General Principles of Formalism, Structuralism and Psychoanalysis

What is theory?

Literally speaking, the word "theory" comes from Greek language which means to *"speculate"*. One of the most remarkable and distinctive qualities of theory is that it is an undefined and problematic entity. We may be thinking of some rough definitions of theories, but not a thorough chunk of theory or a clear cut-definition. Nevertheless, we might be slightly friendly with some distinctive qualities of theory and its characterizations. Because distinctive borders of theory are vague to illustrate, theorists prefer to talk about the qualities of theory rather than marking the boundaries of theory itself.

Theory as Culler says: it is "*a body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define*" (Culler 18). Indubitably, Culler insists that the first thing about theory that is hard to define is that theory is not a part, but is rather a body which consists of many parts which cannot be segregated from one another. Now we might guess –roughly speaking- one definition of theory, saying that theory is a set of ideas, beliefs, and thoughts or disciplines that we can look through, use to control some phenomena, and speculate on, based on some specific set of rules. Since our interest is not about any theory, but only about literary theories, it is crucial to know what literary theory is.

Literary theory is a set of rules, ideas, and disciplines we can use to read, to describe, and to develop the literary text based on some selected criteria which is the body of the theory itself. It is the numerous interpretations of literary works that can be a result of different readings. It might be also said that literary theory is the way a person reaches a verdict when reading, leading them to interpret literary works in a way which makes sense in light of the whole text. Roughly

speaking, literary theory is the way to handle literary text, because it is based on unambiguous disciplines, it deepens comprehension, and it stretches our intellectual capacity by highlighting the text's significance. Formalism, psychoanalysis and structuralism are some literary theories that are going to be examined in this research.

Formalism and the new criticism

As its name suggests, formalism is one of the most common theories to study literature and analyse it based on its form and its unique language. This movement of criticism emerged in Russia before its counterpart (the new critics) in USA and Britain. Literature, for most of its pioneers and figures such as: Shklovsky, Jacobson, Tomashesky and many others-is not a window to study other fields, but they claim that literature has to hold opposing views from other writing-styles by its form and manner. Literature, they claim, in order to be considered literature, must de-familiarize what is recognizable to others. It has to grab the attention of its reader by first sight. They allege that what makes something literature is not the idea that is being padded in the language of the literary work, but rather how this idea is being put on view in this form of the language. Their concern is only about the form of the language and how the idea is being carried in this new distinctive form of language. For example, while Shakespeare's ideas and thoughts are original or ground-breaking, his writing style and the form, the way Shakespeare weaves these ideas into the literary text, are totally innovative and ground-breaking.

Nevertheless, the two movements have some slight differences and divergences. That is to say, formalism prefers to track the scientific and rational approach to scrutinize the literary text while its counterpart does not (Rivkin 4). In other words, formalists prefer to follow the

literary canon of analysing text without paying attention to the content. They separate entirely the study of literary devices, which cause the text to be literature, from its content or other relevant components such as author's biography or history. This is called "*the intentional fallacy*" which means that the meaning of the text lies in the text itself, not in what the author wants to say.

Another expression emerged based on the idea of separating the text from its context which is called "*affective fallacy*". Affective fallacy is the process of limiting the tools of literary works which are in primary in shaping the meaning of the text without paying attention to the context or other external aspects which lie outside the text. New critics pay much more attention to one genre of literature, namely poetry, while their counterpart deals with all genres of literature. New critics prefer to study the literary tools of poetry, which they consider to be universal and indivisible from context. *"A poem must not mean, but be" (Macleish)*

However, both movements share the same notion of analysing the literary text by distinguishing between the language of poetry, which is connotative, and the language of everyday life or other genres of writings. These genres are denotative languages and they stand only for one meaning with no chance for a second interpretation. Also, both of them have adopted two important techniques, de-familiarization and habitualization. The first expression means that literary language is distinctive and idiosyncratic by its own form that dresses the familiar in the garment of the un-familiar to the other. For example, if one would have been asked about one's age, the answer usually would have been given in a direct way. "I am 70 years old". This typical answer might not grab attention since it is a familiar answer to a familiar question. However, if the same question were to be posed in the language of poetic form, it would undoubtedly grab the attention of readers or listeners. Also, the answer would look more

brilliant and significant if someone were to answer poetically, e.g. "the first impulse of my heart had beaten by the early dawn of history". We might not be able to figure the exact age, but the answer sounds and feels totally different from the more direct answer. The first answer is neither significant nor remarkable, but the second is metaphorically and poetically based. Likewise, to describe one's beloved by saying "she is beautiful" cannot be compared to saying "she is like a blooming rose" This is what formalism is all about, to make the familiar into the unfamiliar. Typical and ordinary language has no real value in formalism because they revere language that is impressive and extraordinary.

All in all, formalism and new critics are two movements to interpret literary texts. Formalism focuses on the tools and mechanisms of literary text without regard to the content or any external interpretations. Both movements interpret the text based on its coherence and the tools that make the text a literary one. A formalist always focuses and gives attention to how images are being woven into the text by the literary tools, excluding what the image might actually be. Shkovsky, who is one of remarkable figures of formalism, states the perception of image from the literary text should be perceived consciously and knowingly by the course of action of de-familiarization. This in turn means that the reader of literature should be aware of what he/she reads by the technique of de-familiarization. That is to say, literary tools should be carried more remarkably in mind rather than idea.

"*habitualization devours one's wife......if the whole lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been*" (*Shklovsky 18).*

Reading literature is to pay attention to every word through which unfamiliarly is woven into the poem. It is not like reading a newspaper or any other genre of writings. As Pound says in his description of literature, it is news that stays news. He means that literature should stay new and

delightful in spite when it was written, and this only is accomplished with literary tools that make literature always feel new. For example, Shakespeare's plays are still new and enjoyable; even though they were written hundreds of years ago in his unique writing style.

The main point of both movements- formalism and new criticism- is to pose the question, "What makes this type of writing literary, or something we can call literature?" The answer may very well be that the language of literature fluctuates, oscillates and ebbs, It borrows from other genres of writing, whose styles are characterized by the use of literary tools inside the text, tools which allow the text to be considered a literary one. These tools, such as metaphor, simile, parody and many others are primary and fundamental to the core study of literary language rather than the idea inside the text. Critics within both movements believe that the idea already exists, but what makes this idea unfamiliar is the distinctive language of literature which carves itself a niche by the use of literary tools and techniques.

Structuralism

If formalism is the analysis of text based on its unique language, which differs from other genres, structuralism is the study of literary text based on linguistic considerations. Ferdinand Saussure is considered to be the father of the approach called structuralism. He states that language consists of two main parts, namely the "*la langue*" and "*la parole*". The first part is the system of the language which, as he characterizes it, is universal and homogeneous in all languages. The second part is specific and heterogeneous. La parole, as Saussure claims, is the encoded meaning of the language which is being inserted in "la langue" or the system. To learn language, Saussure asserts, is not to learn utterances or remember some sentences, but rather to learn the system of the language that enables us to create an endless number of sentences. When we learn language, we don't learn how to memorize sentences, but rather we learn the system

"la Langue", which can be taught separately from utterance, or content. It is this system that enables learners to acquire language.

Studying the rules of a language separate from content is similar to the idea of formalism, which insists that the techniques of literature should be studied separately from content. Moreover, structuralism and formalism share the same sense about the language and its content. Formalism considers the idea integrated into in the literary text as one that already exists. That is to say, literature does not offer new ideas, but it offers ideas in a new fashion which may be perceived consciously by the technique of de-familiarization. Similarly, structuralism considers the study of language to be the study of the system which is being used to encode a pre-made idea inside the system but not to study the idea that is woven inside the language.

However, structuralism has been replaced with the term, "*sign*". Sign, as Saussure explains, is a combination of two terms which are linked together without logic or with an arbitrary relationship, such as the sound image "*signifier*" and the concept "*signified*". This relation between signifier and signified is characterized as differential, arbitrary and universal, or conventional as Saussure suggests. Differential is to say that sign differs from one word to another. The word "road" is a different concept than the word "coat", and it also has a different written style in terms of sound images. Consequently, there is no logical reason to call the area that we use to pass by a "road" and not something else. This is termed an arbitrary relationship.

Then again, conventional or universal characters of sign have to do with the stable meaning of sign. For example, the colour black refers literally to a brand of colours which is neither green nor white. But the colour black might have another conventional meaning. It might denote death or something unpleasant. This conventional meaning cannot be changed or

substituted by the efforts of others. It would be problematic for individuals to manipulate the conventional meanings of these signs, because they are collective and universal notions which carry two levels of meaning, the literal and the conventional metaphorical.

According to a structuralist, meaning lies only in the text, without historical or biographical considerations. For a structuralist, text is the study of signs, and signs are to be found in texts which are universal and private at the same time. Delimiting the historical aspects of the author to interpret a literary text is one similarity between formalism and structuralism. The capacity of their scope is always the latitude given to inner interpretation of the text. They do not hang out of text's borders to figure out its meaning, but they are instead always locked inside the shell of literary text.

Coherence is an important focus for both movements. Formalists depend on a general sense of coherence which comes from linking the literary tools together to make sense of the whole literary work. Structuralism follows the same way of analysing the text by finding connections between signs to reach the general meaning of the literary text. Both schools of thought believe that the choice of words is not a haphazard process, but rather a well-organized style of writing designed to shape the main theme of the text out of some sub-meanings.

Last but not the least, in terms of individuality; both movements have limited the individual reading of the text. Hence, individual do not have free reign to read the text, solely relying on their individual comprehension styles. They are restricted by the rules of both movements to analyse the text for meaning is both universal and private and can't be changed easily. In conclusion, structuralism is one of the critical movements to analyse the literary text based on the study of signs and their relationships. It considers text as being composed of signs whose meanings are arbitrary and differential.

Psychoanalysis

If formalism is the interpretation of the literary text based on its unique language, which differs from other writings, and if structuralism sees the analysis of the literary work as the study of signs, psychoanalysis is the analysis of literary text based on the psychological and fundamental nature of the human psyche. Literary work is not separated from its stimulative and prompting motif to be written, for literary work might be an interpretation or the result of many oppressed desires and inferiority complexes within one's psyche.

Sigmund Freud is considered to be the father of this approach. Freud surmises that the human mind consists of three layers; the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. Freud assumes the conscious layer is the area in the mind which consists of things that we are aware of all the time. The preconscious layer is considered to be the area that consists of some information which we may not aware of, but can retrieve. Finally, the unconscious layer, which is thought to be the most important, is always hidden deeply in the mind below the surface and away from our awareness.

According to Freud, there are three elements of personality in the character of every human being. First is the Id, which operates in the unconscious mind. It is responsible for the pleasure urges that wish to be fulfilled instantly. Then, there is the Superego, which is the opposite of the Id. It operates in all three parts of the personality, and it pushes the character toward idealness or toward being acceptable and right according to the norms of society. Finally, we have the Ego, which operates in the conscious and the pre-conscious elements of personality. It is the outside appearance of our personality. Based on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, literary text is considered to be the interpretation of the unconscious element of

one's mind. In other words, literary text is like a dream which paves the way into the yawning concealed unconscious.

The followers of the psychoanalytic approach analyse the text as if it is the manifestation of the oppressed inclinations of oneself which are being translated as a literary text. According to Freud, the road to the unconscious is the dream. Freud assumes that we should interpret dreams literally to understand the unconscious which is being suppressed in the human mind. Based on Freud's theory, literal text is being dealt with as a dream. And dreams, according to psychologists, do not come from nothingness.

Over time, psychoanalysis has mingled with structuralism in interpreting literary text. Lacan assumes that interpretation of dreams should not be done literally, but rather be translated as signifier and signified since dreams are part of the language. And this language carries two layers of meanings.

"I am not whatever I am the plaything of my thoughts, I think of what I am where I don't think to think" (Lacan 200). Lacan applies the mechanism of Structuralism to the psychoanalytic approach. Therefore, the unconsciousness could have another unconscious if it is applied to the structural approach, because dreams, as Lacan proposes, can't be figured out literally. Rather, they have to be translated into another phase to reach the unconscious mind.

Lacan refers to the oppressed desire as the signifier, and he also refers to its manifestations as the signified. The signifier is always something on the surface which operates in the conscious, yet its manifestation is kept in the unconscious. Lacan says that the signifier is manifested if the signifier crosses the line between the signified and signifier-that is to say, the manifestation of the unconscious can be read if it comes from the depth of mind to the surface.

He deals with the interpretation of dreams as if they were structured like language. Yet Lacan does not ignore the psychoanalytic approach of Freud. Instead, he mingles the two processes together, for he believes that dreams are part of the language, and as such, they have to be treated structurally as signified and signifier. In light of that, Lacan defends his theory on some structural disciplines. He assumes that a dream is like metonymy. And this dream is built up metaphorically. For this reason, dreams have to be treated not only from a psychological perspective, but also as a part of language.

All in all, Lacan's approach is the study of literary texts based on psychoanalytic and structural hypotheses. He treats literary texts from two perspectives. On one hand, he treats literary text as if it springs from the oppressed unconscious which is hidden in the deep mind. On the other hand, he treats it structurally, like dreams which are represented in literary text, metaphorically composed and expressed.

Conclusion

Theory is a set of beliefs, ideas, principles, perspectives, and a canon of running thoughts which is used to speculate on phenomena and to give rational interpretations to those phenomena. Literary theory includes a group of theories whose rule is to interpret literary text based on specific considerations. Some literary theories are formalism, structuralism and psychoanalysis.

Formalism interprets literary text based on its unique language. This language is distinctive from other languages because of the use of literary tools such as metaphor, parody

metonymy, paradox etc in the literary text. It is the study of the form rather than meaning, and it is the study of the shape, tools and techniques that make the text a literary one.

In contrast, structuralism is the linguistic study of literary text, or it is the study of signs and their differential, universal and private meanings inside the text. Both of the first two theories have delimited individual attempts to interpret literary text, for they believe that meaning lies in the text itself not outside of it.

Quite the opposite, psychoanalysis deals with literary text as extraction of the unconscious expression of one's oppressed pleasure, as a way to represent and fulfil one's desires. It allows for different and individual interpretations outside or beyond the text, for it depends on the psyche of human personality. Psychoanalysis is the technique of interpretating the literary text as it is, as the road of the unconscious mind. Literature is, from the psychoanalysts' perspective, the oppressed and interoperated dream of the unconscious.

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