

University Moulay Ismail,

Department of English,

Meknes,

S6, Grs:1&2

Pr. Mahdia Abarchah

Modern and Post-modern thought
Programme

(Explanation and analysis will be online)

2020

University Moulay Ismail
Department of English
Critical Theory, S6
Pr. M. Ait Daoud

Feminism and Gender Studies

The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post Feminism:

What, exactly, is feminism? A general definition might state that it is the belief that women, purely and simply because they are women, are treated inequitably within a society which is organised to prioritise male viewpoints and concerns. Within this patriarchal paradigm, women become everything men are not... Where men are regarded as strong, women are weak; where men are rational, they are emotional; where men are active, they are passive; and so on.

Feminist: one who holds the view that women are less valued than men in societies that categorise men and women into differing cultural or economic spheres. A Feminist also insists that these inequalities are not fixed or determined, but that women themselves can change the social, economic and political order through collective action.

Gender studies: avoids the exclusively implicit in the term 'women studies', for its aim is to dynamics of female and male experience and identity... According to Showalter's definition, gender studies would involve analysing masculinity, like femininity, as a construct.

K.M Newton, *Twentieth Century Literary Theory:*

One of the major developments in literary studies in the past twenty years or so has been the emergence of feminist criticism, at the level of both theory and practice. Initially criticism reflected the political goals of feminism in that authors and texts were judged in accordance with how far they could be reconciled with feminist ideology. The 'images of women' school of feminist critics adopts this point of view and is particularly concerned with how women characters are represented in literature.

Another important concern of feminist criticism is women's writing. Elaine Showalter advocates 'gynocriticism', in which the concerns of the woman as writer are central. She argues that the 'woman as reader' approach of critics such as those in 'images of women's school' is restrictive in that it concentrate on male views of women.

Toril Moi: *'Feminist, Female, Feminine':*

"The words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s. 'Feminist criticism', then, is a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism."

Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, Introduction: The Story So Far:

Two of the most distinguished feminist readers of the twentieth century were Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* and Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Gender relations have more to do with custom than with nature. 'Women', as Eva Figes put it, "have been largely man-made". Feminist cultural history emphasises the ways in which social con has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group, and norms of femininity have worked in the interest of men.

Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement in her book, *The Second Sex:*

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'

University Moulay Elsmail,
Meknes,
Pr. M. Ait Daoud

Formalism

Formalism in the broadest sense refers to a type of criticism that emphasizes the "form" of a text rather than its content. Formalist critics also tend to eschew discussion of any elements deemed external to the text itself (history, politics, biography).

More narrowly, Formalism refers to the critics and theorists working in Russia (actually, the Soviet Union) in the 1910s and 1920s. Major figures include **Victor Shklovsky** (*Theory of Prose*), Boris Eichenbaum (*Theory of the Formal Method*), Vladimir Propp (*Morphology of the Folktale*), Yuri Tynianov ("On Literary Evolution"), and Roman Jakobson ("Linguistics and Poetics"). **Mikhail Bakhtin** is often inappropriately lumped in with the Russian Formalists, but he has more in common with historical and cultural approaches.

Russian Formalists emphasized the "literariness" of artistic texts, which they found in the linguistic and structural features of literature (as opposed to its subject matter). For example, Victor Shklovsky, in his famous essay "Art as Technique," offers his notion of **defamiliarization** as the defining feature of literary texts. Art takes that which is familiar and "makes it strange," slowing down the act of perception and making the reader see the world in new ways (think, for example, of how Cubist painting changes our perception of everyday objects and forces the viewer to work to reconstruct the image).

New Criticism

American

New Critics treat a work of literature as if it were a self-contained, self-referential object rather than basing their interpretations of a text on the reader's response, the author's intentions.

They pay attention to the internal characteristics of the text itself, and they discourage the use of external evidence to explain the work. They try to examine the relationships between a text's ideas and its form, between what a text says and the way it says it.

They focus on the fact that literature has an aesthetic experience that is unique, powerful and significant.

They defend the approach by saying that literature has formal aspects that distinguish it clearly from other types of expression. In fact it is different from speeches and persuasive writings because it focuses on how the language is written compared to the audience it is addressed to. In other words, how people say things is as important as what they say.

New Critics emphasize that the structure of a work should not be divorced from meaning, viewing the two as constituting a quasi-organic unity. Special attention is paid to repetition, particularly of images or symbols, but also of sound effects and rhythms in poetry. New Critics especially appreciate the use of literary devices, such as irony, to achieve a balance between the elements of the text.

Marxist Criticism

Based on the theories of Karl Marx (and so influenced by philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel), this school concerns itself with class differences, economic and otherwise, as well as the implications and complications of the capitalist system: "Marxism attempts to reveal the ways in which our socioeconomic system is the ultimate source of our experience" (Tyson 277).

Theorists working in the Marxist tradition, therefore, are interested in answering the overarching question, whom does it [the work, the effort, the policy, the road, etc.] benefit? The elite? The middle class? And Marxists critics are also interested in how the lower or working classes are oppressed - in everyday life and in literature.

The Material Dialectic

The Marxist school follows a process of thinking called the material dialectic. This belief system maintains that "...what drives historical change are the material realities of the economic base of society, rather than the ideological superstructure of politics, law, philosophy, religion, and art that is built upon that economic base" (Richter 1088).

Marx asserts that "...stable societies develop sites of resistance: contradictions build into the social system that ultimately lead to social revolution and the development of a new society upon the old" (1088). This cycle of contradiction, tension, and revolution must continue: there will always be conflict between the upper, middle, and lower (working) classes and this conflict will be reflected in literature and other forms of expression - art, music, movies, etc.

The Revolution

The continuing conflict between the classes will lead to upheaval and revolution by oppressed peoples and form the groundwork for a new order of society and economics where capitalism is abolished. According to Marx, the revolution will be led by the working class (others think peasants will lead the uprising) under the guidance of intellectuals. Once the elite and middle class are overthrown, the intellectuals will compose an equal society where everyone owns everything (socialism - not to be confused with Soviet or Maoist Communism).

Though a staggering number of different nuances exist within this school of literary theory, Marxist critics generally work in areas covered by the following questions.

University Moulay Ismail, Meknes,

Department of English,

Semester,6

Pr.M. Abarchah

(Extracts selected and adapted from *Reception Theory: A critical Introduction by Robert C. Holub*)

"The literary work is neither completely text nor completely the subjectivity of the reader, but a combination or merger of the two. Accordingly, Iser maps out three domains for exploration.

The first involves the text in its potential to allow and manipulate the production of meaning. Like Ingarden, Iser regards the text as a skeleton of "schematized aspects" that must be actualized or concretized by the reader.(84)

["For example, if we read the sentence, "the child bounced the ball", we are confronted with a myriad of "gaps" in the represented object. Whether the child in this case is 10 or 6 years old, whether is male or female, brown or white, red-haired or blond-all of these features are not contained in this sentence and thus constitute "gaps" or points of indeterminacy...It is possible, of course, for the text to restrict or at list to suggest limitations on the scope of the indeterminacy without mentioning particulars."](p.25)

Second, he investigates the process of the text in reading. Of central importance here are the mental images formed when attempting to construct a consistent and cohesive aesthetic object.

Finally, he turns to the communicatory structure of literature to examine the conditions that give rise to and govern the text-reader interaction. In considering these three areas Iser hopes to clarify not only how meaning is produced, but also what effects literature has on its reader."(p.84)

The Vulture

A VULTURE was hacking at my feet. It had already torn my boots and stockings to shreds, now it was hacking at the feet themselves. Again and again it struck at them, then circled several times restlessly around me, then returned to continue its work. A gentleman passed by, looked on for a while, then asked me why I suffered the vulture. "I'm helpless," I said. "When it came and began to attack me, I of course tried to drive it away, even to strangle it, but these animals are very strong, it was about to spring at my face, but I preferred to sacrifice my feet. Now they are almost torn to bits." "Fancy letting yourself be tortured like this!" said the gentleman. "One shot and that's the end of the vulture." "Really?" I said. "And would you do that?" "With pleasure," said the gentleman, "I've only got to go home and get my gun. Could you wait another half-hour?" "I'm not sure about that," said I, and stood for a moment rigid with pain. Then I said: "Do try it in any case, please." "Very well," said the gentleman, "I'll be as quick as I can." During this conversation the vulture had been calmly listening, letting its eye rove between me and the gentleman. Now I realized that it had understood everything; it took wing, leaned far back to gain impetus, and then, like a javelin thrower, thrust its beak through my mouth, deep into me. Falling back, I was relieved to feel him drowning irretrievably in my blood, which was filling every depth, flooding every shore.

Translated by Tania and James Stern

University Moulay Ismail
Department of English, Meknes,
Modern Literary Criticism
Pr. M. Ait Daoud

Clothes

OFTEN when I see clothes with manifold pleats, frills, and appendages which fit so smoothly onto lovely bodies I think they won't keep that smoothness long, but will get creases that can't be ironed out, dust lying so thick in the embroidery that it can't be brushed away, and that no one would want to be so unhappy and so foolish as to wear the same valuable gown every day from early morning till night.

And yet I see girls who are lovely enough and display attractive muscles and small bones and smooth skin and masses of delicate hair, and nonetheless appear day in, day out, in this

same natural fancy dress, always propping the same face on the same palms and letting it be reflected from the looking glass.

Only sometimes at night, on coming home late from a party, it seems in the looking glass to be worn out, puffy, dusty, already seen by too many people, and hardly wearable any longer.

Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

Love Story **By Dave Margoshes (Canada)**

I'll skip the usual beginning, the description of scenery designed to give the story "feel"; the "sticks and stones and pieces of furniture" the creative writing instructors talk about that let the reader believe in the story—in short, all the artifice.

I'll skip, too, the history: who I am, where I come from, all the minutiae of my life that would make me believe, my voice, and would—perhaps—make you care about what I'll tell you.

I'll skip all that and come right to the point, the groin of the story: boy does in fact meet girl, boy tells girl he loves her, girl looks at boy in a curious way, squinting her eyes against the faint rings of smoke rising from her cigarette held between two slender fingers on the otherwise bare table, her ice blue eyes that have looked at many boys, many things with the same blank spider's cast, she blinks them against the moonlight.

"Why?" she says.

Transcribed by Marilyn E. ...
McKees
Fr. A. Mahoney

The Bridge

I was stiff and cold, I was a bridge, I lay over a ravine. My toes on one side, my fingers clutching the other, I had clamped myself fast into the crumbling clay. The tails of my coat fluttered at my sides. Far below brawled the icy trout stream. No tourist strayed to this impassable height, the bridge was not yet traced on any map. So I lay and waited; I could only wait. Without falling, no bridge, once spanned, can cease to be a bridge.

It was toward evening one day—was it the first, was it the thousandth? I cannot tell—my thoughts were always in confusion and perpetually moving in a circle. It was toward evening, in summer, the roar of the stream had grown deeper, when I heard the sound of a human step! To me, to me. Straighten yourself, bridge, make ready, railless beams, to hold up the passenger entrusted to you. If this steps are uncertain, steady them unobtrusively, but if he stumbles show that you are made of and like a mountain god hurl him across to land.

He came, he tapped me with the iron point of his stick, then he lifted my coattails with it and put them in order upon me. He plunged the point of his stick into my bushy hair and let it lie there for a long time, forgetting me no doubt while he wildly gazed around him. But then—I was just following him in thought over mountain and valley—he jumped with both feet on the middle of my body. I shuddered with wild pain, not knowing what was happening. Who was it? A child? A dream? A wayfarer? A suicide? A tempter? A destroyer? And I turned around so as to see him. A bridge to turn around! I had not yet turned quite around when I already began to fall, I fell and a moment I was torn and transpierced by the sharp rocks which had always gazed up at me so peacefully from the rushing water.

Franz Kafka, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir