



The Mainstreaming of Environmental Criticism: Theory and Nature

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Abstract

Contemporary theory has been framed by structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodernist discussions about social, cultural and linguistic formation of meaning. Structuralists argue that meaning is an external feature. It depends on the linguistic framework, for it is defined in and through language. For poststructuralists, meaning can be subjectively defined; thus there is no meaning to be considered. Poststructuralism offers the idea of the plurality of meaning. Like all traditional notions, meaning is a metanarrative whose validity structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodernist critics find controversial. Contemporary theory has been a liberating experience. This might be exemplified with the enquiry into the legitimacy of the patriarchy which rendered women determination to question their inequalities. Theory has enabled discussions about the proletariat having a future to control production. However, theory has illustrated nature within the same exemplification. Nature is a socially, culturally and linguistically constructed notion defined as a man-made perception. The present environmental emergency loses its meaning as nature is a meaningless term. Environmental criticism dismiss the latest designation of nature as a metanarrative. It insists that nature is real, alive and in danger. This article aims to point out that mainstreaming of environmental criticism helps understand the relationship between theory and nature.

Keywords: Environmental criticism, literary theory, nature, meaning, signification.

Çevreci Eleştirinin Normalleştirilmesi: Kuram ve Doğa

Öz

Çağdaş kuram, anlamın sosyal, kültürel ve dilbilimsel oluşumu hakkında yapılan yapısalcı, postyapısalcı ve postmodern tartışmalar sonucu şekillenmiştir. Yapısalcılar anlamın nesnelere dışında yer aldığını kabul ederler. Anlam dil içinde ve dil aracılığıyla tarif edildiğinden dilsel çerçeveye dayanır. Postyapısalcılar için anlam öznel olarak tanımlanabilir, bu yüzden de dikkate alınacak bir anlam yoktur. Postyapısalcılık anlamın çoğulluğu kavramını öne sürer. Tüm geleneksel kavramlar gibi anlam, geçerliği yapısalcı, postyapısalcı ve postmodern eleştirmenler tarafından tartışmalı bulunan bir üst anlatıdır. Çağdaş kuram özgürleştirici bir deneyimdir. Bu durum kadına eşitsizliğe karşı çıkma kararlılığını kazandıran ataerkilliğin meşruluğunun sorgulanması ile örneklendirilebilir. Benzer şekilde kuram, proletaryanın üretimi kontrol edebileceği bir geleceğe sahip olması hakkında tartışmaları da mümkün hale getirmiştir. Bununla birlikte, kuram doğayı da aynı örneklendirme içinde tanımlamaktadır. Doğa, insan yapımı bir algılama olarak tarif edilebilecek sosyal, kültürel ve dilbilimsel anlamda oluşturulmuş bir kavramdır. Doğa anlamsız bir kavram olduğundan mevcut çevresel olağanüstü durum önemini yitirmektedir. Çevreci eleştiri doğanın bir üst anlatı olduğu fikrini reddeder. Doğanın gerçek, canlı ve tehlikede olduğu konusunda ısrar eder. Bu makale çevreci eleştirinin normalleştirilmesinin kuram ve doğa arasındaki ilişkinin anlaşılmasına yardım edeceğine işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevreci eleştiri, edebiyat kuramı, doğa, anlam, anlamlandırma.

INTRODUCTION

Except for literary modernism, twentieth-century literary theory has been influenced by three intellectual movements in literary studies which had already become prominent among French scholars and thinkers especially after the end of the Second World War. Even before the formation of these critical developments in literary theory, it had been Ferdinand de Saussure's questioning of the nature of meaning in the highly complex architecture of any given linguistic systems. As Saussure presumes that no words have their meanings due to a natural correspondence between linguistic signs (i.e. words, signifiers) and their referents (i.e. things, concepts, the signified) but it is only the consequence of a social and cultural convention that words are supposed to be meaningful, this presumption has contributed to the development of structuralism as a specific theoretical approach to literary studies. Structuralist literary critics, who are guided by Saussure's research into how meaning is processed in language, has stressed the idea that words/signs have indeed no significance. According to structuralist thinkers, meaning could only be accomplished outside things. However, though it is outside, the notion of meaning still exists as the subject of structuralist thinkers' conjectural discussions.

Such an enquiry into the problem of meaning in language gives way to a comparatively more radical approach. It is poststructuralism which has criticised the structuralist critics' indecision over how to issue the fundamental role of language (i.e. the linguistic system) in generating and conveying meaning. Instead of maintaining the structuralist discussion, poststructuralist thinkers have concluded that there is no signification. The poststructuralist notion of the lack of significance is an adjustment to form a new theoretical perspective. Meaning is no longer the central and totalising concept that human mind has so long been accustomed to in order to figure out the phenomenal world. Poststructuralist idea of signification is reactionary and nontraditional, yet subjective. As significance is subjective, there is actually no meaning in its conventional sense, which has accentuated the emphasis on subjectivity in poststructuralist thought.

Postmodernism practices nearly the same discipline, for *"postmodernism is philosophically close to poststructuralism – the radical critiques of traditional views of knowledge, truth, meaning, interpretation, communication, and so on"* (Geyh, 2003, p. 3). It is in this case not only meaning or signification but whatever has been traditionally defined and conceptualised in liberal humanist social, cultural and literary process that postmodernism rejects to acknowledge. In other words, postmodernist critique of traditional realism which has emerged from structuralist and poststructuralist theories has liberated human perception from the limitation and restriction paradoxically introduced by tradition itself. One of the most noticeable examples of this situation is that postmodernism has rendered the claims of patriarchy and patriarchal oppression meaningless so that women could cherish equality in society with men. The idea of the superiority of patriarchal norms, like any other theoretical notion, is a socially, culturally and linguistically formulated concept.

In case of nature, however, such nontraditional liberation which is essentially the result of structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodern discussions is likely to trigger a reverse reaction. It is indisputable that nature as a term has been a conventionally established notion in liberal humanist practice. Therefore, whenever environmental criticism is taken into consideration, *"[b]eing largely confined to the theoretically discredited parameters of literary realism, ecocriticism today finds itself struggling with hermeneutical closure as well as facing an ambivalent openness in its interpretive approach"* (Oppermann, 2006, p. 103). In other words, *"'nature' is not simply a given, physical object but a social construction an entity that assumes meaning within various cultural contexts and is fundamentally unknowable outside of human categories of understanding"* (Wapner, 2002, p. 167). The most serious problem is that this approach has significantly undermined global environmental awareness. Then, the question to be raised is: *"[h]ow can societies protect the nonhuman world if the very identity of that enterprise is cast into doubt? How can states*

cooperate to protect nature if the meaning of the term is socially and historically contingent?" (Wapner, 2002, p. 167)

If theory, which "has always been a contested ecocritical issue, because it has been associated with poststructuralist interrogation of the referents of reality, which clashed with ecocriticism's central rationale of focusing on the world beyond the word" (Oppermann, 2010, p. 768), executes the same structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodernist critique upon nature – i.e. if nature is considered being no longer significant since it has been linguistically and socially devised – then the ecocritical call for awareness for the present environmental catastrophe could seriously be endangered. This means that there would be no need for an action for an idea whose significance is believed to be a conventional fallacy. As a result, it could be argued that structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodern discussions have introduced into theory emancipatory awareness and knowledge, but theory might at the same time be potentially restricting especially in the cases of ecological and environmental studies.

The Evolution of Theory

Structuralist thinking relies on the assumption that nothing has significance by itself in isolation. It is due to this assessment that every concept (e.g. a literary work, a novel, a play, a short story, or a piece of poetry) has to be studied in the context of some larger structure that it is somehow part of. Therefore, the term structuralism stems from this notion. What follows from this proposition is the acceptance that meaning is not inside things, but it is necessarily outside. In other words, signification is what is externally attributed to things, to objects, or to the matter by human mind. For example, according to structuralist interpretation, W. Shakespeare's 1606 political tragedy *Macbeth* has significance not by itself but as part of a larger structure. The play becomes meaningful, for example, as a component of Shakespearean drama, or of the reign of James I in England, or of Renaissance (post-Elizabethan) English Literature. Structuralist contribution to twentieth-century literary theory can be summarised pointing to the claim that "the neo-formalist approach to postmodernist fiction was invigorated by an input of structuralist ideas" (Maltby, 1993, p. 525). How these ideas have evolved into the fundamental assertions of poststructuralist discussion is to be figured out in the following paragraphs.

Poststructuralism emphasises the assumption that if language not only records but also shapes and constructs the world –The idea that meaning is produced and expressed only in the linguistic system; without language, there would be no signification—then the first predictable conclusion to draw is that there appears the idea of subjectivity; that is how one perceives as a subjective individual is actually what one, as a person, eventually perceives (Barry, 1995, p. 61). The question now is what the most possible consequences of this particular conclusion might be.

The first development is that meaning is subjectively conveyed, for it is the product of a subjective process. Therefore, meaning is not stable; instead, it is always subject to change. One's awareness (how one considers the things) is necessarily different from the perception of someone else (how someone else perceives the same things to be). This means that there is uncertainty; and no signification is truly fixed, for it is individual. In other words, there is not any permanent reference free from language and linguistic illustration. Finally, there is no standard, for example, to measure, to evaluate, to decide, or to conclude. That is, any traditional/realistic reference point has been permanently removed. This is the "post-structuralist critique of [the traditional/realistic] reference" (Waugh, 1992, p. 115). Correspondingly, though structuralists are trying to situate signification in a larger structure, there is no signification for poststructuralists at all. While structuralism has removed the meaning from the text, poststructuralism, which "was the beginnings of the postmodern revolution in the human sciences" (Drolet, 2004, p. 18), has thoroughly destroyed it. Meaning and signification have been removed; they have permanently disappeared.

When it comes to postmodernism in representational art and literature, what surfaces is the rejection of all the elements of traditional realist doctrine such as time, setting, plot, character, narrator, as well as meaning. It is obvious that literary postmodernism shares most of the references of literary modernism, the most remarkable of which is the modernist writers' interest in subjective narration. It becomes, at this point, easy to notice how postmodernism has articulated the discussion of poststructuralist critics asserting the significance of subjectivity in their claim that how one perceives the universe as a subjective being is what one, as a subjective being, is able to comprehend. One of the most remarkable ways of practice for this notion was the stream-of-consciousness technique characterised by a continuous flow of thoughts and feelings for narration in modernist literature.

It should be emphasised that postmodern literary theory, very much like what modernist writers during the first decades of twentieth century did, has replaced narrative objectivity (i.e. objective narration) with subjective narration (i.e. subjective narrator). Narration has become discontinuous and fragmented, for the narrator has no interest in reliability/believability. The narrator has lost its traditional meaning since truth has lost its significance.

As it is considered that the notion of literary genre is a product of traditional realism, postmodern literary theory tends to erase the distinctions between genres, for the concept of a genre as a literary term has lost its meaning as well. What happens is that postmodern literature exemplifies prose narratives becoming more and more poetic and poetry tending to be prose-like. One of the most remarkable examples of literary modernism in English, Thomas Stearns Eliot's "The Waste Land," characterises most of these characteristics through its prose-like narrative. Furthermore, the poem refers not to the phenomenal reality but to literature/art as reality has been decentred; it is no longer central. Postmodern literature, therefore, is intertextual in terms of parody, pastiche and allusion, for it no more relies on external reality which is now devoid of its traditional significance.

As a result, to sum up the above changes in the literary practice of the time, it is argued that "[p]ostmodernist doctrines thus drew upon a great deal of philosophical, political, and sociological thought, which disseminated itself into the artistic avant-garde [...] and into the humanities departments of universities in Europe and the United States as 'theory'" (Butler, 2002, p. 7). Because theory overshadows everything, "[t]he postmodernist period is one of the extraordinary dominance of the work of academics over that of artists" (Butler, 2002, p. 7).

It is to be asserted that twentieth-century literary theory which had mostly defined itself against the established concepts and notions of traditional realism focuses on the idea of the disappearance of the real. Structuralism has already challenged and questioned conventional formulations in literature and literary studies in terms of time, place, character and genre. But it is the poststructuralist and postmodern confrontation with the conventional practices of literary realism which has formulated the disappearance of the real. It is as a result of this that poststructuralist and postmodern literary theories tend to play with and usually mock and parody the established norms and formulations of traditional realism. Literary realism has thus become one of the principal objects of poststructuralist and postmodernist critical irony.

Nature Theorised

Any enquiries into any possible theoretical interpretations of nature should be introduced recalling the most foundational reviews of structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodern discussions in literary studies. Therefore, it is necessary to inaugurate the discussion first with the structuralist argument about signification so that it could be easier to see the later theoretical interpretations of nature more clearly.

One of the most principal texts of structuralist movement is Ferdinand de Saussure's posthumously published book *Course in General Linguistics*. According to Saussure, whose theory in general features "the arbitrariness of the sign, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic analysis, and the relative nature of identities constituted by the play of formal systems" (Jay, 1988, p. 161), it has always been an innocent approach to assume that words necessarily attribute to things in a simple process (1959, p. 65). The problem, as Saussure illustrates, is that "[t]he linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (p. 66). This sound-image, however, means more than what it first denotes, for it is "the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses" (Saussure, 1959, p. 66). Instead of being a part of a material concept, Saussure's sound-image is a psychological notion. It is not material, it is sensory. Saussure exemplifies the idea of the psychological character of language asserting that "[w]ithout moving our lips or tongue, we can talk to ourselves or recite mentally a selection of verse" (1959, p. 66).

Saussure's first principle of language is the arbitrary character of the sign. He uses the word sign "to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified [signifié] and signifier [signifiant]" (Saussure, 1959, p. 67). His assumption is that the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. However, Saussure's idea of the sign broadly encompasses what results from the association between the signifier and the signified. He concludes that "the linguistic sign is arbitrary" (1959, p. 67). Saussure believes that the arbitrary nature of the sign is indisputable. He proposes that it is only through convention or tradition that meaning has been maintained. Furthermore, according to Saussure's theoretical standard, there is no natural correspondence between a word and its meaning. He pertinently claims that "it is unmotivated, i.e. arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified" (1959, p. 69). When one says – in order to display a simpler example – cat, the cute animal with its fur, tail and claws which will necessarily appear in almost everyone's mind, is the result of the convention human mind has been accustomed to.

In addition to the above discussion, Saussure has suggested the idea that meaning is relational. This means that no word has significance if isolated from other words; no word could be defined in isolation from other words. However, "[o]ne could also argue about a system of symbols, for the symbol has a rational relationship with the thing signified but language is a system of arbitrary signs and lacks the necessary basis, the solid ground for discussion" (Saussure, 1959, p. 73). He has also asserted that instead of merely recording, language structures the world, for it has been language through which meaning is expressed. He in a sense inaugurates the poststructuralist discussions about language, for his idea of "signs mean by relating to and ultimately deferring to other signs in an infinite regress within an always already constituted linguistic system" (Philen, 2005, p. 224).

The principle of arbitrariness of meaning nearly governs the whole system of language. Although objections against arbitrariness of the sign have been raised referring mostly to onomatopoeic signifier, Saussure illustrates that the number of onomatopoeic words are much smaller than it is believed to be. In addition, onomatopoeia is not essential to the linguistic system. If the sign is characterised by its arbitrariness, then it might be claimed that meanings words have are necessarily arbitrary.

Serving a leading role to the development of structuralist theory, Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Structural Anthropology* agrees with Saussure on the assumption that any meaning in the linguistic system is arbitrary though not without reservations. Lévi-Strauss' argument is that "[t]he Saussurean principle ... cannot be disputed if we are concerned only with the level of linguistic description. This principle has played an important role in the science of language by permitting the liberation of phonetics from naturalistic metaphysical interpretations" (1963, p. 91). Lévi-Strauss' discussion about meaning goes on a scale unparalleled by Saussure, yet

[e]ven if [his] view of myth does not actually so closely parallel Saussure's view of linguistic systems (in the form of *langue*) [...] Lévi-Strauss did see clear continuity between his work and that of Saussure. So, it makes sense that he would endeavor to demonstrate that the workings and meaning of myth operate analogously to the way meaning is produced in linguistic signs: through relationality and difference. (Philen, 2005, p. 225)

Saussure's idea of the arbitrariness of meaning has been adapted to the disappearance of the centre by Jacques Derrida, for "[t]he idea of differentiation is borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure, who claims that there are distinctions and differences within language that can generate linguistic concepts not corresponding to any extra-linguistic entities" (Nuyen, 1989, p. 29). In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida defines the centre as a reference point, a fixed point of origin (1978, p. 278). The centre orients, balances and organises the structure; it regulates and formulates the system. Centres maintain so significant a role that "[b]y orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself" (Derrida, 1978, pp. 278-279). When considered traditionally, the centre is potentially a self-referential phenomenon, for "it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality" (Derrida, 1978, p. 279). As a result, the centre is both outside and inside the structure. The centre has disappeared; it no longer exists since it does not function any more as a reference to the totality.

The loss of the centre foreshadows the loss of the process of signification in language. This problem is already foreworded by Saussure, yet Derrida attaches it to the presence and absence dichotomy. Meaning has already been displaced from the signifier-signified interaction. In other words, meaning has been absent from any signification. Derrida illustrates this saying, "it became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed the desire for a center in the constitution of structure, and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for this law of central presence" (1978, p. 280). The loss of the centre has introduced the structuralist notion of the linguistic description of the universe. Literary theory has pointed out that everything is socially and culturally but at the same time linguistically constructed, for "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse" (Derrida, 1978, p. 280). As Saussure underscores the differential nature of meaning, Derrida reconceptualises the same issue under the title of the absence of the transcendental signified. According to him, "a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences" (1978, p. 280). It is hence how the process of signification becomes a never ending practice.

One of the obsolete centres of traditional realism is the author. It has conventionally been endowed with the roles of the creator, the life giver and the owner of the text, which is indeed "the cultural origins of our enshrining the Author as an original, creative genius" (Siegle, 1983, p. 127). Despite the privilege of occupying one of the most important status in literary studies, when reconstructed, as Paul-Michel Foucault observes, "the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed sanctions" (1998, p. 205). Like Lévi-Strauss and Derrida, Foucault reminds his reader about the permanent loss of the significance between the signifier and signified. Contemporary writing is reactionary; it is experimental writing which no longer seeks the regulations of literary realism. Foucault argues that "it is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier" (1998, p. 206). The author has been stripped from its conventional signification. The author is instead a mere function through which "one limits, excludes, and chooses ... one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (1998, p. 221).

Roland Gérard Barthes' analysis of Honoré de Balzac's "Sarrasine," where he "wants to examine the conditions of meaning which enable 'characterization' [and his] fundamental assertion regarding character is

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both radical and self-evident: that any character is nothing more than a linguistic construct" (Scheiber, 1991, pp. 263-264), again invokes Saussure's study of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Similar to what Saussure brings about, Barthes exposes the nature of the connection between the sign and meaning. Playing around five different codes introduced by Barthes as hermeneutics, semic, symbolic, proairetic and cultural for an analysis of Balzac's short story, Barthes in *S/Z* refers to the process of signification between Balzac's protagonist Sarrasine and the castrato Zambinella he falls in love with. As meaning is arbitrary, Zambinella is not a woman but an old man.

Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodernism in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* as the "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984, p. xxiv). Lyotard's idea of incredulity is a critical reference to one of the key concepts of his discussion about present condition, which is the notion of a grand narrative (or metanarrative, any totalising model of knowledge), which could at the same time be outlined as "any metadiscourse which makes appeal to some grand narrative, such as the emancipation of the rational, the liberation of the exploited, or the creation of wealth, which can legitimate all particular claims to knowledge" (Gare, 1996, p. 4).

Lyotard's incredulity towards metanarratives is the Saussurean idea of the arbitrariness of meaning, his disbelief in meaning as a result of the process of signification. As traditional centres of literary realism have disappeared, metanarratives are now devoid of all signification. It is because of this that Lyotard replaces them with petit narratives owing to the change in the human perception of "science, literature, and the arts" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii) starting from the end of the nineteenth century in the West. Therefore, "[i]n Lyotard's view, these [...] grand narratives are no longer trustworthy. This untrustworthiness is the delegitimation that characterizes postindustrial society and postmodern culture" (Brügger, 2001, p. 80). Lyotard alludes to the role of subjectivity in poststructuralist literary theory. As the centre in terms of the grand narrative has been abandoned, it has been substituted with little narratives characterised by their subjective nature of signification.

Lyotard believes that even science seeks to legitimise itself connecting to a grand narrative which, as it has already been pointed out, is an idea or a notion which has historically been endowed with too much significance, emphasis and prominence. However, whenever a remark is made about knowledge, major references of the subject are necessarily to the notion of meaning. In other words, signification has become a grand narrative as well. In addition, the grand narrative has become so influential that its validity has never been questioned or disputed. As a result, the grand narrative has occupied a status even equal to truth. According to Lyotard,

this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end — universal peace. As can be seen from this example, if a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well. Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth. (1979, pp. xxiii-xxiv)

Lyotard suggests the new form of knowledge as an alternative to grand narratives whose legitimacy he has already challenged with incredulity. Besides, he claims that "[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxv). Lyotard believes that grand narratives are no longer credible. From a similar perspective what is incredible is

[T]he textbook history of the writing of the Constitution of the United States, by the Founding Fathers, along with its subsequent legislative enactments. This grand historical narrative with its constitutional 'founding principles' is still very much a going concern in current disputes in the United States about

the limits of free speech, the right to abortion, and the right of American private citizens to bear arms.
(Butler, 2002, pp. 13-14)

Another example of the grand narrative, from a sociopolitical point of view, is *“the Marxist belief in the predestined and privileged function of the proletariat, with the party as its ally, in bringing about a revolution, and in the Utopia which is supposed to follow”* (Butler, 2002, p. 14). Similarly, it has been pointed out elsewhere that Lyotard rejects *“totalizing perspectives on history and society, what he calls grand narratives like Marxism that attempt to explain the world in terms of patterned interrelationships. His postmodernism is an explicit rejection of the totalizing tendencies as well as political radicalism of Marxism”* (Agger, 1991, p. 116). Marxist interpretations of nature (as well as the proletariat) have always been significant in terms of its theoretical discussions about nature, labour and capital. It is so much so that

[t] he artificial nature of property, of the expropriation of workers from the means of production, of the treatment of labour-power as a commodity, of capital and of money itself are disguised and made to appear as the natural order of things; as though individuals, pre-existing social relations, are freely exchanging their labour or products for money to their mutual advantage. This is reinforced by the elaboration of a mechanical view of nature and of people, so nature appears as devoid of significance except insofar as it can be transformed for human purposes. (Gare, 1996, p. 45)

One of the best examples of incredulity towards (i.e. scepticism about) grand narratives is the case of historical narratives (the narratives of official history), for *“the attempt to write history from the hitherto dominant positivist or empiricist point of view was doomed to failure”* (Butler, 2002, p. 32). This is because of the fact that

[o]nce again, postmodernist thought, by analysing everything as text and rhetoric, tended to push hitherto autonomous intellectual disciplines in the direction of literature – history was just another narrative, whose paradigm structures were no better than fictional, and was a slave to its own (often unconsciously used) unrealized myths, metaphors, and stereotypes. (Butler, 2002, p. 32)

Like every other narrative, historical narratives are the subjective accounts of past events whose validity could by no means be certified. In other words, history is a form of literary practice which is as fictional as literary narratives. Historical objectivity is no longer possible, for historical meaning has already been contaminated with subjective accounts.

Therefore, twentieth-century literary theory as a whole is *“a scepticism about the claims of any kind of overall, totalizing explanation”* (Butler, 2002, p. 15), which has, nevertheless, displayed certain weaknesses especially when it comes to the present theoretical perception of nature. As a result, in terms of recent interpretations of nature, the most notable problem is that theory might acknowledge that nature, as a conventional notion, has been associated with a totalising form of knowledge as well.

If environmental studies can be brought together under the title environmental criticism, it is essentially defined as *“the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”* (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). Very much like the feminist criticism’s interest in the working mechanism of the patriarchy and the Marxist critics’ concern with the class, environmental criticism, which has *“styled itself against the poststructuralist strand of contemporary literary theory”* (Oppermann, 2011, p. 153), focuses on the condition of nature. Environmental criticism does not accept the notion that nothing, especially after twentieth-century theoretical enquiry into how language could construct and shape the world, is meaningful anymore and that everything is linguistically structured; it rejects the idea that everything is a social and cultural entity. The difference environmental criticism has displayed is that *“it sought to redefine the human subject not so much in relation to the human others that subjecthood had traditionally excluded as in relation to the nonhuman world”* (Heise, 2006, p. 507). Environmental criticism fundamentally

establishes a solid connection between the physical world and human civilisation, between nature and culture. This is to say that

[d]espite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix)

It is indisputable that like the word nature the word world has adopted much from its social connotations. In other words, literary theory has illustrated the world through its social and economic connotations. Therefore, the difference between environmental criticism and literary theory lies in the fact that

[e]cocriticism can be further characterized by distinguishing it from other critical approaches. Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society-the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere. (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix)

However, human relationship with (at the same time human awareness of) nature plays the most critical role in the conception of nature as categorically different from what literary theory has commonly conceptualised. Glotfelty points to one of the most widespread drawbacks of drawing the public attention to the question of environmental emergency. She says,

[i]f your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xvi)

Twentieth-century theoretical interpretations of nature has been guided by the underlining principle that nature is to be a socio-politically constructed term, and thus human relationship with nature cannot be considered, for example, outside the commonplace poststructuralist and postmodern objections to grand narratives. However, the truth is that nature is alive. Nature is a living, an animate structure whose character cannot be analysed and figured out through a post-humanist approach. It is asserted that

[p]ostmodern philosophy has rudely challenged this transcendental narcissism, viewing the subject as fragmented and decentered in the social realm, a product of institutional technologies of control rather than the unmoved mover of all possible knowledge. This challenge has set the stage for the reevaluation of the silence of nature imposed by the human subject. In environmental ethics, however, resistance to the tendentious rhetoric of 'Man' has come almost exclusively from the camp of deep ecology. (Manes, 1996, p. 22)

What is distressing here is the fact that twentieth-century literary theory has substantially diminished nature in value, for it "argues that nature is a social entity, evolving steadily and thus not a stable frame for environmental discussion" (Howarth, 1996, p. 85). As a result, this condition has hampered academic discussions about the present environmental problems to achieve a worldwide academic recognition. Any theoretical analysis of nature will encounter a stable, a form of firmly established critical resistance to the urgent call by environmentalist thinkers.

Theory has borrowed much from modernism, for it was modernism which, especially in terms of literature, had voiced the first methodical reaction in modern history to the realist tradition. Therefore, it might be suggested that there need to be a comparable notion of nature between the two perspectives. However, structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodern disbelief of the structures of realist tradition

has brought about a widespread difference between modernism and postmodernism in case of the interpretations of nature. The difference between modernism and postmodernism, in this case, is that *"[i]n modernism the roots of nature lie in culture, whereas in postmodernism nature is replaced by commodified representation"* (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxx). Literary theory has acknowledged nature as a commodity; nature is thus a mere substance produced by human culture. As a result, as it has been pointed out that *"[p]ostmodern culture redefines the link between woman/man and the natural world. There has been a gradual shift in attitude from nature as something foreign and other, something to be feared, conquered, and subdued"* (Frisch, 1996, p. 75)

Environmental criticism rejects the above perspective, and it principally articulates that nature is meaningful; it is, in other words, the principle that nature is real, it really exists, and it is beyond human conceptualisation. For environmental criticism, nature is not an abstract idea that needs to be reconceptualised through twentieth-century theoretical subversion. Nature is an entity which has necessarily a real effect on human beings. Environmental criticism argues that nature cannot be reduced to a notion or a concept which human beings comprehend as a result of theoretical illustrations. Although existent theories have established a tendency to see the external world as socially, culturally and linguistically structured, environmental criticism, or environmental critical theory, challenges and questions this highly privileged theoretical approach. Environmental criticism thus highlights representations of the natural world in literary, as well as non-literary, texts. Environmental criticism turns away from recent conceptualisation of the world as theoretically constructed, and it underscores the factual existence of nature.

CONCLUSION

Twentieth-century literary theory has been framed mostly by structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodern discussions about the social, cultural and linguistic structures of meaning. Structuralist critics claim that meaning is outside things, for they believe nothing is meaningful by itself, but everything becomes meaningful when situated in a greater structure it is part of. According to this rationale, a literary work, for example, is meaningless by and of itself, but it becomes meaningful only after the work is interpreted as part of a larger structure. As a result, although it is outside, structuralism still considers the presence of meaning. Furthermore, it was originally Saussure's linguistic theory that has prompted the principles of structuralist argument. Saussure suggests that meaning is not only arbitrary but also relational. Meaning cannot be guaranteed, for it is merely the consequence of tradition. Besides, meaning depends on the linguistic structure, for it is defined in and through language. This is exactly where poststructuralist critics define their positions against structuralist philosophy. For poststructuralists, meaning can only be subjectively defined, for they believe one's meaning is necessarily different from someone else's meaning. It is not only meaning but also every single traditional notion that poststructuralist thinkers consider to be individual. As meaning is subjective, there is indeed no meaning to be considered one and only. Instead of a single meaning, poststructuralism offers the notion of plurality of meaning.

Postmodern theory has originated from the above notion. Meaning is – to use a Lyotardian phrase – a grand narrative whose validity postmodernism as well as the structuralist and poststructuralist writers like Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Foucault and Barthes challenge. All traditional notions, including the ingredients of traditional realism in literature and representational art as well, are examples of grand narratives which have been programmed to secure experience and knowledge in modern societies. Postmodernism aims to replace them with small narratives (*petits récits*) which could rather comply with personal illustrations. This is why the poststructuralist emphasis on the subjectivity of meaning has especially been mirrored in postmodern discussion. Therefore, contemporary theory has been a

liberating experience particularly in terms of the restricting dynamism of the tradition itself. This could be well exemplified with how structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodern enquiry into the legitimacy of the patriarchy has rendered women determination to question their inequalities in the workplace. Similarly, theory has enabled discussions about the proletariat having a future to control production.

However, the above theoretical objection to what it has designated to be grand narratives turns out to be questionable especially when it comes to nature. Following the structuralist and poststructuralist arguments, contemporary theory has illustrated nature within the same posthumanist exemplification. Nature is then a socially, culturally and linguistically constructed notion which could only be defined as a man-made perception. As a result, the present environmental emergency loses its meaning as nature is already a meaningless term. Therefore, environmentalist literary critics principally dismiss the latest designation of nature as a grand narrative. They forcefully insist that nature is real, it is alive and it is in danger. Therefore, the mainstreaming of environmental criticism helps understand the relationship between theory and nature.

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