodernity, all knowledge comes to be seen as “constructed” within historical self-contained systems of understanding. Marxist, feminist, and post-modern thought have brought about the incorporation of all human discourses (i.e., interlocking fields of language and knowledge) as a subject matter for analysis by the literary theorist. Using the various poststructuralist and postmodern theories that often draw on disciplines other than the literary-linguistic, anthropological, psychoanalytic, and philosophical for their primary insights, literary theory has become an interdisciplinary body of cultural theory.

Taking as its premise that human societies and knowledge consist of texts in one form or another, cultural theory (for better or worse) is now applied to the varieties of texts, ambitiously undertaking to become the preeminent model of inquiry into the human condition.

Literary theory is a site of theories, like “Queer theory” are “in” other literary theories, like “Deconstruction” are “out” but continue to exert an influence on the field. “Traditional literary criticism” “New Criticism”, and “structuralism” are alike in that they held to the view that the study of literature has an objective body of knowledge under its scrutiny. The other schools of literary theory, to varying degrees, embrace a postmodern view of language and reality that calls into serious question the objective referent of literary studies.

Importantly, the categories to studied are certainly not exhaustive, nor are they mutually exclusive, but they represent the major trends in literary theory of this century.

## **SUMMARY**

Literary theory is the body of ideas and methods we use in the practical reading of literature. By this, we refer not to the meaning of a work of literature but to the theories that reveal what literature can mean literary theory is the description of the underlying principles, or tools, by which we attempts to understand literature.

## POST-TEST

Clearly distinguish between literary theory and literary history

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## **LECTURE TWO**

### **FORMALISM AND NEW CRITISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

New criticism is a type of formalist current of literary theory that dominated Anglo-American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It emphasized close reading particularly of poetry, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to distinguished between formalism, new criticism and other literary theories.

#### **Pre-Test**

What are the characteristics of Formalism and New Criticism?

#### **CONTENT**

“Formalism” is as the name implies an interpretive approach that emphasizes literary form and the study of literary devices within the text. The work of the formalists had a general impact on late developments in “structuralism” and other stories of narrative “Formalism” like “structuralism” sought to place the study of literature on a

scientific basis through objective analysis of the motifs, devices, techniques, and other “functions” that comprise the literary work. The formalists placed great importance on the literariness of texts, those qualities that distinguished the literary from other kinds of writing. Neither author nor context was essential for the formalists; it was the narrative that spoke, the “hero-function,” for example that had meaning. Form was the content. A plot device or narrative strategy was examined for how it functioned and compared to how it had functioned in other literary works. Of the Russian formalists critics, Roman Jakobson and Viktor Shklovsky are probably the most well known.

The formalist adage that the purpose of literature was “to make the stone stonier,” nicely expresses their notion of literariness. “Formalism” is perhaps best known is Shklovsky’s concept of “defamiliarization”. The routine of ordinary experience Shklovsky contended, rendered invisible the uniqueness and particularity of the objects of existence. Literary language, partly by calling attention to itself as language, estranged the reader from the familiar and made fresh the experience of daily life.

The “New Criticism” so designated as to indicate a break with traditional methods, was a product of the American University in the 1930s and 40s. “New Criticism” stressed close reading of the text itself much like the French pedagogical precept “*explication du texte*”. As a strategy of reading, “New Criticism viewed the work of literature an aesthetic object independent of historical context and as a unified whole that reflected the unified sensibility of the artist. T.S. Eliot, though not explicitly associated with the movement, expressed a similar critical-aesthetic philosophy in his essays on John Donne

and the metaphysical poets writers who Eliot believed experienced a complete integration of thought and feeling. New Critics like Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren and W.K Wimsatt placed a similar focus on the metaphysical poets and poetry in general, a genre well suited to New Critical practice. “New Criticism” aimed at bringing a greater intellectual rigor to literary studies, confining itself to careful scrutiny of the text alone and the formal structures of paradox ambiguity; irony, and metaphor among others. “New Criticism” was fired by the conviction that their readings of poetry would yield a humanizing influence on readers and thus counter the alienating tendencies of modern, Industrial life “New Criticism” in this regard bears an affinity to the Southern Agrarian movement whose manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand*, contained essays by two New Critics, Ransom and Warren. Perhaps the enduring legacy of “New Criticism” can be found in the college classroom, in which the verbal texture of the poem on the page remains a primary object of literary study.

(1) New Criticism developed in the 1920s-30s and peaked in the 1940s-50s. the movement is named after John Crowe Ransom’s 1941 book *The New Criticism*. New Critics treat a work of literature as if it were self-contained. They do not consider the reader’s response, author’s intention or historical and cultural contexts. New Critics perform a close reading of the text, and believe the structure and meaning of the text should not be examined separately. New Critics especially appreciate the use of literary devices in a text. The New Criticism has sometimes been called an objective approach to literature.



The notion of ambiguity is an important concept within New Criticism; several prominent New Critics have been enamored about all else with the way that a text can display multiple simultaneous meanings. In the 1930s, I. A. Richards borrowed Sigmund Freud's term "over determination" (which Louis Althusser would later revive in Marxist political theory) to refer to the multiple meanings which he believed were always simultaneously present in language. To Richard claiming that a work has "One and Only One Time Meaning" is an act of superstition.

In 1954m William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley published an essay entitled "The intentional fallacy", in which they argued strongly against any discussion of an author's intention, or "intended meaning" for Wimsatt and Beardsley, the word on the page were all that mattered; importation of meanings from outside the text was quite irrelevant, and potentially distracting. This became a central tenet of the second generation of New Criticism.

On the other side of the page, so to speak, Wimsatt proposed an "affective fallacy", discounting the reader's peculiar reaction (or violence of reaction ) as a valid measure of a text ("what it is" Vs "what it does"). This has wide-ranging implications, going back to the catharsis and cathexis of the Ancient Greeks, but also serve to exclude trivial but deeply affective advertisements and propaganda from the artistic canon. Taken together, these fallacies might compel one to refer to a text and its functioning as an anonymous entity, intimate with but independent of both author and reader. This reflects the earlier attitude of Russian formalism and its attempt to describe poetry in mechanistic and then

organic terms. (Both schools of thought might be said to anticipate the 21<sup>st</sup> Century interest in electronic artificial intelligence, and perhaps lead researchers in that field to underestimate the difficulty of that undertaking.

Studying a passage of prose or poetry in New Critical style requires careful, exacting scrutiny of the passage itself. Formal elements such as rhyme, meter, setting, characterization and plot were used to identify the theme of the text. In addition to the theme, the New Critics also looked for paradox, ambiguity, irony, and tension to help establish the single best interpretation of the text. Such an approach may be criticized as constituting a conservative attempt to isolate from any external influences such as those of race, class, and gender. On the other hand, the New Critics' emphasis on irony and the search for contradiction and tension in language so central to New Criticism may suggest the politics of suspicion and mistrust of authority, one that persisted throughout the cold war years within New Criticism's popularity.

The Southern Agrarians, for instance, enfolded New Criticism's emphasis on irony into their anti-authoritarianism and criticism of the emerging culture of spending, consumption, and progress but- in the view of such writers as Robert Penn Warren- authoritarian populism early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Perhaps because of its usefulness as an unassuming but concise tool of political critique, new criticism persisted through the Cold War years and immanent reading or close reading is now a fundamental tool of literary Criticism, even underpinning post-structuralism with its associated radical criticism of political culture. New Critical reading places great emphasis on the particular

over the general, paying close attention to individual words, Syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold as they are read. They look at, for example imagery, metaphor rhythm, meter, etc.

Besides the names mentioned above, other prominent New Critical figures include the following: F.R Leavis, William Empson, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, T.S Eliot and R.P Blackmur. It is also important to note that not all the works stemming from these individuals fall within the New Critical Camp. For example, Eliot's relationship with New Criticism was rather complicated. In 1956, he claims that he failed to see any school of criticism which can be said to derive from himself, referring to the New Criticism as "the lemon squeezer school of Criticism" he never understood the ways that the New critics had come to interpret *The Waste Land*, nothing in thoughts after Lambeth" (1931) "when I wrote a poem called *The Waste Land* some of the more approving critics said that I had. Expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention" of Course, Eliot's commentary would be largely irrelevant to a new Critics close reading of his work. (furthermore- and in the first place New Criticism ought to take a dim view of socio-history contextualization embodied in phrases like "disillusionment of a generation".)

## **CRITICISM**

One of the most common grievances iterated in numerous ways, is an objection to the idea of the text as autonomous, detractors react against a perceived anti-historicism

accusing the New Critics of divorcing literature from its place in history by emphasizing the text as autonomous. New Criticism is frequently seen as “uninterested in the human meaning, the social function and effect of literature” and as “unhistorical,” for it isolates the work of art from its past and its context.” To the same ends, Terry Eagleton takes issue with the attention paid by New Criticism “to the words on the page, rather than to the contexts which produced and surround them”.

The New York Intellectuals was a contemporary intellectual movement who emphasized instead the socio-political role of texts, in contrast to New Critics.

Robert Scholes argues that the New Critics fail, unlike the formalist to work on identifying the criteria of the prosaic and poetic rather than specific instances of prose or poems; that they emphasize the work over the idea of sexuality. Similarly, Northrop Frye argues that the study of literature should focus on literary and mythological systems rather than individual texts.

Another common critique of the New Criticism is how ill-adapted the method is to certain types of writing. Russell Reusing, for example, argues that the New Criticism devalues literature that is representational or realist. Likewise, scholes, accuses the methodology as denying any text of “cognitive quality”-that is, “denying that literature can offer any form of acknowledge.

Jonathan Culler’s argument illustrates a shift to a critique of the interpretive process itself. Culler writes that close reading fails not only to analyze the literary system, but in so doing, it regards reading as “natural and unproblematic”. In the same view critic

Terence Hanks writes that the fundamental close reading techniques is based on the assumption that “the subject and the object of study-the reader and the text-are stable and independent form, rather than products of the unconscious process of signification, an assumption which he identifies as the “ideology of liberal humanism” which is attributed to the New Critics who are “accused of attempting to disguise the interests at work in their critical processes” for Hanks ideally, a critics ought to be considered to (create) the finished work by his reading of it, and (not to) remain simply and inert consumer of a ‘ready-made’ product”.

Yet another objection to the aim at making criticism scientific, or at least “bringing literary study to a condition rivaling that of science”. This charge many go hand in hand with another, in which “the New Criticism is being dismissed as a mere pedagogical device a version of the French *Explication de texte*, useful at most for American college students who must learn to read and to read poetry in particular.

## SUMMARY

Formalism is, as the name implies, an interpretive approach that emphasized literary devices within the text. Formalism is best known as Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization. The formalists placed great importance on the literariness of texts, those qualities that distinguished the literary from other kinds of writing. Whilst New Criticism viewed the work of literature as an aesthetic object independent of historical context and as a unified whole that reflected the unified sensibility of the artist.

## Post-Test

What are the major point of divergence between formalism and New Criticism?

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## **LECTURE THREE**

### **STRUCTURALISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Like the “New Criticism”, structuralism sought to bring to literary studies a set of objective criteria for analysis and a new intellectual vigour. Structuralism can be viewed as an extension of formalism in that both structuralism and formalism devoted their attention to matters of literary form (is structure) rather than social or historical content.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture you should be able to delineate between structuralism and other intrinsic theories in textual analysis.

#### **Pre-Test**

What are the characteristics of structuralism?

#### **CONTENT**

Structuralism is an intellectual movement that emanated in France in the 1950s and 1960s and in which human culture is analyzed semantically (i.e as a system of signs) structuralism sought to bring to literary studies a set of objective criteria for analysis and a new intellectual vigour. Structuralism originated in the structural linguistics of

Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent Prague and Moscow schools of linguistics. Just as structural linguistics was facing serious challenge from the likes of Noam Chomsky and this fading in importance in linguistics, structuralism appeared in academia in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and grew to be academic fields concerned with the analysis of language, culture, and society. Like Plato, Ferdinand de Saussure regarded the signifier (words, marks, symbols) as arbitrary and unrelated to the concept, the signified, to which it referred. Within the way a particular society uses language and signs, meaning was constituted by a system of differences between units of the language particularly meanings were of less interest than made meaning itself possible often expressed as an emphasis on “Langue” rather than “parole” structuralism was to be metalanguage, a language about languages, used to decode actual languages, or systems of signification. The work of the formalist Roman Jakobson contributed to structuralism included Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, Tzvetan Todorov, A.J. Greimas, Gérard Genette and Barthes.

According to Peter Barry, Saussure emphasized that the meaning we give to words are purely arbitrary and that these meanings are maintained by convention only. Words, that is to say are unmotivated signs, meaning that there is no inherent connection, between a word and what it designated. To Saussure the word “hut” for instance, is not in any way “appropriate” to its meaning and all linguistic signs are arbitrary like his. (there is the minor exception of a small number of onomatopoeic words like ‘cuckoo’ and ‘hiss’ but even these vary between languages.)



Secondly, Sanssire emphasized that the meaning of words are (what we might call) relational. That is to say, no word can be defined in isolation from other words. The definition of any given word depends upon its relation with other 'adjoining' words. For example, the word 'hut' depends for its precise meaning on its position in a 'syntagmatic chain, that is, a chain of words related in function and meaning each of which could be substituted for any of the others in a given Sentence.

Thirdly for Sanssire, language constitutes our world, it doesn't just record it or label it. Meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind, and constructed by and expressed through language. It is not already contained within the thing. Well-known examples of this process would be the choice between paired alternatives like 'terrorist' or 'freedom fighter'. To Sanssire there is no neutral or objective way to designating such a person, merely a choice of two terms which construct that person in a certain way. (1995:42-43)

Moreso, in literary theory, structuralist Criticism relates literary texts to a larger structure which may be a particular genre, a range of intertextual connections, a model of a universal narrative structure, or a system of recurrent patterns or motifs structuralism argues that there must be a structure in every text, which explains why it is easier for experienced readers than for non-experienced readers to interpret a text. Hence, everything that is written seems to be governed by specific rules, or a "grammar of literature," that one learns in educational institution and that are to be unmasked. A potential problem of structuralist interpretation is that it can be highly reductive, as

scholar puts it: “the structuralist danger of collapsing all difference” An example of such a reading might be if a student concludes the authors of *West Side Story* did not write anything “really” new, because their work has the same structural as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. In both texts a girl and a boy fall in love (a formula” with a symbolic operator between them would “Boy + Girl” despite the fact that they belong to two groups that hate each other (“Boy’s Group-Girl’s Group” or “opposing forces”) and conflict is resolved by their death.

Structuralist readings focus on multiple texts, there must be some ways in which those texts unify themselves into a coherent system. The versatility of structuralism is such that a literary critic could make the same claim about a story of two friendly families (“Boy’s family + Girl’s family”) that arrange a marriage between their children despite the fact that the children hate each other (“Boy-Girl”) and than the children commit suicide to escape the arranged marriage; the justification is that the second story’s structure is an inversion of the first story’s structure; the relationship between the values of love and the two pairs of parties involved have been reversed.

Structuralist literary criticism argues that the “literary banter of text” can lie only in new structure, rather than in the specifics of character development and voice in which that structure is expressed. Literary structuralism often follows the lead of Vladimir Propp, Algirdas Julien Greimas, and Claude Levi- Strauss in seeking out basic deep elements in stories, myths and more recently, anecdotes, which are combined in various ways to produce the many versions of a particular story.

There is considerable similarity between structural literary theory and Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism, which is also indebted to the anthropology study of myths. Some critics have also tried to apply the theory to individual works, but the effort to find unique structures in individual literary works runs counter to the structuralist program and have an affinity with New Criticism.

### WHAT STRUCTURALISTS CRITICS DO

Peter Barry classified the functions of structuralist critics into three:

1. They analyze (mainly) prose narratives, relating the text to some larger containing structures such as:
  - (a) The conventions of a particular literary genre, or
  - (b) a network of intertextual connections, or
  - (c) a projected model of an underlying universal narrative structure, or
  - (d) a motion of narrative as a complex of recurrent patterns or motifs.
2. They interpret literature in terms of a range of underlying parallels with the structures of language, as described by modern linguistics. For instance, the motion of the 'mytheme' posited by Levi-Strauss, denoting the minimal units of narrative 'sense', is formed on the analogy of the morpheme, which in linguistics is the smallest unit of grammatical sense. An example of a morpheme is the 'ed' added to a verb to denote the past tense.

3. They apply the concept of systematic patterning and structuring to the whole field of Western culture, and across cultures treating as 'systems of signs' anything from Ancient Greek myths to brands of soap powder. (1995:49)

## THE SCOPE OF STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism is not limited to the study of languages and literature alone. When Saussure's work was co-opted in the 1950s by the people we now refer to as structuralist, their feeling was that Saussure model of how language works was transferable and would also explain how all signifying system work (1995:46) for example, the anthropology Claude Levi-Strauss applied the structuralist outlook to the interpretation of myth.

According to structural theory in anthropology and social anthropology, meaning is produced and reproduced within a culture through various practices, phenomena and activities that serve as systems of signification. A structuralist approach may study activities as diverse as food preparation and serving rituals, religious rites, games, literary and non-literary texts, and other forms of entertainment to discover the deep structures by which meaning is produced and reproduced within the culture. Levi-Strauss, analyzed in the 1950s cultural phenomena including mythology kinship (the alliance theory and the incest taboo), and food preparation. In addition to these studies, he produced more linguistically-focused writings in which he applied Saussure's distinction between *Langue* and *parole* in his search for the fundamental structures of the human mind, arguing that the structures of the human mind, arguing that the structures that form the 'deep

grammar' of society originate in the mind and operate in his unconsciously. Levi-Strauss was inspired by information theory and mathematics.

Another concept utilized in structural anthropology came from the Prague school of linguistic, where Roman Jakobson and others analyzed sounds based on the presence or absence of certain features (such as voiceless vs. voiced). Levi-Strauss included this in his conceptualization of the universal structures of the mind, which he held to operate based on pairs of binary oppositions such as hot-cold, male-female, culture-nature, cooked-raw, or marriageable vs. tabooed women.

Another influence came from Marcel Mauss who had written on gift exchange systems. For instance, Levi Strauss argues that kinship systems are based on the exchange of women between group (a position known as alliance theory.) as opposed to the 'descent' based theory described by Edward Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes. Some anthropological theorists, however, while finding considerable fault with Levi-Strauss's version of structuralism, did not turn away from a fundamental structural basis for human culture. The Biogenetic structuralism group for instance argued that some kind of structural foundation for culture must exist because all humans inherit the same system of brain structures. They proposed a kind of Neuro anthropology which would lay the foundations for a more complete scientific account of cultural similarity and variation by requiring an integration of cultural anthropology and neuroscience-a program that theorists such as Victor Turner also embraced.

## REACTIONS TO STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism is less popular than approaches such as post-structuralism and deconstruction. There are many reasons for this. Structuralism has often been criticized for being a historical and for favouring deterministic structural forces over the ability of people to act. As the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s (and particularly the student uprising of May 1968) began affecting academia issues of power and political struggle moved to the center of people attention. The anthropologist Robert Jaulin defined another ethological method which clearly pitted itself against structuralism.

In the 1980s, deconstruction and its emphasis on the fundamental ambiguity of language-rather than its crystalline logical structure – became popular. By the end of the century structuralism was seen as an historically important school of thought, but the movements that is spawned, rather than structuralism itself, commanded attention.

Some observer have strongly criticized structuralism or even dismissed it in its entirety. Richard Webster suggests that the consistent failure of structuralist to explain themselves in simple English is evidence of plain or vacuous ideas being hidden behind difficult, ornate language. Anthropologist Adam Kuper argued that structuralism came to have something of the momentum of a millennial movement and some of its adherents felt flat they formed a secret society of the seeing in a world of the blind, conversation was not just a matter of accepting a new paradigm. It was, almost, a question of salvation.

## SUMMARY

Structuralism can be seen as an extension of formalism in that both structuralism and formalism devoted their attention to matters of literary form (i.e structure) rather than social or historical content; and that both bodies of thought were intended to put the study of literature on a scientific objective basis.

## Post-Test

List and explain the feature of structuralism.

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## **LECTURE FOUR**

### **POST-STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Post-structuralism primarily encompass the intellectual developments of certain mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century French and continental philosophers and theorists. The movement is difficult to summarized, but may be broadly understood as a body of district responses to structuralism which argued that human culture may be understood as a series of signs or symbols.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to provide a good explanation on post-structuralism and deconstruction, you should also be able to note and explain the point of divergence between post-structuralism and other theories.

#### **Pre-Test**

What is Deconstruction?

#### **CONTENT**

By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century there were a number of structural theories of human existence. In the study of language, the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Sanssire

1857-1913) suggested that meaning was to be found within the structure of a whole language rather than in the analysis of individual words. For Marxists, the truth of human existence could be understood by an analysis of economics structures. Psychoanalysis is attempted to describe the structures of psyche in terms of an unconscious. In the 1960's, the structuralist movement, based in France, attempted to synthesis the ideals of Marx, Freud and Saussure. They disagreed with the existentialistic claim that each man is what he makes himself, for the structuralist the individual is shaped by sociological, psychological and linguistic structure over which he/she has no control, but which could be uncovered by using their methods of investigation.

Originally labeled a structuralist, the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault came to be seen as the most important representative of the post-structuralist movement. He agreed that language and society were shaped by rule governed system, but he disagreed with the structuralist two counts. Firstly, he did not think that there were definite underlying structures that could explain the human condition and secondly the thought that was impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation Objectively.

Jacques Derrida (1930-) developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretation of texts. Influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche, Derrida suggests that all text has ambiguity and because of this the possibility of a final and complete interpretation is impossible. For Derrida, Language or texts, are not a natural reflection of the world. Text structures our interpretation of the world. Following

Heidegger, Derrida thinks that language shapes us texts create a clearing that we understand as reality. Derrida sees history of western thought as based on opposition: good vs. evil mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, speech Vs. writing. These opposition are defined hierarchically: the second term is seen as a corruption of the first, the terms are not equal opposites.

Derrida thought that all text contained a legacy of these assumptions, and as a result of this, these texts could be re-interpreted with an awareness of the hierarchies implicit in language. Derrida does not think that we can reach an end point of interpretation, a truth Derrida all texts exhibit “difference” they allow multiple interpretations. Meaning is diffuse not settled. Textuality always gives us a surplus of possibilities, yet we cannot stand outside of textuality in an attempt to find objectivity.

One consequence of deconstruction is that certainly in textual analysis becomes impossible. There may be competing interpretations, but there is no un-interpreted way one could assess the validity of these competing interpretations. Rather than basing our philosophical understanding on undeniable truths, the deconstructionist turns the settled bedrock of rationalism into the shifting Sands of a multiplying of interpretations.

According to Peter Barry:

Post-structuralism emerged in France  
in the late 1960s. The two figures  
most closely associated with this  
emergence are Roland Barthes and

Jacques Derrida (1930) Barthes work

around this time began to shift in character  
and move from, a structuralist phase to a  
post-structuralist phase (1995:65).

Hence, this early phase of post-structuralist phase. (1995:65) Hence, this early phase of post-structuralism seems to license and revel in the endless free play of meanings and the escape from all forms of textual permissiveness to the more disciplined and austere textual republicanism suggested in the quotation (7.71) from Barbara Johnson. For her, deconstruction is not a hedonistic abandonment of all restraint, but a disciplined identification and dismantling of the source of textual power. (1985.66)

Post-structuralism primarily encompasses the intellectual developments of certain mid-20<sup>th</sup> century French and continental philosophers and theorists. The movement is difficult to summarize, but may be broadly understood as a body of distinct responses to structuralism, which argued that human culture may be understood as a series of symbols, or put differently the human culture may be understood by means of a structuralist modeled on language – that is distinct both from the organizations of reality and the organizations of ideas and imagination- or “third order” (1) The precise nature of the revision or critiques of structuralism differs with each post-structural author, though common themes include the rejection of the self-sufficiency of the structures that structuralism posits and an interrogation of the binary oppositions that constitute those

structures. (2) Writers whose work is often characterized as post-structuralist include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva.

Post-structuralism is less unified as a theoretical movement than its precursor; indeed the work of its advocates known by the term "Deconstruction" calls into question the possibility of the coherence of discourse, or the capacity for language to communicate. Deconstruction, semiotic theory (a study of which has close connections to structuralism), Reader Response theory in America (Reception theory in Europe), and Gender theory informed by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva are areas of inquiry that can be located under the banner of post-structuralism. If signifier and signified are both cultural concepts, as they are in post-structuralism, reference to an empirically certifiable reality is no longer guaranteed by language.

Deconstruction argues that this loss of reference causes an endless deferral of meaning, a system of differences between units of language that has no resting place or final signifier to hold their meaning. The most important theorist of deconstruction Jacques Derrida, has asserted, "There is no getting outside text", indicating a kind of free play of signification in which no fixed, stable meaning is possible. Post-structuralism in America was originally identified with a group of Yale academics the Yale school of deconstruction: J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartmann, and Paul de Man. Other tendencies in the moment after deconstruction that share some of the intellectual tendencies of post-structuralism would include the Reader response theories of Stanley Fish, Jane Tompkins, and Wolfgang Iser.

The movement is closely related to postmodernism. As with Structuralism, Anti-humanism as a rejection of the enlightenment subject, is often a central tenet. Existential phenomenology is a significant influence; one commentator has argued that post-structuralist might just as accurately be called “post-phenomenologist.

(3) As earlier stated, some have argued that the term post-structuralism arose in Anglo-American academia as a means of grouping together continental philosophers who rejected the methods and assumptions of analytical philosophy. Further controversy owes to the way in which loosely-connected thinker tended to dispense with theories claiming to have discovered absolute truths about the world.

(4) Although such ideas generally relate only to the metaphysical (for instance, meta narrative of historical progress, such as those of dialectical materialism), many commentators discredited movement as revivalist, nihilist or simply indulgent to the extreme. Many so-called post-structuralist writers rejected the label and there is no manifesto.

## ORIGINS.

Post-structuralism emerged in France during the 1960s as an antinomian movement critiquing structuralism. The period was marked by political anxiety, as students and workers alike rebelled against the state in May 1968, nearly causing the downfall of the French government. At the same time, however, the support of the French Communist party for the oppressive policies of the USSR Contribute to popular disillusionment with orthodox Marxist as a result, there was increased interest in

alternative radical philosophies, including feminism, western Marxism, anarchism, phenomenology and nihilism. These disparate perspectives, which Michel Foucault later labeled “subjugated knowledge’s”, were all linked by being critical of dominant. Western philosophy and culture. Post-structuralism offered a means of justifying these criticisms, by exposing the underlying assumptions of many Western norms.

The two prominent figures earlier mentioned in this movement, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes; in a lecture in 1966 “structure, sign and play in the discourse of the Human Science”, Jacques Derrida presented a thesis on an apparent rupture in intellectual life. Derrida interpreted this event as a “decentering” of the former intellectual Cosmos. Instead of progress as divergence from an identified centre, Derrida described this “event” as a kind of play”

In 1968, Barthes published “The Death of the Author” in which he announced a metaphorical event: the “death of the author as an authentic source of meaning for a given text. Barthes argued that any literary text has multiple meanings, and that the author was not the prime source of the work’s semantic content. The “Death of the Author” Barthes posited, was the “Birth of the Reader”, as the source of the proliferation of meanings of the text.

In a 1978 lecture series, Foucault briefly summarized the general impetus of the post-structuralist movement: ... For the last ten or fifteen years, the immense and proliferating criticizability of things, institutions practices, and discourses, a sort of general feeling that the ground was crumbling beneath our feet, especially in places

where it seemed most familiar, most solid, and closest to us, to our bodies, to our everyday gestures. But alongside this crumbling and the astonishing efficacy of discontinuous particular, and local critiques the facts were also revealing something... beneath this whole thematic, through it and even within it, we have seen what might be called the insurrection of subjugated knowledge's (1978:6)

## THEORETICAL PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES

Post-structuralist hold that the concept of "self" as a separate, singular and coherent entity is a fictional construct. Instead, an individual comprises tensions between conflicting knowledge claims (e.g. gender, race, class, profession, etc.) Therefore to properly study a text a reader must understand how the work is related to his or her own personal concept of self. This self-perception plays a critical role in one's interpretation of meaning. While different thinker's views on the self (or the subject) vary, it is often said to be constituted by discourse (s) Lacan's account includes a psychoanalytic dimension while Derrida stresses the effects of power on the self. This is thought to be a component of post-modernist theory.

The author's intended meaning, such as it is (for the author's identity as a stable "self" with a single, discernible "intent" is also a fictional construct) is secondary to the meaning that the reader perceives. Post-structuralism rejects the idea of a literary text having a single purpose, a single meaning, or one singular existence. Instead, every individual reader create a new and individual purpose, meaning, and existence for a given



text. To step outside of literary theory, this position is generalizable to any situation where a subject perceives a sign. Meaning (or the signified, in Saussure's scheme, which is as heavily presumed upon in post-structuralism as in structuralism) is constructed by an individual from a signifier. This is why the signified is said to 'slide' under the signifier, and explains the talk about the "primacy of the signifier". A post-structuralist critic must be able to use a variety of perspectives to create a multifaceted interpretation of a text, even if these interpretations conflict with one another. It is particularly important to analyze how the meanings of a text shift in relation to certain variables usually involving the identity of the reader.

In the Post-structuralist approach to textual analysis, the reader replaces the author as the primary subject of inquiry. This displacement is often referred to as the "destabilizing" or "decentering" of the author, through it has its greatest effect on the text itself. Within a central fixation on the author, post-structuralists examine other sources for meaning (e.g., readers, cultural norms, other literature, etc.) these alternative sources are never authoritative and promise no consistency.

## WHAT POST-STRUCTURALIST CRITICS DO

According to Peter Barry: they read the text against itself so as to expose what might be thought of as the 'textual' subconscious, where meanings are expressed which may be directly contrary to the surface meaning.

- They fix upon the surface features of the words similarities in sound, the root meanings of words, a dead' (or dying) metaphor and bring these to the foreground, so that they become crucial to the overall meaning.
- They seek to show that the text is characterized by disunity rather than unity.
- They concentrate on a single passage and analyze it is so intensively that it becomes impossible to sustain a 'univocal 'reading and the language explodes into 'multiplicities of meaning.
- They look for shifts and breaks of various kinds in the texts and see these as evidence of what is repressed or glossed over or passed over in silence by the text. These discontinues are sometimes called 'Fault-lines', a geological metaphor referring to the b breaks in rock formations which gives evidence of previous activity and movement.

## SUMMARY

Post-structuralism as a movement is difficult to summarize, but may be broadly understood as a body of distinct responses to structuralism, which argued that human culture may be understood as a series of signs or symbols, or put differently, that human culture may be understood by means of a structure-modeled on language-that is distinct both from one organizations of reality and the organization of ideas and imagination.

## Post-Test

What are the characteristics of Post-structuralism?

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Postmodernism is a movement from the view point of modernism. More specifically it is a tendency in contemporary culture characterized by the problem of objective truth and inherent suspicious towards global cultural narrative or meta-narrative. It involves the belief that many if not all apparent realities are only social constructs, as they are subject to change inherent to time and place.

## OBJECTIVE

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to provide a good explanation on postmodernism and a theory and also be able to note its point of divergence from other theories.

## PRE-TEST

What are the differences between modernism and Postmodernism?

## CONTENT

As a movement, postmodernism involves the belief that many, if not all, apparent realities are only social constructs, as they are subject to change inherent to time and

place. It emphasizes the role of language, power relations, and motivations: in particular it attacks the use of sharp classifications such as male versus black, and imperial versus colonial. Rather, it holds realities to be plural and relatives, and dependent on who the interested parties are and what their interests consist in. it attempts to problematize modernist overconfidence, by drawing into sharp contrast the difference between how confident speakers are of their position versus how confident they need to be to serve their supposed purposes. Post-modernism has influenced many cultural fields, including literary criticism. Sociology linguistics and music.

Postmodernist thought is an intentional departure from modernist approaches that had previously been dominant. The term “Postmodernism” comes from its critiques of the “Modernist” scientific mentality of objectivity and progress associated with the Enlightenment. These movements, modernism and postmodernism, are understood as cultural projects or as set of perspectives. “Postmodernism” is used in critical theory to refer to a point of departure for works of literature, drama, and journalism etc, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries.

Importantly, postmodernism, particularly as an academic movement can be understood as a reaction to modernism in the humanities. Whilst modernism was primarily concerned with principles such as identity unity, authority and certainty, postmodernism is often associated with difference, plurality, textuality and skepticism. According to Peter Barry:

The period of high modernism was the

twenty years from 1910 to 1930 and  
serve of the literary 'high priest' of  
the movement were T.S Eliot, James  
Joyce, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf  
and Gertrude Stein. Some of the  
important characteristics of the literary  
modernism practiced by these writers  
include the following:

1. A new emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, that is, on how we see rather than what we see (a preoccupation evident in the use of the stream-of-consciousness techniques)
2. A movement (in novels) away from the apparent objectivity provided by such features as: omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral positions.
3. A blurring of the distinctions between genres so that novels tend to become more lyrical and poetic for instance and poems more documentary and prose-like.
4. A new liking for fragmented forms discontinuous narrative, and random-seeming collages of disparate materials.
5. A tendency towards 'reflexivity', so that poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status, and role; (1995:82)

The outcome of these shifts is to produce a literature which seems dedicated to experimentation and innovation. After its high point, modernism seemed to retreat considerably in the 1930s, partly as a result of the tensions generated in a decade of political and economic crisis, but resurgence took place in the 1960s, which gave rise to postmodernism.

As a starting-point, let's take J.A. Cuddon's entry in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, in which he describes postmodernism as characterized by an eclectic approach, (by a linking for) aleatory writing, (and for) parody and pastiche; (1995:83).

According to Jeremy Hawthorn, both modernism and postmodernism give great prominence to fragmentation as a feature of twentieth century art and culture, but they do so in different moods. The modernist features it in such a way as to register a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority intact.

However, for the postmodernist, by contrast fragmentation is an exhilarating liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In a word the modernist laments fragmentation whilst the postmodernist celebrates it. (1995:84)

Literary critic Fredric Jameson describes postmodernism as the "dominant cultural logic of late capitalism" Late Capitalism here refers to the phase of capitalism after World War II, as described by economic Ernest Mandel; the term refers to the same period sometimes described by "globalization".

## HISTORY AND EMERGENCE

The term postmodernism was first used around the 1870s in various areas. For example, John William Chapman avowed “a postmodern style of painting” to get beyond French impressionism. Then J.M Thompson, in his 1914 article *The Hibbert Journal*, used it to describe changes in attitude and beliefs in the critiques of religion: “The raison d’être of post-modernism is to escape from the double-mindedness of modernism by being thorough in its criticism by criticism by extending it to religion as well as theology, to catholic feeling as well to catholic tradition. In 1917 Rudolf Pannwitz used the term idea of post-modernism came from Friedrich Nietzsche’s analysis of modernity and its end results of decadence and nihilism. Overcoming the modern human would be the post-human.

The term was used later in 1926 by B.I.Bell in his “Postmodernism and other Essays. In 1921 and 1925 it had been used to describe new forms of art and music. In 1942 H.R Hays used it for a new literary form but as a general theory of an historical movement it was first used in 1939 by the historian Arnold Toynbee: “Our own Post-Modern Age has been inaugurated by the general war of 1914-1918”.

The term was then applied to a whole host of movements many in art-music, and literature, that reacted against a range of tendencies in the imperialist phase of capitalism called “modernism”, and are typically marked by revival of historical elements and techniques.



## MAJOR PROPONENTS OF POSTMODERNIST THOUGHTS

A major landmark in the history of postmodernism is the influential paper delivered by Jurgen Habermas in 1980, on modernity-an Incomplete project, the so-called Enlightenment project is the fostering of this belief that a break with tradition, blind habit, and slavish obedience to religious precepts and prohibitions coupled with the application of reason and logic by the disinterested individual can bring about a solution to the problems of society. This outlook is what Habermas means by 'modernity' (1995:85)

*Jean-François Lyotard* (1924-1988) identified in *The Postmodern Condition* a crisis in the discourses of the Human Sciences latent in modernism but catapulted to the fore by the advent of the computerized or telematic era. For Lyotard the Enlightenment whose project Habermas wishes to continue is simply one of the would-be authoritative 'overarching' 'totalizing' explanations of things like Christianity Marxism, or the myth of scientific progress. These 'metanarratives' which purport to explain and reassure are really illusions, fostered in order to smother difference, opposition, and plurality. Hence Lyotard's famous definition of postmodernism that it is, simply, incredulity towards metanarratives? 'Grand Narratives' of progress and human perfectibility, then, are no longer tenable, and the best we can hope for is a series of 'mininarratives', which are provisional, contingent, temporary and relative and which provide a basis for the actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances. (1995:87)

*Jean Baudrillard* (1929-2007), *Simulacra and Simulation*, introduced the concept that reality or the principle of the “real” is short-circuited by the interchangeability of signs in an era whose communicative and semantic acts are dominated by electronic media and digital technologies. Baudrillard proposes the notion that, in such a state, where subjects are detached from the outcomes of events (political literary, artistic, personal or otherwise ) events no longer hold any particular sway on the subject nor have any identifiable context; they therefore have the effect of producing widespread indifference, detachment and passivity in industrialized populations. He claimed that a constant stream of appearances and references without any direct subsequences to viewers or readers could eventually render the division between appearance and object indiscernible, resulting, ironically, in the disappearance of mankind in what is in effect, a virtual or holographic state, composed only of appearances.

#### WHAT POSTMODERNIST CRITICS DO:

1. They discover postmodernist themes, tendencies, and attitudes within literary works of the twentieth century and explore their implications.
2. They foreground fiction which might be said to exemplify the notion of the ‘disappearance of the real’ in which shifting postmodern identities are seen, for example, in the mixing of literary genres (the thriller, the detective story, the myth Saga and the realist psychological novel, etc).

3. They foreground what might be called 'intertextual elements' in literature, such as parody, pastiche, and allusion, in all of which there is a major degree of reference between one text and another, rather than between the text and a safely external reality.
4. They foreground irony, in the sense described by Umberto Eco, that whereas the modernist tries to destroy the past, the postmodernist realizes that the past must be revisited but 'with irony'.
5. They foreground the element of 'narcissism' technique, that is where novels focus on and debate their own ends and processes, and thereby 'de-naturalize' their content.
6. They challenge the distinction between high and low culture and highlight texts which work as hybrid blends of the two. (1995:89-90)

Fredric Jameson (1934-

Set forth one of the first expansive treatments of Postmodernism as a historical period, intellectual trend and social phenomenon in a series of lectures at the Whitney Museum, later expanded as *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Eclectic in his methodology, Jameson has continued a sustained examination of the role that periodization continues to play as a grounding assumption of critical methodologies in Humanities Disciplines. He has contributed extensive effort to explicating the importance of concepts of Utopianism and Utopia as driving forces in the

cultural and intellectual movements of modernity, and outlining the political and existential uncertainties that may result from the decline or suspension of this trend in the theorized state of post-modernity. Like Susan Sontag, Jameson served to introduce a wide audience of American readers to key figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Continental European intellectual left, particularly those associated with the Frankfurt School.

Literary postmodernism was officially inaugurated in the United states with the first issue subtitled “Journal of Postmodern literature and Culture” which appeared in 1972. in 1971, the Arab-American, scholar Ihab Hassan published *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Postmodern Literature*, an early work of literary criticism from a postmodern perspective, in which the author traces the development of what he calls “Literature of silence” through Marguis de Sade, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, Beckelt, and many others, including development such as the theatre of the Absurd and the nouveau roman. In ‘postmodernist fiction’ (1987) Brain Mchale detail the shift from modernism to postmodernism showing that the former is characterized by an epistemological dominant, and that postmodern works have developed out of modernism and are primarily concerned with questions of ontology.

## SUMMARY

Postmodernism is a movement away from the viewpoint of modernism. More specifically it is tendency in contemporary entire characterized by the problem of objective truth and inherent suspicion towards global cultural narrative or meta-narratives it involves the belief that many, if not all, apparent realities are only social constructs, as they are subject to change inherent to time and place.

## Post-Test

Attempt a postmodernist Critique of a text of your Choice.

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## **LECTURE SIX**

### **PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Psychoanalytic literary criticism refers to a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders 'by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind (as the concise Oxford Dictionary puts it).

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to relate psychoanalysis to literature and apply the theory to selected literary works.

#### **PRE-TEST**

What do you understand by psychoanalytic literary criticism?

#### **CONTENT**

Psychoanalytic literary criticism refers to literary criticism which, in method, concept, theory, or form is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis begun by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic reading has been practiced since the early development

of psychoanalysis itself, and has developed into a rich and heterogeneous interpretive tradition.

It is a literary approach where critics see the text as if it were kind of dream. This means that the text represses its real (or latent) content behind obvious (manifest) content. The process of changing from latent to manifest content is known as the dream work, and involves operations of concentration and displacement. The critic analyzes the language and symbolism of a text to reverse the process of the dream work and arrive at the underlying latent thoughts.

According to Peter Barry: "Freud's work depends upon the notion of the unconscious, which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions. Freud was not he discover of the *unconscious*: his uniqueness lies in his attributing to it such a decisive role in our lives. Linked with this is the idea of *repression*, which is the forgetting or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious. A similar process is that of *Sublimation*, whereby the repressed material is promoted into something grander or is disguised as something 'noble' for instance, sexual urge may be given sublimated expression in the form of intense religious experiences or longings. Later in his career Freud suggested a three-part, rather than a two-part, model of the psyche, dividing it into the *ego*, the *Super-ego* and the *Id*, these three 'levels' of the personality roughly corresponding to, respectively, the consciousness, the conscious, and the unconscious(1995:97).



Freud wrote several important essays on literature, which he used to explore the psyche of authors and characters, to explain narrative mysteries, and to develop new concepts in psychoanalysis (for instance, *Delusion and dream in Jensen's Gradiva* and his influential readings of the Oedipus myth and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *the Interpretation of Dreams*. His followers and Jacques Lacan, were avid readers of literature as well, and used literary examples as illustration of important concepts in their work (for instance, Lacan argued with Jacques Derrida over the interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's "*The Purloined Letter*").

In the words of Peter Barry, many of Freud's concern aspects of sexuality. Infantile Sexuality, for instance; is the notion that sexuality begins not at puberty, with physical maturity, but in infancy especially through the infant's relationship with the mother. Connected with this is the *Oedipus complex* whereby, say Freud the male infant conceives the desire to eliminate the father and become the sexual partner, of the mother. Many forms of inter-generational conflict are seen by Freudians as having oedipal overtones, such as professional rivalries, often viewed in Freudian terms as reproducing the competition between siblings for parental favour.

Another cogent idea is that the *libido*, which is the energy drive associated with sexual desire. In classic Freudian theory it has three stages of focus the *oral*, and *anal* and the *Phallic*. The libido in the individual is part of a more generalized drive which the later Freud Called *Eros* (the Greek word for 'Love') which roughly means the life instinct, the

opposite of what is *Thanatos* (the Greek word for 'Death') which roughly means the death instinct, a controversial notion, of course.

Several key terms according to Peter Barry: Concern what might be called psychic processes, such as *transference*, the phenomenon whereby the patient under analysis redirects the emotions recalled in analysis towards the psychoanalyst: thus, the antagonism or resentment felt towards a parental figure in the past might be reactivated but directed against the analyst. Another such mechanism is *Projection*, when aspects of ourselves (usually negative ones) are not recognized as part of ourselves but are perceived in or attributed to another; our own desires or antagonisms, for instance, may be 'disowned' in this way. Both these might be seen as defense mechanisms, that is a psychic procedure for avoiding painful admissions or recognitions. Another such is the *Screen memory*, which is a trivial or more significant one. A well-known example of these mechanisms is the *Freudian slip*, which Freud himself called the *parapraxis*, whereby repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, or unintended actions 1995:98

The object of psychoanalytic literary criticism, as it's very simplest, can be the psychoanalysis of the author or of a particularly interesting character. In this directly therapeutic form it is very similar to psychoanalysis form it is very similar to psychoanalysis itself closely following the analytic interpretive process discussed in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. But many more Complex variations are possible. The concepts of psychoanalysis can be deployed with reference to the narrative or poetic

structure itself, without requiring access to the authorial psyche (an interpretation motivated by Lacan's remark that unconscious is structured like a language). Or the founding texts of psychoanalysis may themselves be treated as literature, and re-read for the light cast by their formal qualities on their theoretical content (Freud's texts frequently resemble detective stories or the archeological narrative of which he was so fond).

Like all forms of literary criticism Psychoanalytic criticism can yield clues to the sometime baffling symbols, actions, and settings in a literary work, however like all form of literary criticism, it has its limits. For one thing, some critics rely on psycho-criticism as a "one size fits all" approach, when in fact no one approach can adequately illuminate a complex work of art.

## THE WORKING OF FREUDIAN INTERPRETATION

The working of Freudian interpretation is popularly thought to be a matter of attributing sexual connotations to objects, so that towers and ladders, for instance, are seen as phallic symbols. Freudian interpretation is often highly ingenious, rather than highly simplistic. For example, let's imagine how a dream featuring a Roman Soldier might be interpreted. Freud believes that a dream is an escape-hatch or safety-valve through which repressed desires, fears, or memories seek an outlet into the conscious mind. The emotion in question is censored by the conscious mind and so has to enter the

dream in disguise, like a person barred from a club who gets in by dressing up as somebody else.

The Roman soldier, according to Peter Barry: “might be connected with the real subject of the dream by a chain of associations. Let’s say that the dreamers is a young adult still under the tutelage of an authoritarian father but waiting to break away from his influence, and experience freedom to the full. The Roman Soldier might represent the father according to Freud, by a process of association: the father is associated with ideas of strictness, authority, and power in the domestic sphere; the Roman Soldier is linked to the Same things in the political sphere; so the one is substituted for the other so the soldier in the dream is a symbolic representation of the father” 1995:99.

However, different meanings might be condensed into this symbol. Suppose the dreamer is tempted to rebel against the father by entering into a sexual liaison of which the father would certainly disapproved. The Roman Soldier might also represent this person, the envisaged lover; perhaps the clichéd phrase ‘Latin Lover’ might have prompted this: thus, both the feared father and the desired lover are *condensed* into the single dream figure of the Roman soldier.

Peter Barry classified the purpose of displacement and condensation into two-fold. Firstly, Freudian critics disguise the repressed fears and wishes contained in the dream so that they can past the censor which normally prevents them surfacing into the conscious mind.

Secondly, they model this material into something which can be represented in a dream that is, into images, symbols, and metaphors. Material has to be turned into this form of dreams, since dreams don't *say* things, they *show* things.

Hence the interest of literary critics in Freudian methods of interpretation  
(1995:99)

#### WHAT FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICS DO

According to P. Barry:

1. They give central importance in literary interpretation, to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind. They associate the literary work's 'over' content with the former, and the 'covert' content with the latter, privileging the latter as being what the work is 'really about, and aiming to disentangle the two.
2. Hence, they pay close attention to unconscious motives and feelings, whether these are (a) those of the author, (b) those of the characters depicted in the work.
3. They demonstrate the presence in the literary work of classic psychoanalytic symptoms, conditions or phases, such as the *oral*, *anal*, and *phallic* stages of emotional and sexual development in infants.
4. They make large scale applications of psychoanalytic concepts to literary history in general, for example, Harold Bloom's book *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) sees the struggle for identity by, each generation of poets under the 'threat' of the greatness of its predecessors, as an enactment of the Oedipus complex.

5. They identify a 'psychic' context for the literary work, at the expense of special or historical context, privileging the individual of class conflict. The conflict between generations or siblings or between competing desires within the same individual looms much larger than conflict between social classes for instance.

### SUMMARY

Like all forms of literary criticism, psychoanalytic criticism can yield useful clues to the sometime baffling symbols, actions and settings in a literary work, however, like all forms of literary criticism it has its limits. For one thing, some critics rely on psycho-criticism as a "one size fits all" approach, when infact no one approach can adequately illuminate a complex work of art.

### Post-Test

What is psychoanalytic literary criticism?

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## **LECTURE SEVEN**

### **FEMINIST CRITICISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the 'women' movement of 1960s. This movement was, in important ways, literary from the start, in the sense that it realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to provide good explanation on why feminist write the way they do. Not only that, you should also be able situate and apply the thought to selected texts.

#### **PRE-TEST**

What are the characteristics of feminist texts?

#### **CONTENT**

Feminism refers to movements aimed at establishing and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women. Its concepts overlap with those of women's rights. Feminism is mainly focused on women's issues, but because feminism seek gender equality, some feminists argue that men's liberation is therefore a



necessary part of feminism, and that men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles. It is important to note that, Feminists that is, person practicing feminism can be person of either sex. Feminism theory emerged from those feminist movements and includes general theories and theories about the origins of inequality, and in some cases, about the social construction of sex and gender, in a variety of disciplines, Feminist activists have campaigned for women's right such as in contract, property, and voting while also promoting women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy and reproductive rights. They have opposed domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

In other fields like economics, they have advocate for workplace rights, including equal pay and opportunities for careers and to start business. The movements and theoretical developments were historically led predominantly by middle class white women from Europe and North America, but, since then, more women have proposed additional feminisms. In this sense the women's movement has always been crucially concerned with books and literature, so that feminist criticism should not be seen as an off-shoot or a spin-off from feminism which is remote from the ultimate aims of the movement, but as one of its most practical ways of influencing everyday conduct and attitudes.

Importantly, the representation of women in literature, then, was felt to be one of the most important forms of socialisation, since it provided the models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted the acceptable versions of the famine and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations.

Feminists pointed out for example, that in nineteenth-century fiction very few women work for a living, unless they are driven to it by dire necessity. Instead, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, which will determine her ultimate social status and extensively decide her happiness and fulfillment in life, or her lack of these (1995:122).

Against the backdrop of what happened in the 1960s, the feminist criticism in the 1970s, their concentration was specifically to expose what might be called the mechanism of patriarchy, that is the cultural 'mind set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality. According to Peter Barry:

Criticism attention was given to books by male writers in which influential or typical image of women were constructed. Necessarily, the criticism which undertook this work was combative and polemical. Then, in the 1980s, in feminism as in other critical approaches, the mood changed. Firstly, feminist criticism became much more eclectic, meaning that it began to draw upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism- Marxism, structuralism, and linguistics and so on. Secondly, it switches its focus from attaching male version of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost suppressed records of female experience. Thirdly, attention was switch to the need to construct a new canon of women's writing by rewriting the history of the novel and poetry in such a way that neglected women writers have given new prominence (1995-123).

The above distinct phases of interest and activity seem characteristic of feminist criticism. In the words of Elaine Showalter, for instance, she described the transition in the late 1970s as a shift of attention from 'andro-texts' (books by men) to gynotexts' (books by women) she coined the term 'gynocritics', meaning the study of gynotexts, but gynocriticism is a broad and varied field, and any generalizations about it should be treated with caution. According to her, the subjects of gynocriticism include: the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual or collective female career, and the evolution canons of a female literary tradition (1997:124).

Showalter also identifies the transitional phases of women's writing first is the *feminine phase* (1840-80), in which women writers imitated dominant artistic norms and aesthetic standards, then a *feminist* (1880-1920), in which radical and often separatist standpoints are maintained, and lastly a *female phase* (1920 onwards) which viewed particularly at female writing and female experience. The reasons for this segmentation include the result of the view that feminist criticism required a terminology if it was to attain theoretical respectability. In addition, there is a great need, in an intellectual discipline, to establish a sense of progress, allowing early and cruder examples to be accorded their rightful merit and acknowledgment whilst at the same time making it clear that the approach they represent is no longer generally regarded as an acceptable model for practice (1995:123).

## THEORETICAL SCHOOLS

Feminist theory aims to understand gender difference and gender inequality and focuses on gender politics and sexuality. Providing a critique of these social and political power relations, much of feminist theory focuses on the promotion of women's rights. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, especially sexual objectification,

oppression and patriarchy. Feminist theory is academically concentrated in women's studies and encompasses work in history, anthropology, sociology, economics, literary criticism, ( supported by women's literature music film and other media), and other disciplines. Elaine showalter modeled the development of feminist theory, although Toril Moi Criticized this models, seeing it as essentialist, deterministic, and failing to account for the situation of women outside the west.

## MOVEMENT AND IDEOLOGIES

Several overlapping movements of feminist ideologies have developed over the years. For example *Liberal feminism* seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reform without altering the structure of society.

*Socialist feminism* connects oppression of women to exploitation, oppression, and labour. *Marxist feminists* feels that overcoming class oppression overcomes gender oppression, some socialist feminists disagree.

*Radical feminism* considers the male –controlled capitalist hierarchy as the defining feature of women's oppression and the total uprooting and reconstruction of society as

necessary and has branched into such as *anti-pornography feminism*, opposed by *sex-positive feminism*. *Anarcha-feminists* believe that class struggle and anarchy against patriarchy, which comes from *involuntary hierarchy*. Cultural feminism attempts to revalidate undervalued “female nature” or “female essence”: its critics assert that it has led feminists for retreat from politics of lifestyle. Separatist feminism does not support heterosexual relationships. Lesbian feminism is thus closely related. Other feminist criticize separatist feminism as sexist womanism surfaced after early feminist movements were largely white and middleclass black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. *Chicana feminism* focuses on Mexican America, Chicana, and Hispanic women in the United States. Multiracial or “women of colour” feminism is related. Standpoint feminists argue that feminism should examine how women’s experience of inequality relates to that of racism, homophobia classism, and colonization postcolonial feminist argue that colonial oppression and Western feminism marginalized postcolonial women but did not turn them passive or voiceless. Third-world feminism is closely related. These discourses are related to African feminism as in the case of Chikwenye Ogunyemi. These discourses are related to African feminism motherism, Stiwanism, negofeminism, femalism, transitional feminism, and Africa womanism.

Conservative feminism is conservative related to the society in which it resides. Libertarian feminism conceives of people as self-owners and therefore as entitled to

freedom from coercive interference. Individualist feminism or ifeminism, opposing so-called gender feminism, draws on anarcho-capitalism.

Postmodern feminists argue that sex and gender are socially constructed, that it is impossible to generalize women's experience across cultures and histories, and that dualisms and traditional gender, feminism, and politics are too limiting. Post-structural feminism uses various intellectual currents for feminist concerns. Many post-structural feminists maintain that difference is one of the most powerful tools that women possess. Contemporary psychoanalytic French feminism is more philosophical and literary than is Anglophone feminism.

Ecofeminists see man's control of land as responsible for the oppression of women and destruction for the oppression of women and destruction of the *natural environment*, but a criticism is that ecofeminism focuses too much on a mystical connection between women and nature. Movements share some perspectives while disagreeing on others considers men primarily the causative agents of sexism.

Some feminists have argued that men's issues are an important part of feminism, as men's equality is necessary for women's quality. These feminists point to legal and social imbalances in regard to father's rights, male rape and spousal battery, negative social expectations for men, and a narrow definition of 'masculinity'.

Contrary to common beliefs, studies have shown that feminist tend to have neutral feelings towards men, and self identified feminist tend to have less hostile attitudes towards men than non-feminists, some feminist argued that the characterization of

feminism as misandrous has been promoted by detractors to discredit the movement, and has contributed to reluctance among supporters of feminism to identify as such.

## FEMINIST CRITICISM AND LANGUAGE

Virginia Woolf one of the foremost feminist critics suggests that language use is gendered so that when a woman turns to novel writing she finds that there is no common sentence ready for her use. The great male novelist has written a nature prose, swift but not slovenly, expressive but not precious, talking their own truth without ceasing to be common property. She quotes an example and says that is a man's sentence. She doesn't make its qualities explicit but the example seems to be characterized by carefully balanced and patterned sequences. This idea that the language is 'masculine' in this sense is developed by Dale Spender in the early 1980s in her book *Man Made Language* (1982). The female writer is seen as suffering the handicap of having to use a medium (prose writing) which is essentially a male tool fashioned for male purposes. Spender argues that language is not a neutral medium but one which contains many features which reflect its role as the tool by which patriarchy finds expression. (Note, this idea that language is man made is angrily challenged from within feminism by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in essay 'sexual Linjustics: gender ,language, sexuality (1989).

According to Helene Cixious from the essay (The laugh of the Medusa)

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility which will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded... It will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric (male-dominated) system, it

does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate (1989:12).

For Cixous, this kind of writing is somehow uniquely the product of female physiology, which women must celebrate in their writing.

Women must write through their bodies they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetoric, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, set beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse including the one that laugh at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence'... such is the strength of women that sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, that say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord (1981:156).

However, the language question is one of the most contentious angles of feminist criticism.

**WHAT FEMINIST CRITICS DO:** According to Peter Barry:

- 1 Rethink the canon, aiming at the rediscovery of texts written by women
- 2 Revalue women's experience
- 3 Examine representations of women in literature by men and women.
- 4 Challenge representations of women as 'other' as 'lack' as part of 'nature'
- 5 Examine power relations which obtain in texts and in life, with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as a political act and showing the extent of patriarchy.



6 Recognize the role of language in making what is social and constructed seem transparent and natural’.

7 Raise the question of whether men and women are essentially different because of biology, or are socially constructed as different.

8 Explore the question of whether there is a female language an *écriture féminine* and whether this is also available to men.

9 ‘Re read’ psychoanalysis to further explore the issue of female and male identify.

10 Question the popular action of the death of the author, asking whether there are only ‘subject positions... constructed in discourse’, or whether, on the contrary, writer) is central.

11 Make clear the ideological base of supposedly ‘neutral’ or ‘mainstream’ literary interpretations.

### **Summary**

Feminism refers to movements aimed at establishing and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women’s rights.

### **Post –Test**

Why is Buchi Emecheta often referred to as a feminist?

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## **LECTURE EIGHT**

### **MARXIST CRITICISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Marxist literary theories tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinctions through the medium of literature.

#### **Objective**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to apply Marxist literary theory to selected literary works of your choice without much stress.

#### **PRE-TEST**

What is Marxist ideology?

#### **CONTENT**

Marxist literary theories tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinction through the medium of the literature. Marxist theorist use traditional techniques of literary analysis but subordinate aesthetic concerns to the final social and political meanings of literature.

Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German Philosopher, and Freidrich Engels (1820-1895), a German sociologist, were the joint founders of this school of thought. The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the

means of production, distribution, and exchange. Marxism is a *materialist* philosophy: that is, it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world or of forces beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in. It looks for concrete, scientific, logical explanations of the world of observable fact. Importantly, whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it.

According to Peter Barry: Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. This view of history as class struggle regards it as 'motored' by the competition for economic, social, and political advantage. The exploitation of one social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth century form. The result of this exploitation is *alienation* which is the state which comes about when the workers is 'deskilled' and made to perform fragmented, repetitive task in a sequence of whose nature and purpose he or she has no overall grasp' (1995-157).

As a matter of fact, there were various influences on early Marxist thinking in addition to that of the political experiences of its founders, including the work of the eighteenth century German philosophers, Hegel, on the idea of the *dialectic*, whereby opposing forces or ideas bring about new situation or ideas). Marxism also built upon the socialist thinking which was produced in France at the time of the French Revolution, and it inverted some of the suit of individual economic self interest would bring economic and social benefits to the whole society ( the belief which was and is the underlying rational of capitalism)

The simplest Marxist model of society sees it as constituted by *base* (the material means of production, distribution, and exchange) and a *superstructure*, which is the cultural world of ideas, art, religion, law, and so on. The essential Marxist view is that the latter things are not ‘innocent’, but are determined’ (or shaped by the nature of the economic base. This belief about culture, known as *economic determinism*, is a central part of traditional Marxist thinking.

### MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Marxist theorist often champion authors sympathetic to the working classes and authors whose work challenges economic equalities found in capitalist societies. In keeping with the totalizing spirit of Marxism, literary theories arising from the Marxist paradigm have not only sought new ways of understanding the relationship between economic production and literature, but all cultural production as well. Marxist analysis of society and history have had a profound effect on literary theory and practical criticism most notably in the development of new historicism “ and ‘cultural materialism”.

Although, Marx and Engels did not put forward any comprehensive theory of literature their views seem liberal and flexible: good art always has a degree of liberty from prevailing economic circumstances, even if these economic facts are its ‘ultimate determinant’.

Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer’s social class, and its prevailing ideology ( outlook, values, etc) have a major impact on what is written by a member of that class. So instead of seeing authors as primarily autonomous inspired’ individuals

whose ‘genius’ and creative imagination enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts in ways which they themselves would usually not admit. This is true not just of the *content* of their work but even of *formal* aspects of their writing which might at first seem to have no possible political overtones (1995:158).

As earlier posited, the Marxist ideology is based on the belief that all societies are structured on the basis of elites ( who are few) and the masses (who are in majority) and that the elites are privileged to be on top of the structure because they have economic power. Marx posits that economics and not politics is the major force to contend with history. He said because the Bourgeoisies possess the means of production, they would continue to hold tenaciously to power unless and until the entire structure of the society is pulled down through the elimination of the bourgeois, thereby paving the way for a classless society. This in a nutshell, is the main thrust of Marxism which the pronounced Africa writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o supports and sympathized with thereby earning him the appellation of a Marxist.

Although, Ngugi sympathizes with the Marxist idea of workers of the world” it is important to point out that he sees the experience of the black man as being unique in the world and as having a certain basic unity. In a letter to Ime Ikiddeh in September, 1971 he writes:

... For I believe that we as blacks have  
suffered doubly under colonialism and  
capitalism, first as part of all the working

masses, and as black. Boy which I mean  
that a white worker by the very nature  
of his position was a beneficiary of the  
colonialist and racist exploitation of  
Africa and black people every where (1972:13).

This is the concern of Ngugi's works and his brand of Marxism as he informs the reader in "writers in politics" that the conditions of life of the toiling and exploited masses inevitably gave rise to his interest in socialist literary works.

Ngugi is worried and concerned about how Europe has underdeveloped Africa but even more worried about how Africa has continued to develop Europe. That is, to develop Europe capitalism through the mercantile as well as slavery where Africans were sold as commodities alongside sugar, Tobacco and gold (1982:11).

The dominant themes in all Ngugi's novels, plays and short stories is reflected in a school talk he gave to Makerere student titled, "The writer in a changing society" where he recommends a socialist programme as the ideal means of harnessing all Africans' aspirations. In his words:

We must strive for a form of social organization which will free the manacle spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country and sing a new song 1971:14.

Ngugi believes that literature is a potent and powerful means of shaping a society and arousing people's consciousness toward the existing realities around them. That through literature, an otherwise docile or inactive people could be awakened towards taking

certain actions, which could change their destiny. And that ,a writer must be emphatic and unwavering in taking positions about the reality of his people since, as a writer, he influences and moulds the peoples collective psyche.

According to Ngugi: ...The product of a writer's pen both reflects reality and also attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality.

The persuasion can be a direct appeal on behalf of a writer's open doctrine or it can be an indirect appeal through "influencing the imagination, feelings and actions of the recipients" in a certain way towards certain goals and a set of values ,consciously and unconsciously held by him.

... Literature is not only a reflection of people's collective reality, collective experience , but also embodies that community's way of looking at the world and its place in the making of that world...how that community class, race, group has defined itself historically and how it defines the world in relationship to itself (1981:22).

Terry Eagleton has been the best –known British Marxist critic since the 1970s. The work has reflected a wide range of influences, including for a time that of Althusser. Marxist criticism seems to conflict in its basic assumption with those of post-structuralism and postmodernism, and the most significant Marxist writing in the 1980s and 1990s has involved a process of intricate interaction with these movements. Marxist criticism has also been opposed to psychoanalytic explanations of conduct, on the ground that psychoanalysis falsely isolates individuals from the social structures in which they exist.



## WHAT MARXIST CRITIC DO:

According to Peter Barry:

1. They make a division between the 'overt' (manifest or surface) and 'covert' (latent or hidden) content of a literary work ( much as psychoanalytic critics do) and then relate the *covert* subject matter of the literary work to basic Marxist themes, such as class struggle, or the progression of society through various historical stages, such as, the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. This, the conflicts in *king Lear* might be read as being 'really' about the conflict of class (the bourgeois) and the falling class ( the feudal overlords).
2. Another method used by Marxist critics is to relate the context of a work to the social-class status of the author. In such cases an assumption is made (which again is similar to those made by psychoanalytic critics) that the author is unaware of precisely what he or she is saying or revealing in the text.
3. A third Marxist method is to explain the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of the social period which 'produced' it. For instances, *The rise of the Novel*, by Ian Watt, relates the growth of the novel in the eighteenth century to the expansion of the middle classes during that period. The novel 'speaks' for this social class, just as, for instance, Tragedy speaks for the monarchy and the nobility, and the ballad speaks for the rural and semi-urban working class. A fourth Marxist practice is to relate literary work to the social assumptions of the time in which it

consumed, a strategy which is used particularly in the later variant of Marxist criticism known as cultural materialism.

4. A fifth Marxist practice is the politicization of literary form, that is, the claim that literary forms are themselves determined by political circumstance. For instance, in the view of some critics, literary realism carries with it an implicit validation of conservative social structure for others, the formal and metrical intricacies of the sonnet and the iambic pentameter are a counterpart of social stability, decorum, and order (1995:167-168).

#### Summary

Marxist literary theories tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinction through the medium of literature.

## POST-TEST

Attempt a Marxist critique of any literary work of your choice.

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## **LECTURE NINE**

### **NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL MATERIALISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The idea of new ‘historicism’ was first coined by Stephen Greenblatt the American critic. It designates a body of theoretical and interpretive practices that begin largely with the study of early modern literature in the United States.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to provide a clear explanation on the meaning and uniqueness of new historicism and cultural materialism.

#### **PRE-TEST**

Explain the terms new historicism and cultural materialism?

#### **CONTENT**

“New Historicism” a term proposed by Stephen Greenblatt, designates a body of theoretical and interpretive practice that begun largely with the study of early modern literature in the United states. New Historicism in America had been somewhat anticipated by the theorist of cultural Materialism in Britain, which in the word of their leading advocate, Raymond Williams describes “ the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and condition of their production. According to Peter Barry, A simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. That is to say, new historicism refuses ( at least ostensibly)

to privilege' the literary text instead of a literary foreground and a historical background it envisages and practices a note of study in which literary and non- literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other. This equal weighing' is suggested in the definition of new historicism offered by the America critic Louis Montrose: he defines it as a combined interest in the textuality of history, the historicity of texts? It also involves (in Greenblatt's words) 'an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts. So new historicism (as indeed the name implies) embodies a paradox (and, for some, a scandal); it is an approach to literature in which there is no privileging of the literary (though we will see later that this statement requires some qualification) (1995:173).

Importantly, both new historicism and cultural materialism seek to understand literary texts historically and reject the formalizing influence of which in varying ways privilege the literary text and place only secondary emphasis on historical and social context.

Greenblatt's main innovation, from the view point of literary study, was to juxtapose the plays of the Renaissance period with the horrifying colonialist policies pursued by all the major European powers of the era' (1991:14).

According to new historicism, the circulation of literary and non-literary texts produces relations of social power within a culture. New historicist thought defers from traditional historicism in literary studies in several crucial ways rejecting traditional historicisms premise of neutral inquiring, " New historicism accepts the necessity of

making historical value judgements. According to new historicism” we can only know the textual history of the past because it is embedded a key term, in the textuality of the present and its concerns text and context are less clearly distinct in New historicist practice.

Traditional separations of literary and non-literary texts, “great” Literature and popular literature are also fundamentally challenged. For the new historicist”, all acts of expression are embedded in the material conceptions of a culture. Texts are examined with an eye for how they reveal the economic and social realities, especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion like much of the emergent European social history of the 1980s, new historicism” takes particular interest in representations, of marginal/ marginalized groups and non- normative behaviours- witchcraft, cross-dressing, peasant revolts, and exorcisms as exemplary of the need for power to represent subversive alternative the other to legitimize itself.

It is important to note that new historicism, in spite of its foregrounding of the word ‘ historicism, really represents a significant extension of the empire of literary studies, for it has to do with intensive ‘close reading, in the literary-critical manner, of non literary texts. Documents are seldom offered entire: instead an extract is made which is then subjected to intensive scrutiny. ( contextualization) of the document is usually minimal partly as a writerly ploy to increase its impact.) Further, little attraction is paid to previous writing about the same text, as if the advent of new historicisms has wiped the academic slate clean. Hence, this is a true ‘words on the page’ approach in which context

is dispensed with and the material then studied like the decontextualized, isolated poems offered for criticism in the 1920s by I. A. Richards.

Hence, a single historical text is  
sometimes the sole witness, for, say,  
a claimed change in attitude towards  
some aspects of sexuality. The  
interpretative weight thus placed  
upon a single document is often  
very great. So we should not expect  
to find the method of new historicism  
greatly valued or admired by historians  
. It is on the contrary, a way  
of 'doing' history which has a  
strong appeal for non-historians (1995:177)

Another major innovator and exponent of "new Historicism" Louis Montrose, describes a fundamental axiom of the movement as an intellectual belief in the textuality of history and the historicity of texts" "New historicism" draws on the work of Levi-Strauss, in particular his notion of culture as a self-regulating system" The Foucauldian premise that power is ubiquitous and cannot be equated with state or economic power and Gramsci's conception of "hegemony" i.e., that domination is often achieved through culturally-orchestrated consent rather than force, are critical underpinnings to the "New Historicist"

perspective. The translation of the work of Milhail Baktin on carnival coincided with the rise of the “ New Historicism” and cultural Materialism” and left a legacy in work of other theorists of influences like Peter Stallybuss and Jonathan Dollimore in its period of ascendancy during the 1980s “New Historicism” drew criticism from the political left for its depiction of counter-cultural expression as always co-opted by the dominant discourses. Equally, “New Historicism’s” lacks of emphasis on literariness” and formal literary concerns brought disdain from a traditional literary Scholars. However, New Historicism” continues to exercise a major influence in the humanities and the extended conception of literary studies.

#### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism, indeed, has one of the greatest appeals. Firstly, though founded upon post- structuralist thinking, it is delineated in a far more simple words for the most part doing away with post-structuralism feature of dense style and vocabulary. It presents its data and draws its conclusions, and it is sometimes easy to challenge the way of interpretation, this is due to the empirical foundation on which interpretations are made openly available for scrutiny. Secondly, the material is often fascinating and is wholly distinctive in the context of literary studies. Particularly, the ‘uncluttered’ ‘pared-down’ feel of the essays, which results from not citing previous discussion of the literary work, gives them a stark and dramatic air. Thirdly, the political edge of new historicist writing is always sharp, but at the same time it avoids the problems frequently encountered in the



‘straight’ Marxist criticism: it seems less overtly polemical and more willing to allow the historical evidence its own voice (1995:178).

#### WHAT NEW HISTORICIST DO:

- 1.They juxtapose literary and non-literary texts reading the former in the light of the latter.
2. They try thereby to ‘defamiliarise’ the canonical literary text, detaching it from the accumulated weight of previous literary scholarship and seeing it as if new.
- 3, They focus attention (within both texts and co-texts) on issues of state power and how it is maintained, on patriarchal structures and their perpetuation, and on the process of colonization, with its accompanying ‘mind-set’.
4. They make use, in doing so, of aspect of the post-structuralist outlook, especially Derrida’s motion that every facet of reality is textualised, and Foucault’s idea of social structures as determined by dominant discursive practices (1995-179).

#### CULTURAL MATERIALISM

According to British critic Graham Holderness describes cultural materialism as ‘a politicized form of historiography? We can explain this as meaning the study of historical material (which) includes literary texts within a politicized framework. The term, cultural materialism’ was expanded in 1985 by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (the icon of the cultural materialists).

The two words in the term 'cultural materialism' are further defined: 'culture' will include all, forms of culture (forms like television and popular music and fiction) This approach does not conscript itself to high cultural, forms like the Shakespeare play. 'Materialism', on the other hand signifies the opposite of 'idealism': an idealist belief would be that high culture represents the free and independent play of the talented individual mind; the contrary materialist' belief is that culture cannot transcend the material forces and relations of production.

Cultural materialism takes a good deal of its view (and its name) from Raymond Williams the British left-wing .Williams formulated the term 'structures and feeling: this has to do with meanings and values as they are lived and felt: Structures to feeling are often antagonistic both to explicit systems of values and beliefs, and to the dominant ideologies within a society. They are characteristically found in literature, and they *oppose* the status quo ( as the values of Dickens, Hardy, Johnson etc stand for human structures of feeling which conflicts with Victorian commercial and materialist valves). According to Peter Barry: the result is that cultural materialism is much more optimistic about the possibility of change and is willing at times to see literature as a source of oppositional values. Cultural materialism particularly involves using the past to 'read' the present, revealing the politics of our own society by what we choose to emphasize or surpass of the past (1995:184).

WHAT CULTURAL MATERIALIST CRITICS DO:

- 1.They read the literary text (very often a renaissance play) in such a way as to enable us to ‘recover its histories’ that is, the context of exploitation from which it emerged.
- 2.At the same time, they foreground those elements in the work’s present transmission and contextualizing which caused those histories to be lost in the first place, (for example, the ‘heritage’ industry’s packaging of Shakespeare in terms of history- as-pageant, national bard, cultural icon, and so on).
3. They use a combination of Marxist and feminist approaches to the text especially in order to do the first of these (above), and in order to fracture to previous dominance of conservative social, political, and religious assumptions in Shakespeare criticism in particular.
4. They use the technique of close textual analysis, but s often employ structuralist and post-structuralist techniques especially to mark a break with the inherited tradition of close textual analysis within the frame work of conservative cultural and social assumptions.
5. At the same time, they work mainly within traditional motion of the common ,on the grounds that writing about more observe texts hardly ever constitutes and effective political intervention (for instances, in debates about the School curriculum or national identity).

### **Summary**

‘New Historicism’, designates a body of theoretical and interpretive practices that began largely with the study of early modern literature in the United States. Both New Historicism and cultural materialism seek to understand literary texts historically and reject the formalizing influence of previous literary studies.

### **Post-Test**

How is Cultural Materialism different from new historicism?

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## **LECTURE TEN**

### **ETHNIC STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Ethnic studies, sometimes referred to as Minority studies, has an obvious historical relationship with “postcolonial criticism” in that Euro-America imperialism and colonization in the last four centuries whether external(empire) or internal (slavery) has been directed at recognizable ethnic groups: African and African-American, Chinese the subaltern peoples of India, Irish, Latino, Pilipino, among others.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to provide good explanation on the background of postcolonial criticism and its linkage with literature. The relationship between Ethnic studies and Postcolonial Criticism.

#### **Pre-Test**

Clearly define these terms with examples “Ethnic Studies”, and “Postcolonial Criticism”.

#### **CONTENT**

Ethnic studies, sometimes referred to as Minority studies, has an obvious historical connection with “postcolonial criticism” in that Euro- America imperialism and colonization in the last four centuries whether external(empire) or internal (slavery) has been targeted at recognizable ethnic groups: African and African-American, Chinese the subaltern peoples of India, Irish, Latino, Pilipino, among others. Ethnic studies’ concerns itself generally with art and literature produced by identifiable ethnic groups either

marginalized or in a subordinate position to a dominant culture. Postcolonial criticism', on its own investigates the relationships between colonizers and colonized in the period of post-colonization.

Though the two fields are increasingly finding points of intersection- the work of bell hooks, for example-and are both activist intellectual enterprises. Ethnic studies and postcolonial criticism have significant differences in their history and ideas. Ethnic studies has had a considerable impact on literary studies in the United States and Britain. In W.E.B Dubious, we find an early attempt to theorize the position of African-Americans within dominant white culture through his concept of "double consciousness", a dual identity including both American and Negro. Dubois and theorist after him seek an understanding of how that double experience both creates identity and reveals itself in culture. Afro-Caribbean and African writers Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe-have made notable early contributions to the theory and practice of ethnic criticism that explores the traditions, sometimes suppressed or underground, of ethnic literary activity while providing a critique of representations of ethnic identity as found within the majority culture.

Ethnic and minority literary theory emphasize the relationship of cultural identity to individual identity in historical circumstances of overt racial oppression. More recently, Scholars and writer such as Louis Henry Gates, Toni Morrison, and Kwame Appiah have brought attention to the problems inherent in applying theoretical model derived from Euro-centric paradigms (ie , structures of thought) to minority works of

literature while at the same time exploring new interpretive strategies for understanding the vernacular (common speech) traditions of racial groups that have been historically marginalized by dominant cultures. The ultimate goal postcolonial criticism is combating the residual effects of colonialism on cultures. It is not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together, toward a place of mutual respect. The section surveys the thoughts of a number of post colonialisms most prominent thinkers as to how to go about this.

Post colonialist thinkers recognize that many of the assumptions which underlie the logic of colonialism are still active forces today. Exposing and deconstructing the racist, imperialist nature of these assumptions will remove their power to persuasion and coercion. Recognizing that they are not simply airy substances but have widespread material consequences for the nature and scale of global inequality makes this project all the more urgent.

A vital goal of postcolonial theorists is clearing space for multiple voices. This is especially true of those voices that have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies-subalterns. It is widely recognized within the discourse that this space must first be cleared within academia. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, provides a clear picture of the ways social scientists, specifically Orientalists can disregard the views of those they actually study-preferring instead to rely on the intellectual superiority of themselves and their peers.



Though not the first writer to explore the historical condition of postcolonialism, the Palestinian literary theorist Edward Said, is generally regarded as having inaugurated the field of explicitly 'postcolonial criticism' in the West. Said argues that the concept of 'the orient' was produced by the imaginative geography' of Western scholarship and has been instrumental in the colonization and domination of non-Western societies.'Postcolonial' theory reverses the historical center/margin direction of cultural inquiry: critiques of the metropolis and capital now emanate from the former colonies.

'Postcolonial criticism' pursues not merely the inclusion of the marginalized literature of colonial peoples into the dominant canon and discourse. 'postcolonial criticism' offers a fundamental critique of the same time seeks to undo the 'imaginative geography of Orientalist thought that produced conceptual as well as economic divides between West and East, civilized and uncivilized, first and third worlds .

According to Peter Barry:

Characteristically, postcolonial writers  
evoke or create a precolonial version  
of their own nation, rejecting the  
modern and the contemporary,  
which is tainted with the  
colonial status of their countries  
. Here, then, is the first  
characteristics of postcolonial

criticism- an awareness of  
representations of the non-  
European as Exotic or  
immoral 'other' (1995:193).

In this respect, postcolonial criticism is activist and adversarial in its basic aims. postcolonial theory has brought fresh perspectives to the role of colonial peoples-their wealth, Labour, and Culture-in the development of modern European nations States. The critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing Western way of thinking, therefore creating space for the *subaltern*, or marginalized groups, to speak and produce alternative to dominant discourse often, the term postcolonialism is taken literally, to mean the period of time after colonialism. This however is problematic because the 'once-colonized world' is full of 'contradictions' of half finished processes, of confusions, and hybrid,'. In other words, it is important to accept the plural nature of the word postcolonialism, as it does not simply refer to the period after colonial era. By some definitions, postcolonialism can also be seen as a continuation of colonialism, albeit through different or new relationships concerning power and the control / production of knowledge. Due to these similarities, it is debated whether to hyphenate post colonialism as to symbolize that we have fully moved beyond colonialism.

Postcolonialism as a literary theory (with a critical approach). Deals with literature produced in countries that once were colonies of other countries, especially of the European colonial power Britain, France, and Spain; in some contexts, it includes

countries still in colonial arrangement. It also deals with literature written by citizens of colonial countries that portrays colonized people as its subject matter. In Dutch literature, a specific colonial and post colonial segment is named Indies ( after Dutch East Indies) literature of colonized people, especially of the British Empire, attend British universities and with their access to education, created the new criticism. Following the breakup of the soviet union during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, its former and republics became the subject of this study as well.

Previously, colonized places are harmonized in western discourse under an umbrella label such as the '*Third World*'. Postcolonial demonstrates the heterogeneity of colonized places by analyzing the uneven impact of western colonialism on different places, peoples, and cultures. This is done by engaging with the variety of the ways in which "relations, practices and representations" of the past is reproduced or transformed" and studying the connection between the "heart and margins". Moreover, postcolonialism recognizes that there was, and still is, resistance to the West. The resistance is practiced by many, including the *Subaltern*, a group of marginalized, and least powerful.

Importantly, postcolonial theory provides a framework that destabilizes dominant discoveries in the West ,challenges "inherent assumption and critique the "material and discursive legacies of colonialism" In order to challenge these assumptions and legacies of colonialism postcolonial studies needs to be grounded, which entails working with tangible identities, connections and processes.

According to Peter Barry:

All postcolonial literatures,  
seem to make a universal transition.  
They begin with an unquestioning  
acceptance of the authority  
of European models  
(especially in the novel) and  
with the ambition of writing  
works that will be masterpieces  
entirely in this tradition (1995:195).

This period according to Peter Barry, can be called the '*Adopt*' phase of colonial literature, since the writer's ambition being that it has universal validity. The second stage according to Barry, can be referred to as the '*Adapt*' phase, this assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre.

In the final phase, there is a declaration of cultural independence whereby African writer remake the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. This to Barry might be called the '*Adopt*' phase, since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent '*Adapt*' in the form, not a humble apprentice, as in the form phase (1995:195).

Furthermore, postcolonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule, the ways in which writer articulate and celebrate that identity ( often reclaiming it from and maintaining strong

connections with the colonizer); the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized (subordinated) people has been generated and used to serve the colonizer interests, and the way in which the colonizer literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonized as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture. These inward struggles of identity, history, and future possibilities often occur in the metropolis and, ironically, with the aid of postcolonial structures of power, such as universities. It is not surprising, to note that many contemporary postcolonial writers reside in London, Madrid, Paris, Sweden and New York.

According to Helen Gilbert in *post-colonial Drama: theory, practice, politics* the term postcolonialism-according to a too-rigid etymology-is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept, meaning the time after colonialism has ceased or the time following the politically determined Independence day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state; Not a native teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism, postcolonialism is, rather, an engagement with the contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies.... A theory of postcolonialism must, then, respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism (2003:46).

Colonized peoples reply to the colonial legacy by *writing back to the centre*, when the indigenous peoples write their own histories and legacies using the colonizer language (e.g French, Dutch, English) for their own purposes. Indigenous decolonization

is the intellectual impact of postcolonialist theory upon communities of indigenous peoples, thereby, their generating postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial theory- as epistemologies ethnics, and politics- addresses matters of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a post-colonial national identity, of how a colonized people's knowledge was used against them in service of the coloniser's interests, and how knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless, circulated respectively and finally legitimated in service to certain imperial interests. At the same time, postcolonial theory encourages thought about the colonized's creative resistance to the colonizer and how that resistance complicates and gives texture to European imperial colonial projects, which utilized a range of strategies, including *anti-conquest narratives*, to legitimize their dominance.

#### NOTABLE POSTCOLONIAL THEORISTS EDWARD SAID

Said took the term *orientalism*, which was used in the West neutrally to describe the study and artistic depiction of the orient, and subverted it to mean a constructed binary division of the world into the orient and the *occident*. This binary, also referred to as the East /West binary, is key in postcolonial theory. Said argued that the occident could not exist without the Orient, and vice versa.. In other words, they are mutually constitutive. To *said*, the concepts of the East is the Orient, was created by the 'West' suppressing the ability of the 'orient' to express themselves. Western depictions of the 'orient' construct an inferior world, a place of backwardness, irrationality, and

wilderness. This allowed the 'West' to identify themselves as the opposite of these characteristics, as a superior world that was progressive, rational, and civil.

### **GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK**

Spivak's main contribution to postcolonial theory came with her specific definition of the term subaltern. Spivak also introduced terms such as 'essentialism', 'strategic essentialism'. The former term refers to the dangers of reviving subaltern voices in ways that might simplify heterogeneous groups, creating stereotyped impressions of their diverse group. Spivak however believes that essentialism can sometimes be used strategically by these groups to make it easier for the subaltern to be heard and understood, when a clear identity can be created and accepted by the majority. It is important to distinguish that 'strategic essentialism does not sacrifice its diversity and voice but that they are being downplayed. Temporarily to support the essential element of the group.

### **FRANTZ FANON**

Fanon is one of the earliest writers associated with postcolonialism. In his famous book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon analyzed the nature of colonialism and those subjugated by it. He describes colonialism as a source of violence rather than reacting violently against resistors which had been the common view, the depiction of the systematic relationship between colonialism and its attempts to deny "all attributes of humanity" to those it suppressed laid the groundwork for related critiques of colonial and postcolonial systems

## WHAT POSTCOLONIAL CRITICS DO

According to Peter Barry:

1. They reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seek to show its limitation of outlook, especially its general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference
2. They examine the representation of other cultures in literature as a way of achieving this end.
3. They show how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with colonization and imperialism.
4. They foreground questions of cultural difference and diversity and examine their treatment in relevant literary works.
5. They celebrate hybridity and cultural polyvalency', that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (e.g, that of the colonizer, through a colonial school system, and that of the colonized, through Local and oral traditions).
6. They develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'otherwise' are seen as sources of energy and potential change.



## Summary

Postcolonial criticism pursues not merely the inclusive of the marginalized literature of colonial people into the dominant canon and discourse. It offers a fundamental critique of the ideology of colonial domination and at the same time seeks to undo the imaginative geography of orientalist thought that produced conceptual as well as economic divides between the West and East, civilized and uncivilized, first and third world.

## Post –Test

Attempt a postcolonial criticism of a literary work of your choice.

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## **LECTURE ELEVEN**

### **READER ORIENTED THEORIES: A CRITICAL STUDY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Reader oriented theories could be traced to I.A. Richard's experiment with some students of Cambridge; given the same text to interpret they came up with different results which was a product of their individual experiences. Richard's experiment was said to have been inspired by Sigmund Freud's psychological theory

#### **OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this lecture, you should be able to note the importance placed on the reader by this theory; not only this, you should also be able to relate this theory to other theories in terms of divergence.

#### **Pre-Test**

In your own view what is reader Oriented Theory?

#### **CONTENT**

The twentieth century of course showed a lot of deviation from an old order in field's like philosophy as portrayed in T.S. Kuhn's postulation on 'fact' in science, Einstein's theory of relativity in science, Gestalt's observation of human mind in psychology etc. Reader

oriented theorist see the reader as the major creator of meaning in a text. Jens Rhoades asserts in the article “Reader Response Criticism:

That the reader response theorist postulate  
‘that a text does not contain a meaning  
which is given to the reader; rather the  
reader creates the meaning of a piece of  
literature as it is read (2004:22).

There is a sharp contrast between the text bound theories of the Roman Jakobson and Viktor Shklovsky led Russian Formalism and Ferdinand de Saussure’s Structuralism, which see the text as everything. The text itself (e.g. form, imagery, literary meaning of a poem) and nothing more is involved in the analysis of a literary work according to the formalist. But away from this, the reader theorist assert that the text has no meaning until it is read. The audience or reader therefore becomes the center of attraction here. Since there is no self-formulation of meaning in a text, the reader derives meaning from the materials of text. According to Wolfgang Iser, (one of the leading figures of the German Conatance School) there are usually ‘blanks’ contained in a piece of literary work of a text does not give it all, he leaves some gaps with his personal experience and from his own imagination, he brings the text to life, this the author can not do as writes.

There are various aspects of the reader oriented theories, the Aesthetic theories affecting stylistics, the structuralist, competence etc. Both reception and the other reader Response theories have attracted several theorists with their various theories of the text-reader tie. These theorists and their formulations would be discussed later on.

Reception theory, also referred to as reception aesthetics grew mainly from Germany in the 1960s and early 70s. From various disciplines as linguistics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, some notable critics here are Wolfgang Iser who draws upon phenomenology so also does Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer who also postulates the hermeneutics. Hans Robert Jauss follows Gadamer's Hermeneutics drawing from 'Horizon of Expectations'.

Roman Selden et al in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* asserts that 'Phenomenology' is 'A modern philosophical tendency which stresses the perceiver's central role in determining'(1976: 51), here we see the postulations of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Husserl sees the contents of our consciousness' and not the things/objects we see in the world. According to Selden et al, for Husserl:

Consciousness is always something, and it is the 'something' which appears to our consciousness which is truly real to us.... We discover in the things, which appear in consciousness their universal or essential qualities.

The hidden form of human consciousness and things that appear to us or ‘phenomena’ are what phenomenology claims to portray to us. The Romantic idea that the center and origin of meaning is the mind is thus x-rayed here. Meaning therefore neither objective nor subjective as Husserl sees it. Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory; An introduction* thus asserts that for Husserl, meaning: was a kind of ‘ideal object’, in the sense that it could be expressed in a number of ways but still remain the same meaning (1983:69). This goes to say that a work of art possesses a meaning which is permanently ‘fixed’ and is similar to the author’s ‘intended’ ‘mental object’ at the time of while he was writing. Husserl’s position has been criticized, E.D. Hirsch Jr., for one does not agree that the meaning of literary work must derive from the author’s ‘intended mental ‘object’ at the time of writing. He does not divorce the fact that a work can have different meaning for different people as the periods differ. Eagleton opines that for Hirsch:

There may be a number of different valid  
Interpretations but all of them must move  
within the ‘system of typical expectations  
and probabilities’ which the author’s meaning  
permits (1983:69).

Martin Heidegger decided to move from his mentor’s (Husserl’s) position to an “Existentialist” stance Dasein (‘givenness’) is the object of his postulation. He bases his work on ‘being’ as seen in his *being and Time*. According to Selden et al, for Heidegger:

Our consciousness both projects the things of  
The world and at the same time in subjected  
To the world by the very nature of existence  
In the world. We find ourselves 'flung down'  
Into the world, into a time and place we did  
Not choose, but simultaneously projects it 1993:52.

For Eagleton, Heidegger sees us being subjects of a 'reality' which comprises 'subject having an infinite meaning, which is part of us we are part of it. Thus we cannot separate ourselves from this consciousness. The being portrays historical thinking, which is personal and inward;, and this happens in a situation. Heidegger's phenomenology' because it deals with historical interpretation. Hans-Georg Gadamer in *truth and method* (1960) used Heidegger's method in literary interpretation. Gardamer argued', as selden et al opines:

That a literaray work does not pop into the  
world as a finished and neatly parceled  
bundle of meaning : rather meaning depends  
on the historical situation of the 'interpreter'.

Hans-Gerog Gadamer, the German philosopher, follows up the hermeneutics, Gadamer's position as Eagleton asserts is that the intentions of the author does not exhaust the meaning of a literary work, rather new meanings emerge from contemporary audience as the work passes from one culture and or historical context to another. Thus when interpreting a past work, the reader draws from the past to the present. Hermeneutics usually bases on its analysis of past works. Reception theory or reception aesthetics developed in Germany from hermeneutics.

At the end of the 1960s, at the time of social unrest Hans-Robert Jauss came up and saw reason to question the German literary canon. It was an attempt to create a compromise between Russian Formalism, which does not include history, and social theories that does not regard the text as basis of analysis. Using the term 'horizon of expectations', selden et al opines that Jauss portrays the criteria used by readers at any period to analyze literary works. Here a poem for instance is placed as tragic, epic, pastoral etc., any work could as well be judged as poetic or unpoetic, literary or non-literary. Jauss neither sees a literary work as universal nor its meaning as fixed. For him:

A literary work is not an object which stands

By itself and which offers the same face to

Each reader in each period. It is a monument

Which reveal its timeless essence in a

Monologue 1993:53.



Jauss further argues that hermeneutic idea of understanding does not separate 'the knower' and the object as does empirical but it sees it as a marriage of past and present; the past cannot be visited in isolation of the present. On appearing, the value given to a work of art and how interpreted is regarded as 'original horizon of expectation'. This is subject to change as years go by for as pointed earlier literary work possesses no fixed meaning neither is it universal.

Wolfgang Iser partners with Jauss as the best exponents of the German School of modern criticism, that is the Reception Theory. In the book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetics response*, Selden et al assert that:

He presents the text as a potential structure  
Which is concretized by the reader in relation  
To his or her extra-literary norms, values and  
Experience

The reader gets the meaning of the text as he adjusts and revises what he expects as reading goes on, thus whatever action is involved in the reader's response to the text is of importance. Iser identifies two types of readers- the 'implied reader' who 'is the reader whom the text creates for itself' as Selden et al puts it. The second is the 'actual reader' who in the process of reading perceives some 'mental images', which paint his 'stock of experience'; for the literary work to come to life, Iser asserts that there must be the co-

operation of the text and the reader. He identifies the literary work as comprising two poles – the artistic and the aesthetic. The ‘artistic refers to the text which the author’s creation while the aesthetic is reader’s realization of ( meaning of the text). Iser sees the literary work not being equal to the text for the text can only be alive when realized and the realization is never independent of the reader’s disposition, hence the work is more than the text. While reading the reader not only adjusts his expectations, another thing he does according to Iser is that he fills in the gaps left by the author. As this happens the text pierces into the reader’s consciousness and becomes part of his own experience. In this case the literary text act as a mirror for the reader’s experience reflects his disposition. Hence Iser asserts that:

The impact this reality makes on his will  
Depend largely on the extent to which he  
Himself actively provides the unwritten part  
Of the text, and yet in supplying all the  
Missing links, he must think in terms of  
Experience different from his own.

The author causes a lot of influence on the reader’s imagination, he creates a picture in the reader’s mind which does not represent the whole of what the text represents for it is only when the reader is left with something to imagine that he participates fully in the process of realizing the text. As Laurence Sterne asserts leaving something for the reader to imagine is the “truest respect” the author can give to the reader’s understanding . In all,

Iser opines that the text is only fully realized with the reader's adjustment of viewpoints and filling of gaps as reading progresses. Selden et al argues that in Iser's viewpoint "texts do not set the terms on which the reader actualizes meaning, the reader's own store of experience will take part in the process.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century American critic Stanley Fish like Iser advocates a theory based on the adjustment of the reader's expectation while reading goes on, this he refers to as 'Affective Stylistics'. Fish's position is slightly different from Iser's as he bases his own analysis at the sentence level. As well as supporting him, Jonathan Culler criticizes fish for not giving a proper theoretical formulation of his criticism. Fish's theory shows the 'informed' reader who possess linguistic competence; internalized syntactic and semantic knowledge for reading. Culler's criticism of fish spans from his fact of:

- (i) Not theorizing the conventions of reading
- (ii) Claiming to read sentences word by word in a temporal sequencing could be misleading for sure, readers do not all perceive sentence bit by bit, neither gradually.

Following the Jakobian view of formalism Michael Riffaterre sees poetry the way.

Hence for him practical language refers to some sort of 'reality; while 'the message as an end in itself is the focus of poetic language. Riffaterre's theory is based on

'Literary Competence' for him:

It requires only ordinary linguistics

Competence to understand the poem's

Meaning, but the reader requires literary  
Competence' to deal with the frequent  
'ungrammaticalities' encountered in reading  
a poem .61.

convention of Reading embody Jonathan Culler's interpretation theory. He 'has argued that the theory of reading has to uncover the interpretive operations used by readers'. 1983:63

Culler's argument is that just as one needs 'linguistic competence' to understand linguistic utterances, the reader needs to possess 'literary competence' in order to read texts as literature.

Norman Holland and David Bleich are American critics whose theory is based on the reader's psychology. Selden (1988) opines that:

Holland believes that we all possess an  
'identity-theme; which, like a musical theme,  
is capable of variation, but which remains a  
stable strand of identity 1988:190

He posits that when we read a text we recast it so as to know our own ways of tackling 'deep fears and wishes that shape our psychic lives'. Giving the example of a body who read detective stories, with the imprint of the stories in his life he thought of using it to assuage the 'aggressive feeling' he had on his mother . This

drove him to associating with the detective and victim, thus he was able to meet his demand. But Holland's example cast doubt on the idea of identity theme.

Bleich's stand shows 'subjective criticism'. He argues according to Selden (1988), that all knowledge is:

'made by people not found; because the  
objects of our inquiry are changed by our  
acts of observation. Secondly, all knowledge  
serves the need, of the community. 1988:190

Bleich further talks about the 'reader' spontaneous response' and then the reader's 'objective statement' of the meaning of the text.

There is multiplicity of approaches involved in the Reader oriented theories as we have seen. This has really made it difficult to give any particular, general interpretation.

Outside this, the different theorist have one or more weakness in their theories, for instance Culler's theory refuses to consider the content of the text in his 'interpretation moves'. Jauss in his 'horizon of expectation' does not show the full meaning of a text, rather he tells how the text is valued and interpreted. Iser's belief that the text only comes to life through reading (realization) is paradoxical because the text, (an object ) is created by an author (a subject); this shows that no texts exist before there is a reader.

From the foregoing we have seen that the reader –oriented theories have given credence to the reader who was forsaken by the earlier critics. According to Clarissa lee Ai Ling, Danid S. Mail and Don kuiken in the form of reading: Empirical studies of literariness asserted that:

Almost no professional attention is being paid  
To the ordinary reader, who continue to read  
For the text rather than for the development  
Of a deconstructive or historicist perspective.

But these reader response theories, variously have made us to know that there exists the text there exists an author, there exists a reader who is moved by the text hence he responds to it. We realized through reading. That the text can only have being in the reader;s mind is another version of the reader-response story, these and more are aspects of the theories discussed in this paper.

I would not but submit that Reader theories have contributed positively by bringing the reader into literary analysis. We should note that reader theories are not just seperative in literary analysis, that they do not stand alone individualistically, they embrace other theories of criticism. Jeus Rhoades in captive Ape Literary criticism opines that:

One of the classier things reader-response  
Criticism pulls off is its claim that every

Analysis of a text is a reader-response

Analysis. Whether you're a Marxist or a  
feminist, or a deconstructionist, you are a  
reader-response critic

Therefore, every reading of a text, analysis, criticism pays homage to the reader oriented theories.

### Summary

There is multiplicity of approaches involved in the Reader oriented theories as we have seen. This has really made it difficult to give any particular, general interpretation.

Outside this, the different theorist have one or more weakness in their theories, for instance Culler's theory refuses to consider the content of the text in his 'interpretation moves'. Jauss in his 'horizon of expectation' does not show the full meaning of a text, rather he tells how the text is valued and interpreted.

### Post Test

Compare structuralism with reader oriented theory.

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