

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
Prof. Aysha Iqbal
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 24

Part A

Post Theory

Welcome friends to today's class, you must have noticed that we are now nearing completion our course on Literary Theory and Criticism. I am sure, you have been enjoying and learning a lot from this course. You must have also realised the history of literary theory, the history of change notion of reading and interpretations and impacts or understanding of literature.

Literary theory is used by students and teachers and in scholars alike to cover a range of assumptions that govern theoretical reflection on the nature and function of literary works. This is what we do in literary theory and literary works; that is, it is a theoretical reflection on literature, this is the purpose of theory and criticism. Criticism is more about judgement, making some parameters about judging.

A work of art, whereas, theory is applying certain key theoretical assumptions and ideas to literary theory work, literary text. Theories as you know differ from age to age and we have being through an entire gamut of theories. The difference in method and approaches of study are often coloured by ideological differences, as you know Marxist and general theory is seen in the politics of our times.

Whereas, let us assume semiotics or formalism or structuralism, they are by and large, a political. So, even deconstruction is a political, at least not as politically motivated as Marxist theories. What is significant is that is each theory has it is complex history of relations with most general theories of society, politics, arts, language, psychology, etcetera.

Theory looks the kind of stability that is science achieves, but this is not to be seen as a short coming or weakness, rather it can be also the strength of theory. Now, ideas from one period are often revived for a new generation of thinker; that is also true. Theory is a

product of ideology and it is important to remember that theory speak from specific ideological position.

Again, literary theory is engaged with several general theories too, such as of theories of knowledge, theories of body, theories of power, theories of politics, cognition, language and so on. We have seen how literary theory has its roots in classical Greece in Plato's idea of mimesis, I am sure you remember that and in an Aristotle poetics. In ((Refer Time: 03:30)) idea of the sub line, all of which established classical definitions of tragedy and distinguish poetry from history and where languages recognised as a tool of elevating the mind of the listener.

We have also seen important roots on literary criticism, for instance of Philip Sidney's, difference of poesy and later, John Dryden's essay on Dramatic Poesy. Now, we also know Immanuel Kant Critique of Judgement, which marked a shift from the English empirical tradition and established the importance of cognition in esthetic judgements. For Kant, esthetic judgements are wroted in a priori principle of taste, the esthetic judgement of the beautiful is disinterested, universal and necessary.

We know that Kantian system exerted a strong influence on English romanticism, which inaugurated the tradition of critical reflection on literature and culture that has influenced literary theory. You may also recall the influence of Germany esthetic theory on Samuel Taylor, Coleridge work and his biography on Literaria. And Coleridge introduces us to the concept of fancy and imagination and these ideas are essentially wroted in we esthetic of Immanuel Kant, Schiller and Shirley, German philosophers.

Again, here coming to another great romantic poet and critic, William Wordsworth, who is his preface to lyrical ballads expounds on the nature and function of literary art and rejects new classical theories of poetic practice. We also know how realism which was dominant in the 1850's and 1860's and was an artistic read which held at the purpose of art was to depict life with complete and objective, honesty and to show things as they really are.

This was followed by Matthew Arnold, who discusses the threat in culture anarchy, he offers humanistic education, designed to appeal to the upcoming working class and suggest a notion of disinterestedness. We have also learnt about the aesthetic theory of the late 19th century. The influence of ideas is stressed in aestheticism, particularly the

concept of autonomy of work of art and in systems on intrinsic values at influence on the writings of the 20th century writers, such as W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot as well as in the literary theory of the new critics.

This was followed by Modernist and one of the seminal works here is *Tradition and Individual Talent* by T. S. Eliot, where Eliot states that he believes that the past inform the present and that individual writers of talent became a part of and transforms that tradition if they could create the new work of art. To other terms related to Eliot's theory of *Dissociation of Sensibility* and *Objective Correlative*.

Formalism is another key area of theory which was based on the works of Saussure and in the work of Saussure, we also become familiar with the way language function as a system. Formally seeks to be objective in the analysis, focusing on the work itself and gesturing external considerations. They pay particular attention to literary devices used in the work and to the pattern, these devices established.

Formalism develop largely in reaction to the practice of interpret in literary texts by relating them to extrinsic issues, such as the historical circumstances and politics of the era in which the work was written. Is philosophical and theological meaning or the experiences and frame of the mind of the author. New criticism, now new criticism was the literary movement that started in the late 1920's and 30's and originated in reaction to traditional.

Criticism, that new critics saw a largely concerned with matters extraneous to the text. For example, with the biography or psychology of the author or the works relationship to history, new criticism proposed that a work of literary should be regarded as autonomous and so should not be judged by reference to considerations beyond itself. Coming to poststructuralism, poststructuralism is an extension and critique of structuralism, especially as used in critical textual analysis which rejects structuralise claims to objectivity and comprehensiveness.

Typically, emphasising instance the plurality and instability of meaning and frequently using the techniques of deconstruction to reveal unquestioned assumptions and inconsistencies in literary and philosophical discourses. We have also seen this deconstruction the roots of which can be found in Saussure semiotic theory of language.

The construction is hold the view, the truth itself is always relative to the difference is times map to the differing point, thus denied the final definition for truths.

The term was introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and points to the fact that the relationship of language to reality is not given or even reliable. Since, all language systems are inherently unreliable, cultural constructs. Derrida also talks about the falls logo centric dependence on language as the mirror of nature. He interrogates the western tradition which in his believed had falsely, supposed that the relationship between language and world was well founded and reliable.

For Derrida, difference is the groundlessness of language, this fear of linguistic indeterminacy. Out of this indeterminacy and the instability of language is defined of meaning as spurious closure and it is sense of aporia, which is an impasse of incompatible meaning, deconstruction discourse the literary text as a dissemination of contradictions. We have also become familiar with reader response criticism, which believe that the text has no meaning before the reader experiences is it or reads it.

Here, the critic examines the ways in which different reader, our interpretative communities make meaning out of both personal reactions and inherited views of reading. Reader response criticism and encompasses various approaches to literature that explore and seek to explain the diversity and often divergence of readers responses to literary works.

So, this is the backdrop of what we have been doing so far, we have also done Marxism, semiotics, general theory. We have also done in eco criticism, film studies, which are newer trends in theory and at also a number of other theories such as post colonialism. So, we have been discussing theory at length in our course and now, we come to a point which is called Post Theory.

So, the reason why I introduce today's class is that, with all these theories, what is the condition today are we living in a period which some scholars termed as post theory time. Is there anything called post theory? Well, let say. So, we know that literary theory can decide to come into being when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non linguistic or historical and esthetic and when the object of discussion is no longer, the meaning or value, but the modalities of production and of reception of meaning and of values prior to the establishment.

Now, the significance of literary theory has changed dramatically after 9 and 11; we have a Brian Boyd, who gives us theory as distinct from theory. One theory with the capital T and one with small t. So, capital T theory represents the height of the 1960's through the 1980 in the U S, which is the age of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Post theory after theory post Derrida and condition, when we can all be the size of relief and get back to just reading literature.

This is the period where all the theories seems almost like pass a they have been done and hence the lowercase. The complaint again against theory are many, for example, feel and rightly, so, is accssesive, redundant, canonical, rigid, over written, a reductive of literature, it reduces literature, just to a string of theory and high flowing sentences fragmented.

Much criticism theory pedagogies also justifiable, we have introductory courses special at the undergraduate level that tend to present theory in a canonical fashion as an ended in itself. All these are streamly confusing and often bewildering to people would just like to read literature for the sake of it. Now, most present a set of list of isms most theories are all about isms, accompanied by literary texts, just there in order to illustrate the approach.

The intention to cover the wide range of available approaches encourages us to focus on the theory itself rather than on it is propose is dialectical relationship literature. When focus on it is proposes lose, theory can easily seems to dismisses or reductive of literature and the pleasure of the text. This kind of theory pedagogy fastest theory applique which is an application of theory to a text as object, which is not creative and does not advance thinking about either literature on theory.

Focus as it is on the exercise, while certain amount of theoretical application may be appropriate and even necessary in an undergraduate introductory course, it need not and should not be the sole focus; that is what people who challenge theory believe in. Now, there is another's scholar David H. Richter, who works from Thomas cone description in the structure of scientific revolutions.

Now, David Richter characterizes the state of theory, the period of high theory as of arising from a loss of consensus about the fundamentals of reading literature about our answers to the questions of why, what and how we read. In this state of theory, we must

define every term, different every statement and address all these questions before we can articulate individual interpretation.

Prior to this there was pragmatic concerns that literature was supreme universal expression of human being that the best and most universal had visited. The test of time to create the canon there was the agreement about the nature of literary language, it was more complicate then the meaning of everyday language, it was more ambiguous or more layers of meaning.

Further there was agreement about literary meaning as public and objectively available to any committed reader precipitated. The best literary works supreme and universal expression of the human spirit and thus fundamental to education in the humanities, according to Richter are growing to a awareness of multiple prospectives and increasing diversity.

Among faculty student in the 1960's, precipitated breakdowns in the paradigm ranging from questions about the purpose of general education to specific of literary interpretation. Richter believed that without consensus on what literature is and why we should read it and how we should read it, it is critical method was up for grabs. Now, we have another theory, Johnson, who reminds us of history of theory, it is historical situations in Europe, after the Second World War.

And it is origins in understanding that the uncritical trust in what was already accepted as truth, does the work of evil or devil for it. We also talked about Gramsci, Lacan, Althusser, Paul d Dimar, Derrida and Foucault and Seles Says and this are writers, whose professional careers or shape by the exigencies of the emigrate post war period. Today detach from these circumstances, theory has revolved into a series of endocentric project without opening up any particularly pathway to constructive action.

Functioning in step as nearly approaches in the most and he uses the word Derrida, dependent upon the recycling of the same idea. So, theorizing has become commodity or marketable commodity is not we no longer talk in terms of Gramsci or Lacan, because there was a product of their age. Now, all theories or theories have been reduce. So, just recycle the old ideas.

In other words, the demoralized dogmatic and apparently empty practice of literary theory arises from a failure to engage the circumstances of our times and the reality of a lives. Theory no longer ask, what theories is, for is no longer a self reflective practice, theory applicable that is to teach theory not as an ended itself, but as a way of generating meaning from literature as a mean towards meaning. So, this is what is needed, we will continue this in the next class and that would be our last class; that is post theory.

Thank you very much.