Critical Theories And Their Differences

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Background

Critical theory can be described as a school of thought that focuses on the reflective evaluation and assessment and the critical analysis of culture and society utilizing the knowledge of humanities and social sciences. The term 'critical theory' has meanings that are different in origin and their backgrounds. The first is the derivation of sociology, and the other can be found in literary criticism. On both grounds, the critical theory serves as an umbrella for the description of a theory founded on the basis of critique. One of the theorists, Max Horkheimer, considered the theory critical since it searches for the liberation of human beings from the conditions or situations that enslave or bind them.

Thus, a critical theory refers to a social theory that is based on changing and critiquing society in comparison to conventional theory. Such a theory has the purpose of going deep into the surface of social life and exposing the conventions that keep us from comprehending the reality of how the world functions. The emergence of the critical theory from the Marxist convention was later developed and extended by many sociologists who called themselves "The Frankfurt School" (Crossman, thoughtco.com). Critiques done by Karl Marx on society and its economy, as proposed in his works, led to the emergence of the critical theory. After Marx, many theorists came up with their theories and opinions regarding social life and its different aspects. These theorists include Antonio Gramsci and Gyorgy Lukacs, etc. With the passing years, the aspects of the critical theory can be seen in various theories of feminism, critical race theory, queer and gender theory, and in theory of media studies. The critical theory comprises methods such as New Criticism, Structuralism, New Historicism, Queer criticism, and African-American criticism.

Differences Among The Theories Of Criticism

One of the different methods to look at and analyze the literature is the New Criticism. It requires the readers to do close reading and reject the old or conventional historicism's focus on sociological and biographical matters. The main aim, which is to determine what message the work conveys or how it works, can merely be determined by means of analyzing and focusing rather than by means of cultured or unnecessary information (public.wsu.edu). The New Criticism analyzes the relationships among the ideas of the text and its shape and structure, and also among what the piece says and the way it's said. It works with the patterns and forms of imagery, sound, point of view, structure of

narration, and other methods observed in the close reading of the piece, and through these, determines the working and their suitability to the independent work. Apart from these elements, the New Critics also examined the paradox, irony, tension, and ambiguity in the text. Before the time of the 1920s, critics used to notice or examine the history of language and also the historical background of the text.

It became the popular technique of analyzing and critiquing literary works in the mid of the twentieth century. The thing that mattered the most to the New Critic was the text and nothing external to the text. Hence, when any literary work is read, the reader does not think about the author's intentions, his or her historical background, etc. Rather, the emphasis and concentration are on what's written. This school of thought has a democratic approach since it permits anyone to be a critic. The reader may not be very well-read or have any knowledge regarding the history to critically analyze the text. Before this school of thought, the world of literature was very exclusionary.

Another literary school of critique is structuralism. It came out as a fashion in the time period of the 1950s as a challenge to New Criticism. Structuralist criticism links the works of literature to a bigger structure, which may be a specific genre, a system of repetitive symbols or patterns, a model of a universal narrative structure, or a variety of relationships and connections inside the text. There must be a particular structure of the text according to structuralism. Unlike New Criticism, inexperienced readers find it hard to critique a text from a structuralist point of view. Everything jotted down must be governed by certain regulations or grammar of literature.

If many texts are under consideration, then they all must have coherency. It works opposite to the rules of New Criticism. Structuralism challenges New Criticism of the belief that a literary work mirrors the proposed reality. Rather, it said that the text contained linguistic traditions and was placed in other literary works. The text is examined and analyzed using basic structures like the plot and characterization and is also attempted to display the way these patterns are universal and hence be applied for the development of the general endings regarding both the solo works and the systems from which they came. The notion of structuralism can be seen in works like Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, etc. The literary works are analyzed on the unambiguous model of structuralist syntax by structuralist critics. Major details are observed in the story in relation to the larger frame or structure, and this larger structure is considered a general system of fundamental pairs having clear thematic, archetypal, and symbolic resonance. This is the usual method of structuralists, going from the specific to the overall, putting the solo work inside a broader context of the structure.

New Historicism criticism seems to be derived from the Marxist tradition. According to this criticism, the literary text must be known and interpreted from the knowledge of its historical background, unlike New Criticism, which completely denies the concept of the history of the text and its author. The New Historicism critic focuses on the history of the author and the historical language and tone applied in the text. New Historicism not only emphasizes the author's history but also acknowledges the response of the critic which is also believed to be according to the reader's beliefs, prejudices, and environment (cliffnotes.com). Similar to the structuralism movement, but unlike the New

Criticism, the critic must have a lot of knowledge regarding the history to critique a text.

Otherwise, the tradition of New Historicism won't be followed. A literary text is analyzed in a wider context in correspondence with history, analyzing things like the effect of a particular era or the time period on the author and how that work mirrors that specific era. This ultimately recognizes the present cultural contexts that provide color to the critic's endings or findings. Literary criticism at present is impacted by and exposes the beliefs of the present times in a similar manner that the literature mirrors. The idea and the concept are embraced by New Historicism that as times and situations change, the understanding and comprehension of the literary text also modify accordingly. These aspects are not considered by the New Criticism and Structuralism. The former only considers the information provided by the author through close reading, while the latter focuses on the structure and relationship among the texts. Thus, to follow the Structuralism and New Historicism the critic must be well-read and particularly have historical knowledge in the case of New Historicism.

The queer theory focuses on the issues and problems concerning power, marginalized populations like women, etc. and sexuality on the grounds of culture and literature (owl.English.purdue.edu). The theory is influenced and impacted by feminist criticism, derived from the post-structural emphasis on disjointed and de-centered information constructing, psychoanalysis, and language. The main aim or concern of queer theory is to discuss and analyze how sexuality and gender are discussed. The Queer critics prefer the splitting of the opposites like male and female and the in-betweens.

Thus the theory upholds the cultural or social definitions regarding sexuality and what it means to be a male and female. It is different from the above-mentioned criticisms in the way that a queer critic gives importance to his or her opinions and beliefs according to their gender. Like the feminist movement, which may be considered as a part of the queer criticism, aims to change the notion that only the male opinions are universal and authoritative. The feminist critics position women and the experience, which is gender-specific, of being a female as the central theme of their works and texts. It can be related to New Criticism and Structuralism in a way that when a literary work is closely read indicating the feminist point of view or some other sexual identity, the link between New Criticism and Queer criticism will be established.

On the other hand, if a number of texts have a similar structure based on any gender-specific point of view and opinions, then Structuralism and Queer criticism will be connected. Queer Criticism can also be linked to the New Historicism. In fact, these two criticisms are deeply related in a way that we have a history full of gender role descriptions. And we can see that feminist studies, in particular, has a connection with Marxist traditions, Black studies, postcolonial and gender studies, and also the Queer theory.

The African-American criticism is also known as Black criticism. Since we know that this is something related to a specific race, this branch of criticism is derived from political, sociological, cultural, and ideological conditions underlying marginalization and oppression (Brocku.ca). Such reading must analyze the difficult margins or the boundaries among the cultural and textual meanings, and

between the ideological and aesthetic influences. This criticism is deeply connected with New Historicism since we have many historical accounts depicting the violence, brutality, and oppression towards the Blacks.

In order to understand all the above-mentioned criticisms, the reader-response theory must also be comprehended. It believes that a reader plays a significant role in the interpretation of the texts. It would be wrong to say a text has just one literal meaning of its own. A reader and a critic create and establish his or her meaning and interpretation of the text. The responses of the readers are according to their sentiments, life experiences, concerns, and awareness of their readings (kaj.upol.cz). Based on these factors, every interpretation is unique and different in its way. For applying New Criticism, the reader needs to have a closer look at the text; for Structuralism, the reader has to read in a way that he can find out the configuration of the texts, and as for New Historicism, Queer criticism and African-American criticism, it depends on the reader's knowledge of the historical context, reader's gender, and own perceptions, and to what race or ethnic group does the reader belong to. All these aspects of a reader contribute to different interpretations of the text.

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