

## Rethinking Literature: The Emergence and Development of Modern Literary Theory

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Abstract

The development of literary theory in the twentieth century marks a decisive shift in the intellectual foundations of literary studies. What had long been governed by the assumptions of liberal humanist criticism, centered on the universality of human experience and the intrinsic value of literary texts, was fundamentally transformed by the emergence of theoretical frameworks that interrogate and reinterpret language, ideology, power, and historical context. Literary theory thus emerged not merely as a methodological supplement to literary criticism but as a critical reorientation of the discipline itself. This paper traces the evolution of literary theory by examining the intellectual transition from classical criticism to the diverse theoretical paradigms that reshaped literary studies in the twentieth century—beginning with early philosophical reflections on art in the works of Plato and Aristotle, and the later development of humanist criticism, highlighting how literary interpretation was historically grounded in moral and aesthetic evaluation. The paper then examines the emergence of modern theoretical approaches, including the entourage of psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, new historicism, and postcolonial theory. By situating these movements within their historical and intellectual contexts, the paper demonstrates how literary theory redefined the scope and purpose of literary studies.

Keywords: Feminist Theory, Liberal Humanism, Literary Theory, Marxism, New Historicism, Postcolonial Theory, Postmodernism, Post-structuralism, Structuralism

There has been a need to understand the meaning of literature and other artistic forms throughout history. Over the years, this derivation of meaning has employed various methodologies that have served as the guiding principles of the texts in question. The analysis involved in this derivation of meaning has thus undergone various shifts and continues to shift. The emergence of Literary Theory as a separate field, then, is a result of this need to find meaning. Literary Theory has, in fact, introduced a different and almost radical approach to the interpretation and understanding of meaning. It is almost all-encompassing, which is why it has been extremely difficult to find a universal definition. Literary theory, sometimes designated critical theory, or simply theory, and now transforming cultural theory within the discipline of literary studies, can be understood as the set of concepts and intellectual assumptions on which rests the work of explaining or interpreting literary texts.

Literary theory did not suddenly occur in the twentieth century. It rather evolved gradually through a series of intellectual transformations, movements, and developments within literary criticism. From the philosophical reflections of classical thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, through the critical writings of later Romantic and modern authors, literary interpretation has traditionally been grounded in humanist assumptions about the universality of human experience and the moral value of literature. Later identified as liberal humanism, this tradition dominated literary studies for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

However, the mid-twentieth century witnessed a significant shift in literary studies as theorists increasingly questioned the assumptions of liberal humanist criticism. A transformation within the understanding of theoretical frameworks such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism, and post-structuralism fundamentally altered the landscape of literary observations. These approaches not only expanded literary analysis beyond aesthetic appreciation but also began to include questions of ideology, language, gender, power, history, and cultural identity.

This paper traces the evolution of literary theory by examining the intellectual transition from traditional liberal humanist criticism to the diverse theoretical paradigms that later characterized contemporary literary studies. By exploring the contributions of theorists and literary movements, including psychoanalytic theory, Marxism, feminist criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, new historicism, and postcolonial theory, the essay demonstrates how literary theory has progressively expanded the scope of literary interpretation and analysis.

The origin of Literary Theory can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century, with the emergence of Marxist and psychoanalytical theories in the 1930s, which were revisited in the 1960s. The trajectory of theory then began with the linguistic theory of the early 1960s, followed by feminist theory from the late 1960s. The 1970s saw the emergence of structuralism, a post-structuralism that aimed to discuss matters of philosophy as well as language instead of highlighting history and context, creating factions within the discipline of English in Britain and the United States. As Peter Barry would argue, the 1980s witnessed a shift, sometimes referred to as a “turn in history,” in which “history, politics and context were reinstated in the literary-critical agenda” (Barry, 32). This led to the emergence of two new forms of political or historical criticism which came to be known as new historicism and cultural materialism. The 1990s and later brought in theories that rejected the various compartmentalized theories so far by establishing their exclusivity. These would include, postcolonialism, which rejected the universalism of Marxist explanations, postmodernism, which focuses on the fragmentariness of existence, and the dissolution of feminism into gender studies, writings by gay and lesbian people, and womanism, which was feminism for black women.

The timeline and evolution of theory can thus be explained through this description. But then one might ask: what were the theoretical guidelines followed before the twentieth century? What constituted theory before? And how was literature understood and interpreted? To answer these questions, we must dive into the pool of literary criticism and understand it through three different stages. The first stage elaborates upon the time of ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, among others. These philosophers discussed various topics related to life, art, thought, politics, culture, history, and literature. Some of their work has been excerpted by litterateurs over the years, discussing the theory and criticism of their time. Aristotle’s *Poetics*, for instance, gives a detailed description of tragedy and comedy in drama and poetry. Aristotle’s unities and conventions were followed for centuries. Plato’s *Republic* and *Symposium* offer insight into his concepts of reality and love. In his book *Republic*, Plato discusses the importance of poetry and reduces it to a poor and unnecessary imitation that is twice removed from reality.

The theories and conventions they discussed shaped most of the works of later generations.

The first stage of theorists then progressed to the writers who started writing about theory and criticism. Sir Philip Sydney’s “Apology for Poetry” borrowed from Horace to determine the intention of poetry- to teach and delight. He spoke about the importance of entertainment and enjoyment fused with a moral that instructed the reader. This fusion must be to create a “speaking picture” with words. Literary theory was then further advanced by Samuel Johnson. His *Lives of the Poets* (1779) and *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765) can be seen as a way forward for criticism and theory as well as a start for practical criticism. The contribution of Romantic poets to criticism and theory advanced literary theory.

Works such as “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads” by Wordsworth, *Biographia Literaria* by Coleridge, and *A Défense of Poetry* by Shelly provided important insights into the creation, theory, and criticism of poetry. After the Romantics, themed-d and late Victorians like George Eliot, Matthew Arnold and Henry James further contributed to the development of critical theory. Their arguments varied from the classical and continental writers, focusing on philosophical thought. T. S. Eliot’s contribution to criticism and theory came later in his works, such as “Tradition and Individual Talent,” where he discusses the relation between historical sense or tradition and the personal talent and effort of the poet. This second stage saw the emergence of many such writers who came out to write about theory and criticism separately. There is a track that leads from Samuel Johnson and Mathew Arnold to writers like T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, who begin to talk about “practical criticism.”

This brings us to our third and final stage, where theorists and critics began to further describe critical theory, exploring the nuances that distinguish criticism from theory. F. R. Leavis, with his notion of “felt experience”, emerged as a popular figure in the field of critical theory. For Leavis, it is crucial to determine that the work is favourable to “life” and “vitality.” He represented a mixture of moralism, a social vision, and non-theoretical critical practice.

Later, practical criticism, as pioneered by I. A. Richards, became almost the benchmark of critical theory. Richards is the proposed that the context of a text may be rendered obsolete and the focus should rather be on close reading of the text. His decontextualized approach to literacy, which gained popularity in the 1930s to 1970s. His approach made a close reading of the text possible in isolation from the context. Reading the text for it is. His emphasis was on more attention to the exact details of the text rather than when and where it was written.

The understanding of the relationship between literary theory and literary criticism, especially after the Ricardian concept of “practical criticism” or “new criticism,” becomes an important question. One may differentiate between them through a simple definition; literary theory provides us with various methods to analyse literature, while literary criticism is the application of theory to analyse literature. This understanding, although not wrong, has been discredited by many writers. The relationship between literary criticism and literary theory is more intrinsic, where both are dependent on each other but are still individual fields of study. The recognition of theory as a separate field, as we have discussed above, came very late. However, the use of theory always existed, but not independently

of criticism. To understand criticism before theory came to be recognized as an independent field, we must discuss the traditional literary criticism, or what came to be known as liberal humanism by many theorists.

Peter Barry discusses this in detail in his book *Beginning Theory*. He highlights the hostility attached to the term “liberal humanism” in the 1970s as representative of literary criticism “which held sway before theory” (Barry, 3). The term liberal in this context would generally allude to something that is evasive and non-committal, while the term humanism suggested a set of “negative attributes” like “non-Marxist” or “non-feminist” and “non-theoretical.” There is a general implication that “liberal humanists believe in ‘human nature’ as something fixed and constant which great literature expresses” (Barry, 3).

To discuss liberal humanism further, Barry gives us “ten tenets of liberal humanism” which we will discuss here briefly. Here, Barry gives us ten points that characterize liberal humanism in a successive manner where each successive point is an extension of the previous point. These values and beliefs of the system are: first, good literature is always of timeless significance and therefore, second, it must contain its own meaning independent of the context because the primacy is given to the words on the page. The third value is that the text should be studied in isolation on the assumption that, forth, human, then essentially unchanging, and that, fifth, individuality and, horizontality has a unique presence to make the essence of a person.

The purpose of literature then, seeks to enhance life and the propagation of human values but not political propaganda, and making sure that, seventh, the form and content are organically fused and not just ornamentation, which is possible if, eighth, the individual is sincere, which is a quality that persists in the language of literature. This sincerity would enable the individual to, ninth, demonstrate silently instead of commenting because, finally, tenth, the aim of criticism is ultimately to interpret the text and further negotiate between the text and the reader without much importance to the nature of reading and internal perceptions.

The focus of a liberal humanist approach is, therefore, centered on the notion of “art for art’s sake” where the conflict is between “art” and “life.” This kind of reading is driven by the conviction involved rather than focusing on any other systematic approach to literary criticism. It also seems to do away with the importance of form, genre, structure, and so on, delving straight into the actual meaning of the text. The transition to theory then came as an alternative to the liberal humanist approach. Literary Theory brought the focus back on the context, form, and history. The importance shifted to the writer and

The theoretical account of the nature of reading as well as writing. The various theories enabled one to transcend the convention to reach out to the psychological, racial, sexual, social, colonial, political, and economic aspects of existence. Having discussed the origin of and transition to theory, we must now turn our focus to discussing these theoretical boom that created waves in the ocean of literature.

Following the timeline already mentioned, we know that psychodynamic and Marxist theories had started evolving in the 1930s.

With Sigmund Freud’s introduction of the Psychodynamic approach, the importance of the mental psyche of an individual increased exponentially. His proposal of the structures of personality struck the contemporary society and maintains its credibility to this day. His Psychodynamic approach highlighted the role of sexuality in the creation of an individual’s personality. His approach, discussed through the five-stage theory of personality, one of which has been explained through a reference to a Greek play, *Oedipus Rex*. Freud’s conceptualization of the Oedipus complex, the sexuality of women, or the interpretation of dreams has been crucial to literature and other theories. His treatment of female sexuality, for instance, became central to many feminist debates.

To understand the psychoanalytical approach we must look at Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst who gave the theory of “the mirror stage” where he states that a human infant undergoes a stage where it looks at its replication in the external world and develops the notion of “I” and selfhood. Later in his practice, Lacan turns away from the traditional understanding of Freudian psychoanalysis and creates a “back-to-basics” Freudianism. Here, he suggested the unconscious self is the nucleus of our being. His focus on the unconscious being is elaborated in his most important essay, “The instance of the letter in the Unconscious.” He begins the essay with a mention of the intellectual dominance of language studies and further states that language is central because, in investigating language, the one who analyses, both uses and examines the language simultaneously. So the unconscious mind is thus “structured like a language.” Lacan’s contribution to the psychoanalytical approach became more prevalent in the 1960s when working-class individuals.

Similarly, the Marxist theory emerged as a fundamental principle for many literary writings. Karl Marx’s Marxism, although famous for a working-class political movement, became a source of many politically charged texts. Especially after the Second World War, when the world was torn between the two superpowers, the Socialist and Marxist regimes became solace for many writers. Dramatists like Bertolt Brecht overtly supported the Marxist and Socialist system in his writings. Many Marxist theorists have devised various plans that discuss the exploitative and utilitarian systems. Louis Althusser, one of the most influential Marxist philosophers, spoke about ideology and its role as a state apparatus used to create a class of people who would comply with consent. He puts a clear distinction between what constitutes as the state’s power and how is it different from state control. The state power operates through external force with the help of institutionalised spaces like the courts, prisons, the police force and the army.

However, there is a subtlety in the manner of exercising the state’s power by securing the consent or interpellation of the people. He calls this the “ideological structures” or the ideological state apparatus. Antonio Gramsci, another Marxist philosopher, further developed the idea of “hegemony” and the creation of organic and traditional intellectuals in a civil society. He argued how the hegemonic group ensures how the suppressed groups are coerced into complying with the norms of the exploitative system.

The aspects highlighted by these theories were further developed in the feminist theory, where the oppressed voice specifically belonged to women. Many women writers had been writing about women empowerment and their equal rights for decades now. The development of the theory only came later in the twentieth century. The term “feminist” derived from feminine became the label for the later theories and critics to identify and further develop the theory. The three waves of feminism emerged dating back to the times of Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote about the right of education and voting for women back in the eighteenth century. She criticized the sexist and patriarchal approach of Rousseau in her famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). After her, many other women writers started writing about the importance of writings produced by women and its inclusion in the canon. This was further developed and expressed by Virginia Woolf who writes about the importance of women’s writing. In her book *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) she argues that women, like men, should be able to write and their writing should be included in the literary canon. For a women, she argues, the only things that are essential for writing is a room of her own and economic independence. Earning off of one’s writing should be an open and valid option for women. The expression of one’s thoughts and ideas, however, must be allowed and included. The representation of women in literature usually had a didactic purpose of showcasing the ideal woman who is the proper amount of “feminine” and had legitimate feminine goals or aspirations. These women were showcased as wanting stability in life with a husband that could take care of her and a household that she nurtures as a good wife and mother. The identity of a woman did not exist independently and was always in relation to her gender roles and relationships. Most of the earlier writings were aimed at writing back to the misogynist texts and writers who contributed to this subjugation of women.

There was a shift in the 1980s as the mood and approach of/for feminism changed. It became more eclectic. It started drawing upon from different kinds of criticism like Marxism, structuralism, linguistics and post colonialism. It switched its focus drastically from endlessly attacking the one dimensional male centric perspectives and point of views to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook. It started focusing on tracing these records that expressed the female world and point of view. The aim was now to generate and cultivate a new canon for women’s writing which could be achieved through a rewriting the history of literature like novels and poetry that had been neglected. This creation of a new canon was described by Elaine Showalter in 1970s when she talked about the “gynotexts” (books by women) as a response to “androtexts” (books by men). She coined the term “gynocriticism” which especially pertained to the reading and theorizing of literature written by women. Other feminist theories like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar had a psychoanalytical approach about the notion of ‘containment’ of women, denying them the space to become a part of the society. Their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* discusses this society ostracization that is faced by women that the confinement is almost internalized. Kate Millet’s book *Sexual Politics* too highlights the psychoanalytical approach towards the condition of female sexuality that has been embedded in the society and condemns Freud for stripping women of their agency to be sexual beings on their own. This view has been supported by many French feminist who largely borrow from the work of great post-structuralist like Lacan, Derrida and Foucault. For them, a literary text is never the primary representation of reality or a reproduction and reiteration of a female voice.

Works from theories like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray became a major contribution to this theory. Irigaray uses sexualized language to theorize the conditioning of women and their demarcated role in the society. In her noted essay, “When Goods get Together” she discusses the transactional place of women in society where they are only subjects of men who can interact in with each other. This interaction does not take place among women unless it is out of rivalry or competition to be the best “good” for men. She calls for an egalitarian society that has been made into a utopian idea because of its impartibility. Later theories like Michael Barrett for instance, identified as a Marxist feminist, talking about the economic disparity as well as cultural oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Literature and language then became the most important tools for feminist critics. Kristeva, for instance, talks about the gendered language and theorized

it in the symbolic and semiotic aspects of language. In her essay "The System and the Speaking Subject" (1975) she states that the "symbolic" is often associated with authority, orders, fathers, repression and control. The family that creates a convention or dictates what is normal, a normative classic psychological discourse. By contrast, the semiotic aspect of discourse that is characterized not by logic and order, but by "displacement, slippage, condensation" which suggests a much fragmented and non-linear way of making connections that ultimately contributes to the increase in the probable range of possibilities (Kristeva, 62).

After the conceptualization of these theories, alongside them, emerged structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory that created a civil war-like situation between scholars and theories from Britain and the United States. Almost as a revolution, these theories brought the attention back to history and context while also focusing on the language and form of literature. The most important intervention in the structuralist theory came from Ferdinand de Saussure who described the role of language and how it affects our lives. Saussure gives us three pronouncements, as Barry mentions, where he states that, firstly, the meaning of language is always arbitrary and the meaning it has is only attributed by the convention. Secondly, he talks about the relational nature of language, that is, it can only mean something in relation to other words and cannot exist in isolation. Thirdly, he maintains that language is constitutive of our world and not just the mere recorder of it. "The opening statement of structuralism" as Barry suggests is that "it aims to understand an individual item by placing it in the context of a larger structure to which it belongs." Roland Barthes too subscribed to this definition of structuralism and worked on the value and meaning of language while asking questions like "who is speaking?" (Barry, 52). Structuralism focused on the structure, symbol and design while giving importance to commentary. Their focus on language further becomes cause for concern for the post-structuralist who were almost rebelling against their predecessors. They believed that the structuralist notion of language as not a mere record of life but is constitutive of life lead to a world of radical uncertainty as we do not have a standard landmark, a fixed point of reference or standards to determine and measure anything. Post-structuralism would argue that this 'fixed point of reference' are removed and is thrown into a gravity less universe, language without them becomes decentred in what they call a "decentred universe" (Derrida, 3). Structuralism originates and derives from linguistics while post-structuralism derives directly from philosophy. Structuralism tends to lean towards abstraction and generalizations while post-structuralist are much more emotive. For structuralists, language is constitutive of the world, while the post-structuralist insist upon the consequence of putting all importance on language as being constitutive of any and all language. For post-structuralists, language is rather fluid and decentred which is subject to constant slippage.

The emergence of post-structuralism in the 1960s then becomes a clear response to its predecessor. This shift could be seen through the shift of Roland Barthes who turned towards post-structuralism after realizing the limitations of a structured and restricting universe of structuralism. Barthes and Jacques Derrida are the most important names for this theory. Barthes' crucial essay "The Death of the Author" became the marker of his shift towards post-structuralism. In the essay, he announces the rhetorical death of the author that leads to the independence of the text. The essay accurately calls for the radical textual independence of a text which would be free of intention and context. In fact, the text is free in all sensibilities in a centre-less universe.

Derrida's 1966 lecture on "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" became another benchmark for post-structuralist theory. In this paper, Derrida saw the emergence of a radical "event" that marked the break from the past thought and sensibilities, from philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger as well as the psychoanalytical approach of Freud. This "event" that encompasses the "decentring" of the contemporary intellectual universe. The resulting world is free of absolutes or fixed points. This new world gave rise to "free play." Derrida embraces this new and centreless universe of "free play" in this paper as does Barthes in his essay with the declaration of the death of the author, and with him, the structure and limitations. This unleashed what Barry calls "an era of joyous freedom."

The critical method of looking at the text would then come in the form of deconstruction. The post-structuralist literary critic would now engage in the deconstruction of a text. This method encourages and unravels the unconscious aspects of the text rather than the conscious ones. To define it, the critic Barbara Johnson states:

Deconstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction'. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo'... the deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of the warring forces of signification within the text. (Johnson, 5)

To sum up what the post-structuralist critics would do, Peter Barry gives us five major points: first, the text would be read against itself to reveal "textual subconscious." Second, they would fix on the surface features of the words, noting the similarity in sound or the root meaning to establish various different meanings out of it. Third, they showcase how the text is made with its "disunity" rather than "unity." Fourth, they would concentrate on a single paragraph intensively and come out with numerous different meanings and interpretations that could exist parallel to each other. And fifth, they would look for "shifts" or "gaps" in the text to focus on what caused it. Like structuralism and post-structuralism, a similar debate outstands for modernism and postmodernism. While modernism constituted most of the twentieth century, postmodernism only surfaced in the 1980s. 'Modernism' was a term denoted to a movement that heavily impacted the art and culture of the first part of the century. It took down the structure and convention of art that had established itself throughout the previous centuries. This art movement led to the creation of experimental style forms like Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Futurism. The period of high modernism in literature followed from the year 1910 to 1930 where many modernist novelist and poets like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and many more were writing using experimental methods. The focus of writing was at creating emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, away from apparent objectivity of omniscient narratives, fixed point of views and clear moral positions. It aimed at blurring the distinction between genres where novels became lyrical while poems became prose-like. There was an inclination towards fragmented forms and discontinuous narrative and a tendency towards reflexivity. The focus shifted to the nature, state and role of self.

To define postmodernism then, we must look at the definition given by J. A. Cuddon as "an eclectic approach" that celebrates "aleatory writing [for] parody and pastiche." The definition doesn't seem very different from that of modernism so far. And so critics have suggested that to understand the two separately one must remove the sequenced hierarchy between them that decided which came first. The difference, many suggest, lies in the mood. The difference in mood, as Jeremy Hawthorn would argue, come from the mood and attitude that they share towards the fragmented nature of the text. The modernist subscribed to this experimental fragmentation in their writings but with a sense of nostalgia for the past, a regret for the age when faith was full and authority was intact, that is now lost. For the postmodernist, this fragmentation was exhilarating and liberating, symptomatic of the escape from the confining hold of fixed conventions.

The second difference between the two can be seen as an extension the difference in attitudes yet again. For the modernist, the fondness of over-elaborate art forms and their practice of fierce asceticism, their elitism that aimed at producing and appreciating high art. Postmodernism rejects this distinction between "high" and "popular" art, accepting the fusion of both as mixtures of quality art.

To further discuss what postmodernist theory would entail, we must look at Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge* (1979) where he discusses what is postmodern. Lyotard opens his essay "Answering the question: what is postmodernism" with an attack on the thinkers who are nostalgic about the Enlightenment philosophy, exposing these opponents as the real conservatives. For him, the Enlightenment is one of the would-be "authoritative", "overarching", "totalizing" explanation of things like Christianity, Marxism and supposed scientific progress (Lyotard, 98). These "metanarratives" for him are mere means to extend illusions to increase plurality. He defines postmodernism by stating that it is simply "incredulity towards metanarrative." The best we can hope for is series of "Mini narratives" which are provisional, relative, temporary and contingent. It forms the basis for the actions of specific groups, in particular, local circumstances. "Postmodernity, thus" as Barry puts it, deconstructs the basic aim of Enlightenment, that is "the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject" (Barry, 83).

With relation to the emerging significance and relevance of the decentred universe with a hegemonic system at play, theories like new historicism surfaced with an implicit inclination towards liberal ideals of personal freedom and accepting and celebrating all forms of difference and "deviance." It centres on the emphasis of its importance around resistance to thought control in order to eliminate the "deviant" and cleanse the state which appears to be a monolithic structure where change becomes impossible. To understand this, we must look at the most important figure of new historicism, the post-structuralist cultural historian Michel Foucault who explained this situation with the help of a pervasive image of the panoptic, which is surveillance. The Panopticon was a design of a circular prison where all the cells were monitored through a single tower in the centre. The monitoring and surveillance did not, however, take place through physical force or individual participation but rather a light bulb that just indicated that one is being watch. This is the method devised to cure the "deviant" problem. In the face of the power of the oppressive state, where the state penetrates and taints the most intimate parts of one's life. A similar, but more aggressive idea, is seen in Althusser's work and his distinction between the "repressive structures" and "ideological structure." There is also a clear affinity to Gramsci's concept of

hegemony and its role in a civil society. Therefore, Gramsci's "hegemony", Althusser's "interpellation" and Foucault's "discursive practices" are all concerns for the repressive and powerful state.

Another major theory that emerged during this time also extended from a similar experience of surveillance, hegemony and interpellation through colonialism and imperialism. The postcolonial theory emerged from the post-colonial nations where the previous colonies started responding to the Eurocentric discourse. The post-colonial countries shared a history of exploitation and subordination that often resulted in cultural assimilation. The white man on a civilizing mission aimed at acculturation of the native people who needed to be civilized. The creation of the Orientalism in the West to refer back to the East stated defining the post-colonial countries who had now started feeling the need to respond. Edward Said attends to this cause in his book *Orientalism* (1979) where he discuss how the "orient" is defined to describe what the "occident" is not. In the Eurocentric Discourse the East is depicted as the exotic place while the West stands superior in culture. Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths talk about the importance of writing back to this Eurocentric discourse in there book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). The question of identity has been all pervasive in postcolonial theory. This questions also reaches use of language that was imposed and assimilated among the natives by the colonizers. The presence of theory in our present society and culture, therefore, has had tremendous importance. From the recognition of theory as a separate field and the emergence of various critical theories has been endless. Theory entertains the issues and ideas that have always existed in the most articulate manner. Its importance in literary studies has increased exponentially but has still not reached too far. Many university courses include a paper on Literary Theory but it remains optional on the undergrad level in many university curriculum. The relevance of theory is difficult to define, as is its definition, but the presence of it in the world where its application is becoming more and more important has been realized.

The development of literary theory represents one of the most significant intellectual transformations in literary studies. From its origins in classical philosophical reflections on art and representation to its contemporary engagement with questions of ideology, power, and cultural identity, literary theory has consequently expanded the scope of literary observations. While earlier traditions of literary criticism emphasized the upon the universality of human experience and the timeless value of literary texts, the onset of twentieth-century theoretical movements challenged these assumptions by foregrounding the historical, political, linguistic, and ideological dimensions of literature.

The rise of modern psychoanalytic theory, Marxist criticism, feminist theory, structuralism, and post-structuralism fundamentally altered the critical landscape by introducing new ways of understanding the relationships among texts, authors, readers, and social structures. Later developments, such as postmodernism, new historicism, and postcolonial theory, further the field by interrogating dominant cultural narratives and highlighting the role of power in the production and interpretation of knowledge and meaning.

Rather than replacing earlier forms of literary criticism, literary theory has created a more complex and dynamic framework for examining literature from multiple perspectives. In contemporary literary studies, theory remains an essential intellectual tool, enabling scholars to analyse literature in relation to broader cultural, social, and political contexts. The continued evolution of theoretical approaches demonstrates that literary interpretation remains an ongoing intellectual process shaped by changing historical conditions and critical perspectives.

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