

Historiography of Narrative Theories in the Twentieth Century

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Introduction

When one is asked about that which is a non negotiable matter in the study of Literature, the answer comes without circumlocution: ‘Theories’. In fact, a theory, to be established conjectural methods used as principles of explanation for a class of phenomena, is the basis of argument by which some truth may be reached. And if there may be no other truth than the theoretical truth, a theory as it applies to various disciplines offers itself as the (most accurate) means of understanding human experience. The premises of theories thus become permeable boundaries to rhetoric, ideological and aesthetic interpretations; which brings the theoretical claims to truth to find better origins in its own social historical development. The theoretical borders are as extensible as the ongoing debate about this significance. So extensible can be the borders that within the ranks of any given theory, there may be countless disagreements among practitioners, fact which at times results in the emergence of schools of thought within a single theory. It then stands to reason that theories transcend one truth even though a truth is lodged within the precinct of a disciplinary practice, so much so that the cross-disciplinary interpretations of human experience opens variegated reading perspectives through literary works. Agreeing and disagreeing on theoretical assumptions pushes the borders of life experience and make the theoretical truth malleable argument that take on differing values across disciplines.

Given that this document is intended to learners of literary studies, I thought it necessary to address the general problematic of the theories that have marked the past century, and which are still very much present in the multi-disciplinary arena of literature. I mean to look at how theories are born of human desires, conflicts, and the ways different manifestations may be interpreted for the benefit of humanity in the fields of science, technology, architecture, music, film industry, Economics, politics.

Three reasons justify my endeavor. Firstly, presenting learners with various theories will help them to critically appraise their intellectual schema, to rediscover themselves and the world in

valuable new ways that can influence how they react to their environment with their own motives, fears, and desires. Secondly, theories are developed in university curricula as lenses through which responsible learners can strengthen their ability to think logically, creatively, and with a good deal of insight. It is important for learners to know the rapport between and the influence of theories the ones upon the others; for example, how New Criticism was a reaction against New Historical and cultural criticism, or how deconstruction stretches language dynamics far beyond structuralist premises. Thirdly, theories can overlap a good deal with one another producing very compatible, even similar readings of the same work. It would then be useful to think of theories, not as isolated entities, completely different from one another, but, to use the metaphor by Lois Tyson, "... as mixed bouquets, each of which can contain a few of the flowers that predominate in or serve different purpose in other bouquets". (2006: 05).²

Thus, for example, while Marxism focuses on the socioeconomic conditions that underlie human behavior, it does not exclude the psychological domain of human experience; rather, when it addresses human psychology, it does it so in order to demonstrate how psychological experience is produced by socioeconomic factors rather than by the causes usually posited by psychoanalysis. Similarly, while feminist analysis draws on psychoanalytic and Marxist concepts, it uses them to illuminate feminist concerns; for example, to examine the ways in which women are psychologically and unconsciously oppressed. (Ibid)

While in the exercise I aim at drawing a catch-all attention to the dynamics of theoretical assumptions in the field of literature over the past century, I further recall some of the concepts that have been ambiguous to learners who, at times, are faced with complex theoretical terminologies. In fact, theories explain assumptions and values upon which various forms of scientific criticisms rest. Understanding a theory familiarizes a learner with its language and the key concepts that underlie it and opens large perspectives to its adaptation to outgrowths of human experience.

Because disciplinary reading of the 20th century theories may prove to be an ambitious enterprise in that it may appear as an anthological exercise, I wish my endeavor to be an ice-breaker to the learners upon whom the duty rests to stretch the confines of the applicability. Listing up theories that develop over so long a period as the past century sounds an encyclopedic enterprise indeed! For the point to be made then, a synchronic discussion of major theories is (depending on what one may understand in that respect) made in terms of their influence the ones upon the others; based on some historical events that have contributed to this being so. So presented, many theories expected to foreground in the development may

not be. Notwithstanding that the historical overview will help the learner to find temporal mark to missing theories.

Historical Overview of Narrative Theories in the Twentieth Century¹

The early 20th century foregrounds the importance of narrative in the experience of the external world, while producing experimental writing which recognizes the structural and contingent nature of narrative. The early moment that was marked by formalist thinking which reached its high point with Russian formalist approach to narrative between the Bolshevik Revolution and Stalinist repression saw critical works by Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Virginia Woolf based on the new science of psychoanalysis, the recuperation of a narrative of trauma and cure with a narrator (analysand) and narrate (analyst)/ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)/ Sigmund Freud, *'Creative Writers and Daydreaming'* (1908)). Russian formalism, while being interested in form, is at pains to subordinate literary form to general political and revolutionary concerns (Lemon and Rees (1965), Hartman (1970), Brooks (1984).

The 1920s saw the predominance of formalism, a critical method which concentrates on the formal dimensions of literary text (such as word choice, syntax, rhyme scheme or narrative structure) to the exclusion of content or meaning (such as historical social dimensions), as it may be seen in the works of Roman Jakobson who is believed to have left Russia for Czechoslovakia in 1920 and helped introduce formalist techniques to Central and Western Europe; and the works of Ferdinand de Saussure gives *Course in General Linguistics* in Geneva during the war years. Cf. Victor Shlovsky, *'Art as technique'* (1917)/ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure principle* (1920), Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (1920)/ Edward Sapir, *Language* (1921)/ E.M. Foster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1926)/ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928)/ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928)).

During the period between the 1930s up to the 1950, the work of formalism is complemented by a focused consideration of narrative and history, partly as a 'corrective' to unorthodox thinking and partly in response to the ideological contexts of the day. Benjamin's great essay stands out from this time, important works by Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud too (William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930)/ Walter Benjamin, *'The Storyteller'* (1936)). It may be note in this period the formation of phenomenological and linguistic circles in Europe (particularly in Geneva) which provides many of the future stucturalists. A

postwar generation of literary critics in Europe begins to move away from formalist and (literary) historical concerns into an engagement European philosophy, especially Heidegger: work by Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Blanchot. New Criticism becomes the dominant strand in Anglo-American considerations of narrative (Vladimir Propp, *Oedipus in the Light of Folklore* (1944)/ Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis* (1946)/ Cleanth Brooks, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (1949)).

Structuralist narratology begins from 1950 to 1960 predominantly French touch little translated into the Anglo-American thinking as well with important work by Chomsky and Austin (Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), *Mythologies* (1957)/ Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (1957)/ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957)/ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957)/ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (1958)/ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (1959)), to reach a high point in 1970s. A growing interest in certain French thinkers (Barthes, Derrida, Lacan) emerges within the Anglo-American academy, and a brand of American structuralism (Scholes, Kellog, Chatman) begins to develop. The 1960s ends with a call to move away from the restrictions of formalism (Cf. Geoffrey Hartman)(Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961)/ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (1962)/ Roland Barthes, *Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits* (1966)/ Gerard Genette, *Figures I* (1966)/ Greimas, *Sémantique Structurale* (1966)/ Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (1966)/ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970)).

With the publications of Barthes and Lacan in the English academia in the 1970s, the English space proves as productive for the engagement of psychoanalysis with narrative. Narratology is well established as an interest in the English-speaking world by the end of the decade – deconstruction is on its way (J. Hillis Miller (ed.), *Aspects of Narrative* (1971)/ Wolfgang Iser, *The Reading Process: A phenomenological Approach* (1971)/ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975)/ Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975)/ Stephen Heath, *Narrative Space* (1976)/ Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax* (1976)/ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (1978)/ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds* (1978)/ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978)/ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (1979)/ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (1979)/ Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (1979)).

Early 1980s produces a series of important works which combine psychoanalysis and gender to discuss 'narrative desire'. Narrative becomes a focus for the discussion of postmodernism and becomes subject to a rigorous consideration by both post-structuralist analysis and philosophy. The decade ends with narrative showing its resilience and centrality in two important collections (Cf Homi K. Bhabha and James Phelan)(Cf. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (1981)/ W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative* (1981)/ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction, 2nd Edition* (1983) /Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (1984)/ Teresa de Lauretis, '*Desire in Narrative*' (1984)/ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* (1984)/ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1984)/ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Vols, 1, 2, 3: 1984-1985-1988)/ Mieke Bal, *Narratology* (1985)/ Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (1986)/ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988)/ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988)/ Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (1989)/ James Phelan (ed.), *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology* (1989)/ Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms* (1990).

From 1990 to 2000, the post-structuralist narrative diaspora is well established, with narrative analysis enjoying a life not limited to the confines of literary studies. Many recognized 'narratologists' now carry their inquiries into interdisciplinary and 'post-narratological' spaces. Questions of race and sexuality have proved to be particularly interesting site for narrative theory. Writings are carried on narrative and ethics the Law, history, visual culture, information technology, science, the Holocaust, space, the body, film, and so on (Christopher Nash, *Narrative in Culture* (1990)/ Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (1992)/ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)/ Trin Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (1994)/ Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (1996)/ Herman Beavers (ed.), *Narrative*, special edition, '*Narrative and Multiculturalism*' (1999)/ Martin McQuillan (ed.), *The Narrative Reader* (2000).

Psychoanalytic criticism

Because critical theories function as a laboratory of human experience and that any theory applies to individual cross-cultural human beings, none of whom is completely free of psychological problems, it may be important to consider at the outset the psychoanalytical perspective. The assumptions of areas of classical psychoanalytical theory is particularly useful to literary criticisms in that it allows to show how this view of human behavior is relevant to our experience as conscious beings.

Based on the psychoanalytic principles established by Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), psychoanalytic criticisms marked in a peculiar way the early 20th century. Its importance as a critical theory helped literary critics solve psychological problems in literature. The psychoanalysis posits that we are conscious beings with unconscious drives. While it may be admitted that we make conscious choices in life, we equally unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us to ‘play out’, without admitting it to ourselves, our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress. Under these circumstances, the unconscious is not a passive reservoir of neutral data but a rather dynamic entity that engages us at the deepest level of our beings. The notion that human beings are motivated, even driven by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware – that is the unconscious -, was one of Sigmund Freud’s most radical insights taken up by theorist to lay down the basis of classical psychoanalysis today.

How this theory of the psyche referred to as *classical psychoanalysis* applies to literary perspectives? What projects do the author whose un/conscious constitute the storehouse of the experiences and emotions come into being in writing? Indeed, classical psychoanalytic theory considers the environment of the author as one which forms and informs the author. A writer is viewed as the sum total of his individual experiences within the family-complex and the community in which s/he grows up. In a sense, the ‘birth’ of the unconscious lies in the way we perceive our place in family and society. In literary terms for example, a flashback is assimilated to the Freudian *regression* (the temporary return to a former psychological state), whether painful or pleasant and may be viewed as an attitude of defense because it carries our thoughts away from some present difficulty. When an author flashes back to the past of a character, he means for example that the character unconsciously aspires to avoid unpleasant realities of the present life, exactly as a situation of hunger brings back memories of abundance. In a way, the psychological insignia such as the defense, anxiety witnessed through fears for intimacy, for abandonment, of betrayal, for self-esteem, unstable sense of self, oedipal fixation, all transpire in textual representation by a writer.

While classical psychoanalytic theory advocates the presence of the author in his textual representation of his unconscious, another brand of psychoanalytic theory initiated by Lacan, laid down the foundations of the death of the author, so much adopted within the structuralist precinct. In my view, the origins of structuralism find explanations in Lacan’s philosophy that greatly influenced Derrida and others.

It may be recognized that the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's (1901-1981) work is rather ambiguous, and almost difficult to understand. In fact, he claims that writing about the unconscious is itself ambiguous (its manifestations in our dreams, our behavior, and artistic production, for example, usually have multiple meanings), and the unconscious is difficult to understand. Lacan's theory begins with the infant's experiences both itself and its environment as a random, fragmented, formless mass. He argues that the infant does not have words for feelings, for feeling is preverbal, and therefore the infant does not differentiate itself from its environment and does not know that parts of its own body are parts of its own body. The infant does not have a sense of itself that is capable of such an understanding. For example, its own toes are objects to be explored, placed in mouth, and so forth, just like its rattle or other objects in its environment. At some point between six and eight months, however, what Lacan calls the *Mirror Stage* occurs. The infant then develops a sense of itself as a whole as if it had identified with the whole image of itself that can be seen reflected in the mirror. The Mirror stage initiates what Lacan calls the *Imaginary Order*, by which he means the world of images and perceptions the child experiences. He refers to the child's acquisition of language as its initiation into the *Symbolic Order*, for language is first and foremost a symbolic system of signification, that is, the symbolic system of meaning-making. Our entrance into the Symbolic Order thus involves the experience of separation from others, which he views as our most important experience of loss which will haunt us all our lives. We will spend our lives unconsciously pursuing the *objet petit a* (object small a, which is nothing more than 'a little other' that belongs to me) in the Symbolic Order. In other words, the Lacanian unconscious is also structured like a language in another way that it involves loss or lack. He explains that the operations of the unconscious resemble two very common processes of language that imply a kind of loss or lack, such as metaphor and metonymy. Indeed, metaphor occurs in language when one object is used as a stand-in for another, dissimilar object to which we want to nevertheless compare it. For example, a red rose can be a metaphor for my love, or beauty. Metonymy occurs in language when an object associated with or part of another object is used as a stand-in for the whole. For example, one might say "I think the crown should be expected to behave better" to mean that we do not approve of something the king has done. This stands for a strong argument to the structuralism theory to whom any character, event, or episodes in the narrative seem to embody the imaginary order, in which they would involve some kind of private and either fantasy or disillusional world. Some critics have objected to the use of psychoanalysis to understand the behavior of literary characters because literary characters are not real people and therefore, do not have psyches

that can be analyzed. However, psychoanalyzing the behavior of literary characters is probably the best way to learn how to use the theory, for psychoanalysis does not suggest that literary characters are real people but that they represent the psychological experience of human beings in general.

In a sense, Lacanian reflexions foreshadowed what was to become the structuralist premises of textual representations

New criticism vs Biographical-historical Criticism

New Criticism dominated literary studies from 1940s through the 1960s. Some of its postulates include the close reading methods for the reader to be able to use concrete and specific examples from the text itself to validate his interpretations. The method is otherwise called “close reading” by American critics. Structuralism rejects New Criticism’s focus on the individual literary work in isolation from other literature and from other cultural productions. In addition, deconstruction’s theory of language and the New Historicism’s view of objective evidence are directly opposed to New Critical assumptions about language and objectivity.

Indeed to New Criticism, ‘the text itself’ becomes the battle cry and advocate exclusive focus on the literary work as the sole source of evidence for interpreting it. All the evidence should be provided through ‘Close reading’, which must aim at identifying what the theory considers as ‘formal elements’ of the text.

In fact, New Criticism is better understood in a sense that it replaced the Biographical-historical criticism that dominated literary studies in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. In those days, it was common practice to interpret a literary text by studying the author’s life and times to determine authorial intention, that is, the meaning the author intended the text to have: the author’s letters, diaries and essays were combed for evidence of authorial intention as were autobiographies, biographies, and history books. In its most extreme form, Biographical-Historical criticism seemed, to some, to examine the text’s biographical-historical context instead of examining the text itself.

Attention to the reading process emerged during the 1930s as a reaction against the growing tendency to reject the reader’s role in creating meaning, a tendency that became a formal principle of the New Criticism. While New Critics claimed that attention to the reader’s response confuses what the text is with what the text does. The reader-response theory, which

did not receive much attention until the late 1970s, maintains that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does.

Reader-response theory considers 1) the role of the reader that cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature, and that 2) readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text, rather, they actively make the meaning they find in literature. Among other premises of the theory, the transactional reader-response theory analyses the transaction between text and reader. The transaction takes place when we read, and that the text acts as a stimulus to which we respond in our own personal way. Feelings, associations, and memories occur as we read, and these responses influence the way in which we make sense of the text as we move through it. Literature we have encountered prior to this reading, the sum total of our accumulated knowledge, and even our current physical condition and mood will influence us as well.

Structuralism

Beginning in early 1950s, structuralism translated on one hand the need to move away from (Russian) formalism, and on the other the intellectual response to social and psychological upheaval caused by WW2. It is an attempt to understand in a systematic way the fundamental structures that underlie human experience, therefore, all human behavior and production. It is simple words the cross-examination of the fundamental structure that underlies a given system.

For structuralism, the world as we know it consists of two fundamental levels – one visible, the other invisible. The visible world consists of what might be called surface phenomena. The invisible world consists of the structures that underlie and organize all these phenomena so that we can make sense of them; in other words, the hidden driving force behind the organizational set of a visible phenomenon. The structuralists' belief is that structures are generated by human mind which is thought of as a structuring mechanism; which is that the order that we see in the world is the order we impose on it. Thus structuralism sees itself as the science of humankind in its attempts to discover the structures that underlie the world's surface phenomena. This becomes all the more as an interesting intellectual response to human complex mind that can trigger a holocaust attitude that destroys his fellow human beings. The ruins of WW2 are still smoking hot and humanity was still wondering how this has been possible out of the pretentious dreams for domination of one person. WW2 was a murderous and appalling crime against the most valuable heritage of mankind: consciousness.

The world pledges a ruin, not only of the structures he put in place for his survival, but more importantly in his mind. The complexity of man's psychological attribute is at stake, insofar as the ensuing cold war between the most powerful minds was again drawing an uncertain future. Will there be a third WW3? We have no idea. What intellectuals may be sure of was the re-structuring of the world, human experience, and activity. To restructure, we must explain the concept of structure not in terms of what its components are, but in terms of its deep structural qualities because man, as a visible being we can interact with also has a hidden side that must be explained. Structuralist activity is then given momentum in the decade that follows WW2 as an inclusive intellectual reaction to explain human experience and behavior and quickly covered all intellectual disciplinary compartments of the human science in all aspects of his life and covered Anthropology, semiotics, narrative, and all other literary genres. In literary terms then, structuralism has very important implications. After all literature is a verbal art whose relation to language is very direct. Structuralism believe that the structuring mechanisms of human mind is the means by which we may make sense of our world and literature is a fundamental means by which human beings explain the world to themselves. If credit is given to linguistics as a discipline, this will not surprising since language is considered the most valuable heritage and the most fundamental structure of humankind, and the one on which most structures depend. It is through language we learn to conceive and perceive the world the way we do, and pass on beliefs from one generation to the next. In fact, the field of structural linguistics is the source of most of structuralism's terminology.

Structural linguistics

Structural linguistics which was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure between 1913 and 1915 was given particular considerations in the 1950s. Saussure's work was mostly popularized until the late 1950 through translation in most languages.

Before Saussure, language was studied in terms of the history of changes in individual words over the time, or *diachronically*, and it was assumed that words somehow imitated the object for which they stood. Saussure understood that we need to understand language, not as a collection of individual words with individual stories but as a structural system of relationships among words as they are used at a given point in time, or *synchronically*. This is the structuralist focus. Structuralism doesn't look for the causes or origins of language (or any other phenomenon). It looks for the rules that underlie language and govern how it

functions: it looks for the structure. In order to better grasp the functioning of language, distinction is to be made between the structure that governs language which Saussure calls *langue* (French word for language), and the several individual utterances that are its surface phenomena, which he calls *parole*. *Langue* according to structuralist postulate is the proper object of study; *parole* is of interest only in that it reveals *langue*. The Saussurian word, for its arbitrariness, becomes a linguistic sign which does not simply refer to object in the world for which it stands: it is a two-side coin of two inseparable parts of the *signifier* or the sound image and the *signified* or the concept to which the signifier refers.

The idea that signifiers, or linguistic sound-images, do not refer to things in the world but to concepts in our mind (arbitrariness) is crucial for Structuralism. The study of sign systems or *semiotics* applies insights of structuralists to the study of what it calls the sign system as a linguistic or nonlinguistic object or behavior that can be analyzed as if it were a specialized language. In other words, semiotics examines the ways linguistic and nonlinguistic objects or behavior operate symbolically to “tell” something. In its application to literature, semiotics will be interested in literary conventions: the rules literary devices, and other formal elements that constitute literary structures. To semioticians, language is a fundamental sign system to be decrypted beyond the saussurian notion of signified and signifier. In fact, language also includes objects, gestures, activities, sounds, images, or else anything that can be perceived by the senses. The signifier is given a wide angle of malleability and possibilities in the semiotic field in that it wishes to isolate and analyze the symbolic function of sign systems under variegated situations and contexts. The narrative dimension of literary texts (as structuralist criticism deals mainly with narrative) may be called Narratology, which is a method of analysis of the inner ‘workings’ of literary texts in order to discover the fundamental structural units.

The belief in the primacy of language in structuring human experience becomes of great interest to other disciplines of human culture. Structural anthropology as it applies to popular culture also becomes an area of structuralist speculations.

Structural Anthropology

Structural anthropology was created by Claude Lévy-Strauss in the late 1950s to establish the underlying common denominators, the structures that link all human beings regardless of the differences among the surface phenomena of the cultures to which they belong. Despite the very different ritual forms in which different cultures express important aspects of their

community life it seems that all human cultures have codified process of, for example, mate selection, kinship ties, and initiations of various kinds. The existence of structural similarities among seemingly different myths of different cultures was one of Lévy-Strauss's particular area of interest. His goal was to discover when "different" myths are actually different versions of the same myth in order to show that human beings from very different cultures share structures of consciousness that project themselves in the formation of structurally similar myths.

Other genres

Other literary genres are subject to structuralist approach. What Northrop Frye calls his *theory of myths* is nothing else but the theory of genres that seeks the structural principles underlying the Western literary tradition. *Mythoi* (plural of *mythos*) is a term Frye uses to refer to the four narrative patterns that structure myth and revealing the structural principles underlying literary genres such as comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony/satire. He goes on to identify the structural components in the traditional quest in terms of conflict, catastrophe, disorder and confusion, and triumph. In the field of Orality, narrative laws may be adapted to the tradition societies with the absence of writing. Olrick Axel calls epic laws that regulate narratives in general, etc. But is the seminal work by Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord that gave momentum to structuralist approach of Orality studies in the 1980s. In the 50s the Parry-Lord oral formulaic theory based on the structural qualities of the composition of the Iliad and the Odyssey by Homer inspired of the findings by Milman Parry doctoral thesis of the late 1920s on the metrical nature of the composition.

Marxism

Man in his relationships with others is driven by the instinct of domination which is also socioeconomic. Marxism may then be resuscitated under the particular circumstances of man in the social context of understanding of what may possibly expose him to conflicts, desires, fears, and anxiety.

In the total context of human contest for domination the power relation is ever revealed in the socioeconomic drive of human consciousness. communist societies, though they claim to be based on the principles developed by Karl the Marx (1818-1883) may be resuscitate in the 20th century, especially that oligarchies in which a small group of leaders controls the money and its guns and forces exerted over populations kept in line through physical intimidation

was the drive behind the two World Wars. Marxist theory would still give us a meaningful way to understand human experience in terms of exploitation of man by man in a savage capitalist system.

Deconstructive criticism

Deconstruction is no longer a new phenomenon on the academic scene. The theory was inaugurated by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s and became a major influence on literary studies during the 1970s. perhaps one reason deconstruction is frequently misunderstood is that the writing by some of the biggest names in the field – Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Geoffrey Hartman – as well as the explanations offered by those who attempt to summarize the work of these thinkers, frequently employ such unusual language and organizational principles that they seem to defy our understanding and acceptance. Nonetheless, it all pays tribute to the very concept of *différance*, term coined by Derrida which opens a wide semantic field where meaning is constantly in motion and where the sense of the absolute truth is drowned in the ambiguity of the reader's uncertainty, or in the death of the author.

Deconstruction theory of language is based on the belief that language is much more slippery and ambiguous, unstable and unreliable than we realize. Consider for example the sentence *X does not eat cake* suggests so many additional meanings that the sentence could mean: X is incapable of eating cake/ X eats all other food except cake/ X has been ordered to not eat cake due to his state of health/ etc.

Derrida argues that language has two important characteristics: 1. Its play of signifiers continually *defers*, or postpones meaning. 2. The meaning it seems to have is the result of the *differences* by which we distinguish one signifier from another. He combines the French words for 'to defer' and 'to differ' to coin the word *différance*, which is the name for the only "meaning" language can have. It is rather important that we stretch language in new ways, Derrida says, given that language is what forms us and that there is no way to get beyond it. There is no getting beyond the language because we exist –we think, we see, we feel –within the language into which we were born. How we see and understand ourselves and the world is thus governed by the language which we are taught to see them. In other words, language mediates our experience of ourselves and the world. And for deconstruction, language is wholly ideological: it consists entirely of numerous conflicting, dynamic ideologies –or a system of beliefs and values –operating at any given point in time in any given culture.

Inspired by Lacanian thinking and Nietzschean philosophy, Derrida kills the author on the reader's altar as Nietzsche kills God to praise the republic. In Nietzschean terms that so much inspires Derrida, language is the absolute condition of self realization in society as conceived of in a superstructure; it is power. According to Derrida, language determines our experience based on the structuralist assumptions of the polar opposites, called binary oppositions. For example, according to structuralism, we understand the word 'good' by contrasting it with the word 'evil'; reason/emotion; civilized/primitive, etc. Derrida noted that these binary oppositions are also little hierarchies, that is, one term in the pair is always privileged, or considered superior to the other. Language is then seen by Derrida as a power: it is a powerful tool that can set on motion individual users' will to reach individual goal, be it to dominate and/or exploit the others. The havoc is that, if language mediates our experience of ourselves and the world, then the absolute authority of an idea, an impression, a feeling rests on the insider perspective of textual representation. That is, understanding a text rests on authorial perceptions of his word which constitutes the absolute truth rather than that of the reader who falls outside the initial circumstances of the textual representation. Deconstruction, while rejecting the New Historical and cultural criticism of the 1870s that sees the author as the inseparable condition for textual interpretations, overlaps in a sense with New Criticism theory that dominated the English space in the 1940s.

To summarize Deconstructive premises in three points 1) language is dynamic, ambiguous, and unstable, continually disseminating possible meanings, and that 2) existence has no center, no stable meaning, no fixed ground; since 3) human beings are fragmented battlefields for competing ideologies whose only "identities" are the ones we invent and chose to believe. The theory mainly recommends that a literary text is read to 1) reveal the text's *undecidability* and /or 2) to reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed.

Yet, the certainty of life wishes that something be stable, or at least exists: the author who wrote his text, a Cartesian cogito that may resuscitate the author who is in that battlefield of illusory and slippery meanings.

Postcolonial criticism/ Subaltern theory

Postcolonial theory and the Subaltern theory posit as a reaction between our personal psychological conflicts and all the domains of our experience – ideological, political, social, economic, aesthetic, intellectual - and the way we interpret all critical theories that deal with

human oppression, such as Marxism, feminism; gay, lesbian, postmodernism, and queer theories; and African American theory.

In fact, because postcolonial criticism defines formerly colonized peoples as any population that has been subjected to political domination of another population, it is common to see that postcolonial critics draw examples from the literary works of African Americans as well as from literature of aboriginal Australians or of the formerly colonized population of India.

When it emerged as a powerful force in literary studies in the early 1990s, postcolonial criticism developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to the present. As a theoretical framework, postcolonial theory seeks to understand the operations –politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically – of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies. One fundamental premise of the theory is the problematic of the postcolonial cultures that include henceforth both a merger of and antagonism between the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer, which at that point in time are difficult to identify and separate into discrete entities. The colonizers believe that only their own (metropolitan) culture was civilized, sophisticated, and superior, and that native people were savage, backward, underdeveloped, and inferior; thus failing to address the important aspects of religion, customs, codes of behavior of the people they subjugated. This feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself that result from individual psychological disorder and from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives, is referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as *unhomeliness*, which is a term that translates the cultural crisis that besieges the psychological stand of the colonized who is *unhomed* (who does not feel at home even in his own home). The colonizers saw themselves at the center of the world; the colonized were at the margins. It is this Eurocentric perception of human life that is at stake in postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial theory involves the many complex problems in which colonized populations find themselves today. At times, it has been suggested to reject colonialist ideology by reclaiming the pre-colonial past. In order to reject colonialist ideology, some native authors, such as Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, write in their own local language.

A number of similarities may be noted in the theoretical issues that concern feminist and postcolonial critics. For example, patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to colonial subjugation of indigenous populations; or achieving an independent personal and group

identity; gaining access to political power and economic opportunities, and finding ways to think, speak, and create that are not dominated by the ideology of the oppressor.

Or else other stands by gay, lesbian, and queer theory, African American theory, or else the subaltern theory developed by the Indian writer Spivak that struggle for individual and collective cultural identity, and the related themes of marginalization, alienation, *unhomeliness*, double consciousness, hybridity. If so it is from the deconstructive point of view that language mediates our experience of ourselves and the world, the suggestion by Homi Bhabha that the world literature must be studied in terms of the different ways cultures have experienced historical trauma such - slavery, civil wars, political mass murder, colonial oppression and loss of identity – becomes the leitmotiv of postcolonialist thinking.

Conclusion

The 20th century flourished in theoretical assumptions, and this paper just introduced the matter and exemplified it through a few quotes of a seemingly anthological enterprise. A synchronic discussion of major theories proved necessary to show the influence of the ones upon the others; based on some historical events that have contributed to the emergence throughout the century.

The twentieth century inevitably started up with positivistic thinking of the modern era with the intention of formalizing evolutionist methods that would ultimately foreshadow the seed of post-modern. Thus, from the Russian formalism to the New–Historical thinking to Structuralism, and from their claim for true identity by post-colonialists to post-modernism advocates, theories evidence human motives, desires, conflicts, fears, and the ways history may interpreted for the benefit of humanity in the fields of science, technology, architecture, music, film industry, Economics, politics. In the pluri-disciplinary arena of the evolutionist theories, accessing these fields through the critical intellectual appraisal is to become a powerful tool of self realization.

Theories develop in university curricula because university is the laboratory of formal human experiments where one learns to be empowered through the ability to think logically and creatively.

Learners of theories must then bear in mind the rapport between theories. One must understand that by overlapping theories produce compatible, even similar readings of the

same work since they all aim at the same goal of the universal truth. They are the ‘mixed bouquets’ with the same purpose of embellishment.

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