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Affiliated to the University of Madras
Approved by the Government of Tamil Nadu
An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Institution



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**SUBJECT NAME: INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY THEORIES
AND CRITICISM**

SUBJECT CODE: BRA5A

SEMESTER: V

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SEMESTER VI

Core Paper-XII- Introduction to Literary Theories

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION

Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory by Peter Barry

From Aristotle to F.R.Leavis

Theory before 'theory'-liberal humanism

Aristotle's Poetics was the first literary theory. In this work, Aristotle "offers famous definitions of tragedy, insists that literature is about character, and that character is revealed through action, and he tries to identify the required stages in the progress of a plot.

In 1580, Sir Philip Sidney wrote his groundbreaking "Apology for Poetry." In this work, he made the radical claim that literature was different from other forms of writing. Literature's primary aim is giving pleasure to the reader, and any moral or didactic element is necessarily either subordinate to that, or at least, unlikely to succeed without it."

Samuel Johnson was another important figure in the history of critical theory. Johnson's in depth commentary on Shakespeare was the first time one had given "intensive scrutiny" to a non-sacred text.

The Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley are all engaged in a great detail of literary criticism. Notable Victorian literary critics include George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and Henry James.

The three major literary critics in the first part of the twentieth century were I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis (from Cambridge) and T.S. Eliot. Richards In his Practical Criticism, 1929, claimed that readers should focus on a text's actual words and not its historical context. One of Leavis' major contributions was to claim that literature should be moral, that it should strive to instill its readers with values.

T.S. Eliot made three major contributions.

He claimed the "dissociation of sensibility" , a radical separation of thought from feeling.

Second, he advocated the idea of impersonality, which claims that one should view poetry, not pouring out of personal emotion and personal experience, but as transcending of the individual by a sense of tradition which speaks through, and is transmitted by, the individual poet.

Third, he advocated the objective correlative, which claims that “the best way of expressing an emotion in art is to find some vehicle for it in gesture, action, or concrete symbolism, rather than approaching it directly or descriptively.” In other words, the artist should try to show and not tell emotions.

There are two “tracks” in the “development of English criticism.” The “practical criticism” track (which “leads through Samuel Johnson and Matthew Arnold to T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis”) focuses on “the close analysis of the work of particular writers, and gives us our familiar tradition of ‘close reading.’” “The other track is very much ‘ideas-led’ rather than ‘text-led’: it tends to tackle big general issues concerned with literature. How are literary works structured? How do they affect readers or audiences? What is the nature of literary language? How does literature relate to the contemporary and to the matters of politics and gender? What can be said of literature from a philosophical point of view?”

Liberal humanism is the type of criticism that “held sway” before “theory” emerged in the 1960s. Barry describes ten tenets of liberal humanism.

1. Good literature transcends the culture in which it was written; it speaks to people throughout all ages.
2. A text “contains its own meaning within itself. It doesn’t require any elaborate process of placing it within a context, whether this be” socio-political, literary-historical, or autobiographical.
3. One should strive to approach a text with an open mind, “without priori ideological assumptions, or political pre-conditions.
4. “Human nature is essentially unchanging.” Therefore, “continuity in literature is more important and significant than innovation.
5. Every person has a unique “essence,” which transcends his “environmental influences.” Though one can “change and develop” this essence (“as do characters in novels”), “it can’t be transformed, hence our uneasiness with those scenes (quite common, for instance, in Dickens) which involve a ‘change of heart’ in a character, so that the whole personality is shifted into a new dimension by force of circumstance, the miser is transformed and changes his ways, or the good man or woman is corrupted by wealth.”
6. “The purpose of literature is essentially the enhancement of life and the propagation of human values,” but not in a preachy, propaganda-like way.
7. “Form and content in literature must be fused in an organic way, so that the one grows inevitably from the other. Literary form should not be like a decoration which is applied externally to a completed structure.”
8. Writers should be sincere and honest. For example, he should avoid clichés, or “over-inflated forms of expression.” In so doing, the writer “can transcend the sense of distance between

language and material, and can make the language seem to 'enact' what it depicts, thus apparently abolishing the necessary distance between words and things."

9. "What is valued in literature is the 'silent' showing and demonstrating of something, rather than the explaining, or saying, of it." According to this view, "words should mime, or demonstrate, or act out, or sound out what they signify, rather than just representing it in an abstract way. This idea is state with special fervency in the work of F.R. Leavis."

10. The job of criticism is to interpret the text, to mediate between it and the reader. A theoretical account of the nature of reading, or of literature in general, isn't useful in criticism.

In the 1960s, scholars began to reject liberal humanism in favor of "critical theory." In the Sixties, Marxist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, linguistic criticism, and feminist criticism emerged. The Seventies saw the rise of structuralism and post-structuralism. In the Eighties, "history, politics, and context were reinstated at the centre of the literary-critical agenda." New historicism and cultural materialism. "Both of these take what might be called a 'holistic' approach to literature, aiming to integrate literary and historical study while at the same time maintaining some of the insights of the structuralists and post-structuralists of the previous decade." The major movements that arose in the Nineties were postcolonialism and postmodernism

Some recurrent ideas in critical theory

1. Many notions that we habitually regard as fixed and reliable essences (gender identity, individual selfhood, literature itself) are fluid, unstable, socially constructed, contingent, provisional categories upon which no overarching absolute truths can be established. Contemporary critical theory critiques such premises of essentialism.

2. All thinking affected and largely determined by ideological commitments—no mode of inquiry is disinterested, not even one's own (Barry notes that this premise introduces risk of relativism that may undercut one's argument).

3. Language conditions and limits what we see—all reality is a linguistic/textual construct

4. No fixed, definitive, definite readings/meanings—all texts are webs of contradiction with no final court of appeals to render judgment

5. Distrust of grand, totalizing theories/notions, including notion of "great books" that are somehow identifiably great regardless of a particular socio-political context; likewise, concept of a "human nature" that transcends race, gender, class is untenable, and can be shown to have the effect of marginalizing other categories of identification/affiliation when some general "human nature" is invoked, appealed to

To Summarize,

Politics is pervasive,

Language is constitutive,

Truth is provisional,

Meaning is contingent,

Human nature is a myth.

UNIT II

Structuralism

Structuralism began in France in the 1950s in the works of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–) and literary critic Roland Barthes (1915–1980). Their significant works, as well as the works of other structuralists, began to be translated into English in the 1970s. Structuralism claims that “things cannot be understood in isolation—they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of.

To better understand how structuralism works, Barry gives an example of how a structuralist might analyze John Donne’s “Good Morrow.” (a) A structuralist would say that we can only understand the poem if we understand “the genre which it parodies and subverts.” The genre of Donne’s poem is the alba, “a poetic form dating from the twelfth century in which lovers lament the approach of daybreak because it means that they must part.” (b) But, a structuralist would continue, we can only understand the alba if we understand courtly love. Further, “the alba, being a poem, presupposes a knowledge of what is entailed in the conventionalised form as utterance known as poetry.”

Barry notes that the structuralist approach “is actually taking you further and further away from the text, and into large and comparatively abstract questions of genre, history, and philosophy, rather than close and closer to it, as the Anglo-American tradition demands.” In the “structuralist approach to literature there is a constant movement away from the interpretation of the individual literary work and a parallel drive towards understanding the larger, abstract structures which contain them. Those structures...are usually abstract such as the notion of the literary or the poetic, or the nature of narrative itself, rather than ‘mere’ concrete specifics like the history of the alba or of courtly love, both of which, after all, we could quite easily find out about from conventional literary history.

The structuralists were greatly influenced by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), whose teaching can be summarized in three points. First, language is arbitrary. That is, there is no reason why the words we apply to objects couldn’t be different than they are. I may call X a “dog,” but there is no reason why I couldn’t have instead chosen to call X a “cat.” The structuralists were “interested in the implication that if language as a sign system is based on arbitrariness of this kind, then it follows that language isn’t a reflection of the world and of

experience, but a system which stands quite separate from it.” Second, the meaning of words is relational—that is, “no word can be defined in isolation from other words.” For instance, I cannot understand what “good” means if I do not also understand what “bad” means. I cannot understand what a “mansion” is if I do not understand what a “house” is and what a “palace” is—a mansion is bigger than a house but smaller than a palace.[xvii] Third, “language constitutes our world, it doesn’t just record it or label it.” Meaning is not just “expressed through” language; it is also “constructed” by it. For instance, Osama Bin Laden can be called either a “terrorist” or a “freedom fighter”; there is no objective way to describe him; regardless how I describe him, I am imposing my values onto the world. For instance, according to our language, there are four seasons of the year. But, in reality, are we any more justified dividing the year into four seasons than, say, six or eight? “The seasons, then, are a way of seeing the year, not an objective fact of nature.” “So Saussure’s thinking stressed the way language is arbitrary, relational, and constitutive, and this way of thinking about language greatly influenced the structuralists, because it gave them a model of a system which is self-contained, in which individual items relate to other items and thus create larger structures.

Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction

In some way, Post-structuralism (which emerged in France in the late 1960s) takes structuralism to its logical conclusion. Structuralism claims that our words do not adhere to reality, but create it. “The post-structuralist maintains the consequences of this belief that we enter a universe of radical uncertainty, for we can have no access to any fixed landmark which is beyond linguistic processing, and hence we have no standards to measure anything. It is mandatory to listen to the two pioneers, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida in order to understand post-structuralism better.

Barthes, in his 1968 essay “Death of the Author,” claimed that the meaning of a text is not determined by context or authorial intention. Rather, the meaning of a text is determined by the reader. In other words, the author does not produce the text, but the reader does. Given this interpretation, it follows that a text cannot have a wrong interpretation. Derrida claimed that the universe is relativistic or “decentered,” having “no absolutes or fixed points.” Like Nietzsche, he argued that facts were not possible, only interpretations; further, “no interpretation has the stamp of authority on it, as there is no longer any authority to appeal for validation on interpretation.” This view of a decentered universe led to the deconstructive “reading of texts.” Texts, previously regarded as unified artistic artifacts are shown to be fragmented, self-divided, and centreless.”

Post-structuralists strive to deconstruct texts. Deconstructionists strive to uncover the unconscious rather than the conscious dimension of the text, all the things which is over textuality glosses over or fails to recognize.

Deconstructionists try to unmask internal contradictions or inconsistencies in the text, aiming to show the disunity which underlies its apparent unity. In his Dictionary of Literary Terms, J.A. Cuddon writes that, “a text can be read as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying...it may be read as carrying a plurality of significance or as saying many different

things which are at variance with, contradictory to and subversive of what may be seen by criticism as a single 'stable' meaning. Thus a text may 'betray' itself." "In pursuance of its aims, the deconstructive process will often fix on a detail of the text which looks incidental, the presence of a particular metaphor, for instance, and then use it as the key to the whole text, so that everything is read through it. Terry Eagleton refers to deconstruction as "reading against the grain" or "reading the text against itself" in order to know, "the text as it cannot know itself.

THREE STAGES

There are three stages to deconstruct: the verbal, textual, and linguistic stages.

VERBAL STAGE

The verbal stage is very similar to that of more conventional forms of close reading. It involves looking in the text for paradoxes and contradictions, at what might be called the purely verbal level.

TEXTUAL STAGE

In textual stage a critic looks for shifts or breaks in the continuity of the poem. These shifts reveal instabilities of attitude, and hence the lack of a fixed and unified position.

LINGUISTIC STAGE

The linguistic stage looks for moments in the poem when the adequacy of language itself as a medium of communication. There is implicit or explicit reference to the unreliability or untrustworthiness of language.

UNIT 3

Postmodernism

"'Modernism' is the name given to the movement which dominated the arts and culture of the first half of the twentieth century. Modernism was that earthquake in the arts which brought down much of the structure of pre-twentieth-century practice in music, painting, literature, and architecture. One of the major epicentres of this earthquake seems to have been Vienna, during the period of 1890-1910, but the effects were felt in France, Germany, Italy and eventually even in Britain, in art movements like Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurism." "In all the arts touched by modernism what had been the most fundamental elements of practice were challenged and rejected: thus, melody and harmony were put aside in music; perspective and direct pictorial representation were abandoned in painting, in favour of degrees of abstraction; in architecture traditional forms and materials (pitched roofs, domes and columns, wood, stone, and bricks) were rejected in favour of plain geometrical forms, often executed in new materials like plate glass and concrete.

In literature, finally, there was a rejection of traditional realism (chronological plots, continuous narratives relayed by omniscient narrators, 'closed endings', etc.) in favour of experimental forms of various kinds." "High modernism" lasted from 1910 to 1930 and featured such artists as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, and Gertrude Stein. Modernism "seemed to retreat considerably in the 1930s" and made a minor "resurgence in the 1960s," but never regained the "pre-eminence it had enjoyed" in its high period.

Barry records five characteristics of literary modernism. First, it focused 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 technique)." Second, there is 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." Third, there is a "blurring of distinctions between genres, so that novels tend to become more lyrical and poetic, for instance, and poems more documentary and prose-like." Fourth, there is a "new liking for fragmented forms, discontinuous narrative, and random-seeming collages of disparate materials." Fifth, there is a "tendency towards 'reflexivity', so that poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status, and role.

Now that we have a working definition of modernism, we can learn what postmodernism is. According to Jeremy Hawthorn (who wrote the Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Terms), both modernism and postmodernism "give great prominence to fragmentation as a feature of twentieth-century art and culture, but they do so in very different moods. The modernist features in such a way as to register a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority was intact. There "is a tone of lament, pessimism, and despair about the world which finds appropriate representation in these 'fracture' art forms (the collages of Kurt Schwitters, for example, which mix painted areas of canvas with random clippings from newspapers, time-tables, and advertisements). 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 while the postmodernist celebrates it."

Unlike modernism, postmodernism "rejects the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' art and believes in excess, in gaudiness, and in 'bad taste' mixtures of qualities. It disdains the modernist asceticism as elitist and cheerfully mixes, in the same building, bits and piece from different architectural periods. A similar postmodernist 'edifice' in literature would be the 'Martian' poetry of writers like Craig Raine or Christopher Reid, where bizarrely colorful mixtures of imagery, viewpoint, and vocabulary jostle on a surface without the depths or significance which a literary education trains us to seek through..

Jurgen Habermas significantly contributed to postmodern theory in his 1980 paper "Modernity—an Incomplete Project." Habermas claims that modernity began with the Enlightenment or Age of Reason (which lasted from the mid-1600s to the mid-1700s), "when a new faith arose in the power of reason to improve human society."

The Enlightenment included such thinkers as Kant, Voltaire, Diderot, Locke, and Hume. “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 in society. This outlook is what Habermas means by ‘modernity’.” For Habermas this faith in reason and the possibility of progress survived into the twentieth century, and even survives the catalogue of disasters which makes up this century’s history. The cultural movement known as modernism subscribed to this ‘project’, in the sense that it constituted a lament for a lost sense of purpose, a lost coherence, a lost system of values. For Habermas, the French post-structuralist thinkers of the 1970s, such as Derrida and Foucault, represented a specific repudiation of this kind of Enlightenment ‘modernity’. They attacked, in his view, the ideals of reason, clarity, truth, and progress. Habermas wants to continue the project of the Enlightenment.

Contrary to Habermas, Jean-Francois Lyotard wants to abandon the Enlightenment project. He looks at modernity as an attempt to put a meta-narrative or super-narrative on life. Meta-narratives (be they Christian, Marxist, or scientific), “which purport to explain and reassure, are really illusions, fostered in order to smother difference, opposition, and plurality.” Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives.

Rejecting metanarratives, he claims that “the best we can hope for is a series of ‘mini narratives’, which are provisional, contingent, temporary, and relative and which provide a basis for the actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances.

Another influential postmodern theorist is Jean Baudrillard, who claims that “in contemporary life the pervasive influences of images from film, TV, and advertising has led to a loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth. The result is a culture of ‘hyperreality’, in which distinctions between these are eroded.”

Psychoanalytic criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism “uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature.” As the Concise Oxford Dictionary puts it, psychoanalysis is “a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders ‘by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind.’” “The classic method of doing this is to get the patient to talk freely, in such a way that the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining ‘buried’ in the unconscious. This practice is based upon specific theories of how the mind, the instincts, and sexuality work. These theories were developed by the Austrian, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). There is a growing consensus today that the therapeutic value of the method is limited, and that Freud’s life-work is seriously flawed by methodological irregularities.

Barry lists five things that Freudian psychoanalytic critics do. First, they “given central importance...to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind. They

associate the literary work's 'over' content with the former, and the 'covert' with the latter, privileging the latter as being what the work is 'really' about, and aiming to disentangle the two." Second, "they pay close attention to unconscious motives and feelings, whether these be (a) those of the author, or (b) those of the characters depicted in the work." Third, the "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." Fourth, the "make large-scale applications of psychoanalytic concepts to literary history in genera, 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." Fifth, they "identify a 'psychic' content for the literary work, at the expense of social or historical context, privileging the individual 'psycho-drama' above the 'social drama' of class conflict.

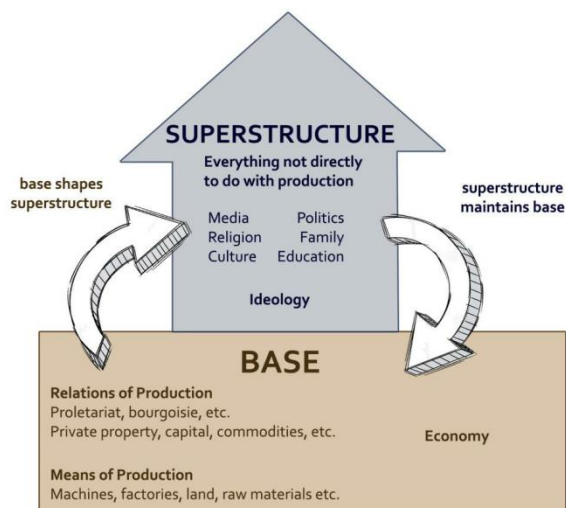
UNIT 4

Feminist criticism

Barry lists eleven things that feminist literary critics do. First, they "[r]ethink the canon, aiming at the rediscovery of texts written by women." Second, they "[r]evalue women's experiences." Third, they "[e]xamine representations of women in literature by women and men." Fourth, they "[c]hallenge representations of women as 'Others', as 'lack', as part of 'nature'." Fifth, they "[e]xamine 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." Sixth, they "[r]ecognize the role of language in making what is social and constructed seem transparent and 'natural'." Seventh, they "[r] the question of whether men and women are 'essentially' different because of biology, or are social constructed as different." Eighth, they "[e]xplore the question of whether there is a female language...and whether this is also available to men." Ninth, they "[r]e-read' psychoanalysis to further explore the issue of female and male identity." Tenth, they "[q]uestion the popular notion of the death of the author, asking whether there are only 'subject positions...constructed in discourse', or whether, on the contrary, the experience (e.g. of a black or lesbian writer) is central." Eleventh, they "[m]ake clear the ideological base of supposedly 'neutral' or 'mainstream' literary interpretations." [xl]

Marxist Criticism

The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Steiner calls the two main streams of Marxist criticism, of the 1960s and of the 1970s, the Engelsian Marxist criticism, which stresses the necessary freedom of art from direct political determinism. The Leninist Marxist criticism insists on the need for art to be explicitly committed to the political cause of the Left. This chapter outlines the key terms and concepts of the Marxist thinking on literature introduced by Louis Althusser. The chapter describes some critical activities of Marxists and presents an example of Marxist criticism, which mainly shows the Marxist critical activities.



Source: The Narratologist

Unit-5: Post-Colonial Criticism

As an epistemology (i.e., a study of knowledge, its nature, and verifiability), ethics (moral philosophy), and as a political science (i.e., in its concern with affairs of the citizenry), the field of postcolonialism addresses the matters that constitute the postcolonial identity of a decolonized people, which derives from:

[2]the colonizer's generation of cultural knowledge about the colonized people; and how that Western cultural knowledge was applied to subjugate a non-European people into a colony of the European mother country, which, after initial invasion, was effected by means of the cultural identities of 'colonizer' and 'colonized'.

Postcolonialism is aimed at disempowering such theories (intellectual and linguistic, social and economic) by means of which colonialists "perceive," "understand," and "know" the world. Postcolonial theory thus establishes intellectual spaces for subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and thus produce cultural discourses of philosophy, language, society, and economy, balancing the imbalanced us-and-them binary power-relationship between the colonist and the colonial subjects.

Influenced by the poststructuralist and postmodern idea of decentering, postcolonial literary criticism undermines the universalist claims of literature, identifies colonial sympathies in the canon, and replaces the colonial metanarratives with counter-narratives of resistance, by rewriting history and asserting cultural identities through strategies such as separatism, nativism, cultural syncretism, hybridity, mimicry, active participation and assimilation. Backed by an anti-essentialist notion of identity and culture, it critiques cultural hierarchies and the Eurocentrism of modernity. The major theoretical works in postcolonial theory include *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Franz Fanon, *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said, *In Other Worlds* (1987) by Gayatri Spivak, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft et al, *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi K Bhabha, and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by Edward Said.

In literature, indigenous people from previously colonised and marginalised countries have increasingly found their voices, attempting to assert their own visions, tell their own stories and reclaim their experiences and histories.

With the objective of locating the modes of representation where Europeans constructed natives in politically prejudiced ways, post colonial criticism intends to unveil such literary figures, themes and representatives that have enforced imperial ideology, colonial domination and continuing Western hegemony. It endeavours to probe beneath the obvious and apparently universal/aesthetic/

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

New Historicism: “The historicity of the text and the textuality of history.”

The phrase was coined by Stephen Greenblatt around 1980. Other practitioners are J.W. Lever. Jonathan Dollimore.

Cultural materialism is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same time period. It refuses to privilege literary text. It is no longer a matter of literature maintaining the foreground and history the background, instead it is a matter of literature and history occupying the same area and given the same weight. Reading all of the textual traces of the past, fiction or non. It places the literary text within the frame of a non-literary text.

A historical anecdote is given, relating the text to the time. Context is replaced by “co-text”, that is an interrelated non-literary text from the same time period.

Differences between old and new historicism:

Old historicism is hierarchical, with literature being the “jewel,” and history the background. New historicism is Parallel readings, no more hierarchy.

Old historicism is a historical movement. It creates a historical framework in which to place the text. New historicism is a historicist movement. New historicism is interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents—history as text. The word of the past replaces the world of the past. The aim is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re- situating it.

New Historicism focuses on the way literature expresses-and sometimes disguises-power relations at work in the social context in which the literature was produced, often this involves making connections between a literary work and other kinds of texts. Literature is often shown to “negotiate” conflicting power interests. New historicism has made its biggest mark on literary studies of the Renaissances and Romantic periods and has revised motions of literature as privileged, apolitical writing. Much new historicism focuses on the marginalization

of subjects such as those identified as witches, the insane, heretics, vagabonds, and political prisoners.

Cultural materialism is “a politicized form of historiography.” Raymond Williams coined the term Cultural Materialism. Jonathan Dollimore and Allen Sinfield made current and defined Cultural materialism as “designating a critical method which has four characteristics:

Historical Context: what was happening at the time the text was written.

Theoretical Method: Incorporating older methods of theory—Structuralism, Post-structuralism etc.

Political Commitment: Incorporating non-conservative and non-Christian frameworks—such as Feminist and Marxist theory.

Textual Analysis: building on theoretical analysis of mainly canonical texts that have become “prominent cultural icons.”

Culture: What does this term mean in the context of Cultural Materialism?

Culture in this sense does not limit itself to “high culture” but includes all forms of culture like TV and pop music.

Materialism: Materialism is at odds with idealism. Idealists believe in the transcendent ability of ideas while materialist believe that culture cannot transcend its material trappings. In this way, Cultural Materialism is an offshoot of Marxist criticism. History, to a cultural materialist, is what has happened and what is happening now. In other words, Cultural Materialists not only create criticism of a text by contextualizing it with its own time period, but with successive generations including our own. Cultural Materialism bridges the gap between Marxism and Post-Modernism.

Raymond Williams

Raymond Williams added to the outlook of Cultural Materialism by employing “structures of feeling.” These are values that are changing and being formed as we live and react to the material world around us. They challenge dominant forms of ideology and imply that values are organic and non-stagnant.

Cultural Materialism embraces change and gives us different (changing) perspectives based on what we chose to suppress or reveal in readings from the past.

Shakespeare is one example of how Cultural Materialism can change our point of view, and even our values, in regard to past texts. Many Cultural Materialist have challenged the fetishistic relationship conservative Britain has with Shakespeare.

Differences

Differences Between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism have a significant overlap. In fact the main difference is politics. There are three main differences:

1. Cultural Materialists concentrate on the the interventions whereby men and women make their own history, where New Historicists focus on the the power of

social and ideological structures which restrain them. A contrast between political optimism and political pessimism.

2. Cultural Materialists view New Historicists as cutting themselves off from effective political positions by their acceptance of a particular version of post-structuralism.

3. New Historicists will situate the literary text in the political situation of its own day, while the Cultural Materialists situate it within that of our own.

ECOCRITICISM



Ecocriticism investigates the relation between humans and the natural world in literature. It deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented and analyzed. One of the main goals in ecocriticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. This form of criticism has gained a lot of attention during recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts, which brings new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies. Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach that is known by a number of other designations, including “green (cultural) studies”, “ecopoetics”, and “environmental literary criticism.”

- (1) Ecocritics believe that human culture is related to the physical world.
- (2) Ecocriticism assumes that all life forms are interlinked. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere.
- (3) Moreover, there is a definite link between nature and culture, where the literary treatment, representation and “thematisation” of land and nature influence actions on the land.
- (4) Joseph Meeker in an early work, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) used the term “literary ecology” to refer to “the study of biological themes and relationships

which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species.”

(5) William Rueckert is believed to have coined the term “ecocriticism” in 1978, which he defines as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature.”

