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## ***THEORY AS A DISTINCT GENRE IN LITERARY STUDIES***

**Keywords:** *literary theory, textuality, genre, interpretation, deconstructive, structural relationship, reading*

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to examine literary theory by a generic approach, as a body of thinking and writings, a miscellaneous genre which challenges disciplinary boundaries and produces its own set of canonical texts within a specific organization and a discrete identity.*

*I have chosen deconstruction as a basis for analyzing the major issues of literary theory and the ways in which it is historically constituted as a distinct genre, mainly by developing a set of rules circumscribed to the respective critical thinking.*

*"The genre has always in all genres been able to play the role of order's principle: resemblance, analogy, identity and difference, taxonomic classification, organization and genealogical tree, order of reasons, sense of sense, truth of truth, natural light and sense of history".*

*Starting from the ideas expressed by Derrida in the above quotation, it is obvious that literary theory meets the order's principle like any other genre, with the delineation of its scope and being subject to criticism and historical becoming.*

In literature, genre is known as an intangible taxonomy, with stable ideas. From the earliest recorded systems of genre in history, from Plato and Aristotle, the derived criteria of mode, object and medium in a tripartite system, have been expanded to an increasing scope and complexity. Taxonomy allows for a structured classification system of genre, opposed to the contemporary rhetorical model. In the modern views, the readers take any part in decoding the meaning, and the meaning is influenced by forces external to the text. A primary feature of genre is that the reader comes to it with expectations of form, style and content that cannot be undone by interpretation.

Jacques Derrida's work *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* proved particularly influential in the creation of post-structuralism. In literature, genre has been known as an intangible taxonomy. It allows for a structured classification system of genre, as opposed to a more contemporary rhetorical model of genre.

Starting from the general definition of genre ("a class or category of artistic endeavor having a particular form, context, technique, or the like") and from genre theory, my paper hints at the demonstration that literary theory in its critical sense has become a distinct genre itself.

The process by which genres are established always involves the human need for distinction and interrelation. Since the purposes of critics who establish genres vary, it is self-evident that the same texts can belong to different groupings of genres and serve different generic purposes. (Cohen, *History and Genre* 204)

The focus is on Derrida's work in order to select the features typical to deconstruction in general, showing that any theoretical school we think of has certain constants such as certain normative and aesthetic constituents even if they belong to a different philosophical thought.

The application of the genre concept to literary theory is based on its dominant elements. In *Encyclopedia Britannica* genre is "a distinctive type or category of literary composition". The concept has moved far beyond the simple notion of pattern in form and content. Today we cannot classify texts only on basis of a set of formal criteria without awareness of their context and purpose. A pattern of communication is a better characterization than a text pattern, because it embraces the interaction between writer and reader or speaker and audience, and it has an implicit association with situation.

Considering the evolution of literary theory, which had many twists through the 19th and 20th centuries, very much influenced by the deconstructionist thought, it can be said that literary theory pertains to a new genre that meets all the above prerequisites. In his article entitled "The Law of Genre", Jacques Derrida first puts forward the idea that individual texts belong to certain genres and that not only is taxonomy a subjective approach, but that the place and time the taxonomical initiative takes place requires further analysis. Although the genre concept directs both author and reader to what is familiar and conventional, we can still talk about evolution and diversification, when understanding genre as a superstructure.

To show that genre is the template for a certain type of texts and that it requires unique and specific vocabularies with a historical formation is another major aspect regarding the two complementary areas of literary theory: historical and philological, as the prerequisites for understanding, with reference to methods of reading and interpretation.

The pattern of communication means audience/readership (more or less specialized) and a certain information organization by means of basic categories and a conceptual structure. Genre has a paradigm of interrelated challenges and responses that provide a frame of reference in reader's modeling. The analysis model of genre is based on the regularities at the level of structure, style and register. These similarities are recognizable in the type of composition process, involving activities such as forming opinions, text production, in the reading practices, namely approaching the text, constructing knowledge and using it.

Having a controlled reflection on the method formation, theory rightly proves to be entirely compatible with its larger context of culture. A general consideration about literary theory should address questions such as the definition of literature and analyze the

differentiation between literary and non-literary uses of language. It should then proceed to the descriptive taxonomy of the various species of the literary genres and to the normative rules that are to follow from the respective classification. Therefore, literary theory belongs to a genre, since it can be circumscribed to a pre-established context of norms it prescribes according to a particular ideology.

The norms of interpretation operate within institutional contexts for diverse purposes, knowing that they have an ideological nature. There is a common pattern in literary theory on its normative critical side, irrespective of the ideology, despite a bewildering variety of theoretical positions and vocabularies.

Genre theory does not conceptualize context as simply the space outside of text but as dynamic media that at the same time structure and are structured by the communicative practices of social agents. There is no "outside-of-the-text," in Derrida's phrase: life is textual. Culture and individuals are constructed through networks of affiliated language, symbol and every text connects to and is constituted through other texts. By providing it a broader context in this overview, genre is a framework for literary theory. It creates shared expectations about the form and content of communication and, therefore, is supposed to be relevant for the theoretical texts.

In addition to content and form, purpose and function have become most relevant to modern genre analysis. The social and organizational functions of genre, namely their purpose and role within a discourse community, in a genre repertoire and a genre system, explain the dynamism or evolution of genre.

In general, deconstruction as a philosophy of meaning, can also be deemed as one of the subgenres or species of literary theory. Breaking out of any proposed closure, the delimitation is the only basis for making more than the contrasts between theory and literature. Derrida contributed to literary theory from a philosophical perspective and his critique was initially applied to philosophical texts in the main, but the difficulties – aporias and paradoxes – are also found in literature. Nearly all the problems that deconstruction rises for criticism can be found in his work. I will go briefly through some ways in which it is the text is made intelligible in reading, its relationship to linguistic description, its reference to the external world and its relation to ideology which the interpreter may wish to promote. I tackle with these problematic areas by analyzing what I take to be the underlying logic of typical examples of the interpretative strategy at issue.

Deconstruction represents a complex response to a diversity of theoretical and philosophical movements of the 20th century, primarily Husserlian phenomenology, Saussurean and French structuralism, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* gives a number of arguments consistent with Derrida's about the lack of epistemological certainty in philosophy. He asserts that epistemology, the 'linguistic turn', ontology, and so on, have never given an adequate answer to what it means to say that an idea or meaning "represents" reality.

Similarly, Derrida argues against the notion of a knowable centre (the Western ideal of logocentrism), and nothing has any real meaning or truth. Deconstructionism

liberates the notion of text from a discernible epistemological center. There is no absolute underlying structure to which a text must be accountable. Language is important, Derrida asserts, but it is not stable; it exists in an infinite “interplay of signification” (Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” 961). Greater attention is paid to the role of language and textuality in the construction of reality and identity. That is one of the reasons Derrida is the best example in this overview, apart from his tremendous contributions to the literary theory development, the huge influence of the entire contemporary thought and views over “genre law” that very well serve my purpose herein. Ralph Cohen resonates in all those ideas, especially in the work called *Literary Theory as Genre*. The focus is on the deconstructive perspective reference point in the literary studies historicity from the genre formation point of view and the definite perpetuated influence of Derrida on further works circumscribed to the same genre.

Deconstruction has separated linguistic performance and critical thought and endeavored to question the assumptions and complexity of language and discourse uses. It has continued the work of existential and hermeneutic thought, attempting to find meaning and challenged both the pieties of humanism and the rigidity of structuralism. The deconstructionist view over the literary text, inherently self-contradictory depends upon a play between the construction of a situation context and literary convention. To put the matter downrightly, there may be a gap between what the readers expect and what are they persuaded by the critic text depends upon the latter. Therefore, the conventions by which the approach is made towards *reality, truth or transcendental signified*, will reveal themselves.

Deconstruction can also be described as a theory of reading based on the logic of opposition within texts. The term designates a particular type of practice in reading and a method of criticism, representing a complex response to a multitude of theoretical and philosophical movements of the 20th century, out of which the most notable being: Husserlian phenomenology, Saussurean and French structuralism, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Derrida's work in this field can also be compared to that of Barthes, as he underscored the value of this critical activity: *'l'ennjeu du travail littéraire, c'est de faire du lecteur, non plus un consommateur, mais un producteur du texte.'* His work today may be tracked by its confluence with a series of disciplines, different questions, to make connections for the reader as to how these may work and are pretexts for more exploration.

“A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself” (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 123). But as a mode of reading, deconstruction is, in Barbara Johnson's phrase, a 'teasing out of warring forces of signification within a text', an investigation of the tension between modes of signification, as between the performative and constitutive dimensions of language.

Derrida gives a reading or interpretation of texts, identifying logic at work in a text. Derrida's interpretation shows the extent to which literary works themselves, such as

Rousseau *Confessions*, are theoretical: they offer explicit speculative arguments about writing, desire, and substitution or supplementation, and they guide thinking about these topics in ways that they leave implicit. Derrida shows how theoretical the literary works are, Foucault how creatively productive the discourses of knowledge are. Derrida is claiming to tell us what Rousseau's texts say or show, so the question that arises is whether what Rousseau's texts say is true.

Literary works can be deemed as language with particular properties or features, and we can think of literature as the product of conventions and a certain kind of attention. Neither perspective successfully incorporates the other, and one must shift back and forth between them.

“Could a performative utterance succeed”, asks Derrida, ‘if its formulation did not repeat a “codified” or iterable [repeatable] form, in other words if the formula that I utter to open a meeting, christen a boat, or undertake marriage were not identifiable as conforming to an iterable model, if it were not thus identifiable as a kind of citation?’ Austin sets aside as anomalous, non-serious, or exceptional particular instances of what Derrida calls a “general iterability” that should be considered a law of language. General and fundamental, because, for something to be a sign, it must be able to be cited and repeated in all sorts of circumstances, including ‘non-serious’ ones. Language is performative in the sense that it doesn't just transmit information but performs acts by its repetition of established discursive practices or ways of doing things. Derrida argues that ideality is constituted by repetition (iterability), without rising the empirical over the ideal, but maintaining the dynamic relationship between them as differance. And differance is the acknowledgement of the economy of conceptual oppositions. Since Ferdinand de Saussure’s work at the beginning of the century, language signifies through difference: words differ from others, which in their turn differ from yet other words. Meaning becomes a chain of differentiations which are necessarily at the same time interrelations, and so any meaning involves a number of other meanings — through oppositions or associations. Comparisons can be made with other movements, from the time of entering the symbolic order, the world of signs and power (Lacan), and before that to evocations of inchoate experiences (Kristeva). Others address to various worlds of the discourse and socially constituted ways of conceptualizing: judicial, economic, domestic, theological, academic and so on (Foucault).

There are several contexts that may be discussed in connection with a text. There are, first, aesthetic contexts of art, of its role in culture, genre of the text, particular aesthetic traditions and the period style in which the text is written. Second, there are the conditions of the texts production and reception, how they are defined, and socially categorized. Third, there is the artist's own personal history. Fourth, the meanings and methods of culture and sub-cultural, class, ethnic, regional and gender groups, marked by different expressions of attitude, perception and symbols.

An essential, central and inevitable context of any text is the existence of other texts. This is a creation of meaning from previous and cognate expressions of meaning

(intertextuality). Any literary work will by all means refer to works in its genre previous to it or on other writings in its culture according to the specific discourse structures. As language is the basic symbol system through which culture is created and maintained, everything can be regarded as discourse, that is, that we only register as being what we attach meaning to, we attach meaning through language, and meaning through language is controlled by the discursive structures of a culture. There is no outside-of-the-text, but experience is constructed by the way of talking about it, and thus itself being a cultural construct.

The genre has always in all genres been able to play the role of order's principle: resemblance, analogy, identity and difference, taxonomic classification, organization and genealogical tree, order of reason, order of reasons, sense of sense, truth of truth, natural light and sense of history. (Derrida, "*The Law of Genre*" 5)

Theory involves speculative practice: accounts of desire, language, and so on, that challenge received ideas. So doing, they incite rethinking the categories that may be reflecting on literature. The impact of theory has been to expand the range of questions to which literary works can answer and to focus attention on the different ways they resist or complicate the ideas of their age. In principle, cultural studies, with its insistence on studying literature as one signifying practice among others, and on examining the culture roles with which literature has been invested, can intensify the study of literature as a complex intertextual phenomenon. Theory was endless, an unbounded corpus of challenging and fascinating writings. And as attention moves to literature as the cultural expression of lived life, and to the textuality of all experience, the dividing line between 'literature' and more popular entertainment is being challenged; such things as detective fiction and romances are being treated to as serious and detailed a study as are canonical works. The Canon itself, that collection of texts considered worthy of study by those in control of the curriculum, is under attack as ethnocentric, patriarchal and elitist, and as essentializing in that it tends to create the idea that canonical works are independent entities standing on their own intrinsic and transcendent authority and not rooted in the agencies and contingencies of history.

Contemporary literary theory is marked by a number of premises and does not stand on its own. It is part of a larger cultural movement which has revolutionized many fields of study and it is based on the idea that all interpretations are conditioned by cultural perspectives mediated by symbols and practice. As theory has become more central, literary studies have in the view of many turned away from the study of literature itself to the study of theory.

Other types of literary theory, influenced both by post-structural theory and deconstructive practice are still in force, coalescing efficiently at the moment of New Historicism, transgressing the motives of their cultural meanings. Contemporary critical theories may not all be valid over time, but the issues they address mark their contribution to the contemporary thought, and the practice leads to repeated interpretations and revaluations, like in a cycle.

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