




Literary Theory and Its Relation to Continental Philosophy (With an Emphasis on Reader-response Theories)

Hamed Tavakoli Darestani¹ 
Ghodrat Ghasemipour^{2*} 
Alireza Nikouei³ 

Abstract

Continental Philosophy, through dialogues with German Idealism and Romanticism, and in accordance with Subjectivism, Criticism, Traditionalism, Historicism, and Anti-authoritarianism, has influenced many literary theories, especially phenomenology and hermeneutics. Although continental and analytical philosophies have influenced other literary theories, the present article contends that in the conflict between the 'continental' and 'analytical' approaches, continental philosophy is characterized by 'taste' and 'literary' insights as well as uncertainty, multiplicity of methods, and even antagonism. The method exhibits radical differences with natural sciences (Positivism), Existentialism, and subject orientation, and it can be regarded as a much more suitable medium for the development and application of reader-response theories. Therefore, in the present article, while enumerating the common features of continental literature and philosophy, we will show that the relation between philosophy and literary theory, often formed through continental approaches and reader-centered theories, are visibly compatible with this approach. We will also discuss that in addition to the political and academic origins that played a role in the emergence of schools such as Constance, numerous drawbacks in Enlightenment philosophy, including the failure of rationality, the undesirable consequences of Capitalism, the gradual disappearance of Christian values, have profoundly influenced the formation of reader-response theories.

Keywords: Literary Theory, Continental Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Reader-response Criticism, and Subjectivism

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The present article studies the relation between literary theory and continental philosophy through the major premises of reader-response theories. Continental

1. Ph. D. Student of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. (hamed_tadabiat88@yahoo.com)

*2. Associate Professor of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz.

(Corresponding Author: gh.ghasemipour@yahoo.com)

3. Associate Professor of Guilan University. (alireza_nikouei@yahoo.com)

philosophy is a much more suitable medium for the development and application of reader-response theories due to its 'taste' and 'literary' insights, uncertainty, multiplicity of methods, antagonism, and its differences with the methods of natural sciences (Positivism), Existentialism, and subject orientation. We will also discuss that in addition to the political and academic origins that played a role in the emergence of schools such as Constance, numerous drawbacks in Enlightenment philosophy, including the failure of rationality, the undesirable consequences of Capitalism, and the gradual disappearance of Christian values, have profoundly influenced the formation of reader-response theories. It must be mentioned that Subjectivism, in a historical exigency and a paradoxical situation, functions as an agency for both the emergence of Nihilism and its refutation.

2. Theoretical Framework

In addition to giving rise and influencing critical approaches such as philosophical, social, and psychological, literary theories have often been influenced by the philosophical schools of 'Continental' and 'Analytic' philosophy. Although in contemporary philosophy, many affinities have emerged between these two philosophies, and in some levels and stages, they have 'sympathy' and 'alignment' with each, there are still obvious differences and gaps between these two philosophies. By scrutinizing the foundations and components of these two philosophies, we will show that the continental approach has had a considerable impact on the emergence of reader-response theories through Subjectivism, Historicism, Criticism, Semiotics, Relativism (Pluralism), Anti-authoritarianism, and Humanism, among other notions.

3. Methodology

The present article is a descriptive-analytical library-based research. Through comparing and contrasting the elements of 'continental' and 'analytical' philosophy, this article tries to shed light on the links, affinities, and relations between continental philosophy and 'reader-response' literary theories. We will also argue that Hans Robert Jauss adopted a more methodological, documented, and substantiated approach by moving away from 'subjectivism' and laying emphasis on tradition and history.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Reader-response theories are divided into two approaches: 'Phenomenological Hermeneutics' and 'Ontological Hermeneutics,' which in the school of 'Reception Aesthetics' is divided into two forms: 'Theoretic-Textual' and 'Socio-historical.' Phenomenological Hermeneutics (theoretic-textual) is a combination of Husserl and Heidegger's views, and is dominated by 'Husserlian' elements. Also, Ontological Hermeneutics (socio-historical) is associated with assumptions put forward by Heidegger and Gadamer. The most important feature of the theoretic-

textual approach is 'parenthesizing' the world and everything in it, including the author, history, situation, and context. This concept has deeply influenced the views of Roman Ingarden, Wolfgang Iser, Jürgen Habermas, and David Bleich. The most remarkable aspect of the socio-historical approach, pioneered by 'Hans Robert Jauss,' whose opinions are deeply rooted in Heidegger and Gadamer's thoughts, is transition from 'Subjectivism' to Historicism, Contextualism, Traditionalism, and Paradigmism. This article indicates that 'Subjectivism' can be viewed as both a reason for the emergence of 'Nihilism' and a reaction to it. It also identifies 'reader-response' literary theories as a critique of 'Nihilism.'

5. Conclusion

The present research shows that 'comprehensive' and 'precise' comparisons can be used to explain the relations between literature and philosophy in general, and philosophy and literary theory, in particular. Continental Philosophy incorporates interpretative, hermeneutic, subjective, relative, non-deterministic, historic, and traditional elements. It is more aligned with interpretive and reader-response theories. Therefore, the origin of reader-response theories can be traced in the 'continental tradition.' Consequently, the article tackles a number of the basic elements of reader-response theories as rooted in the continental philosophers' struggle with the crisis of 'Subjectivism' and 'Nihilism.' In this complicated, critical, and 'paradoxical' context, 'Subjectivism' has been both a 'factor' in the emergence of Nihilism and an 'answer' to the crises arising from it. Therefore, through 'Subjectivism,' 'literary texts' replaced 'scriptures' and 'reader-response literary theories' replaced 'traditional (religious) exegesis theories.' The article divides reader-response theories into two major approaches: 'theoretic-textual' (Husserlian) and 'socio-historical' (Heidegger and Gadamer). The former, propagated by such philosophers as Iser, Ingarden, Habermas, and Bleich, insists on parenthesizing 'historical assumptions' and 'preconceptions.' Relying on the 'mentality of the interpreter,' it often suffers from relative and unconditional interpretations. However, in the latter, philosophers such as Jauss, Stanley Fish, and Pierre Bourdieu, underscored 'history and tradition' and moved reader-response theories from 'pure subjectivism and mentalism' to intellectual, historical, epistemological, political, social, and cultural 'paradigms.' That is why theories proposed by Jauss and his followers, compared to other theories in aesthetics, look more comprehensive, concrete, convincing, detailed, and justified. Jauss adopts a 'middle' method, based on the historicity of the text, the horizon of expectation, and the existential mindset of the reader. Also, by creating a dialectic interaction among them, he demonstrates a deeper understanding and more fundamental conception of 'interpretation.'

Select Bibliography

- Critchley, S. 1398 [2019]. *Falsafeh-e Qarreh-yi*. Kh. Deyhimi (trans.). Tehran: Mahi.
(*Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*)
- Dummett, M. 1394 [2015]. *Khastgah-ha-e Falsafeh-e Tahlily*. A. Niksirat (trans.).
Tehran: Hekmat.
(*Origins of Analytical Philosophy*)
- Gadamer, H. 1395 [2016]. *Hermeneutic, Zaban, Honar (Shesh Jostar-e Hermeneutic)*. A. Amini (trans.). Abadan: Porsesh.
(*The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*)
- Heidegger, M. 1392 [2013]. *Masa'el-e Asasi-e Padidar-shenasi*. P. Zia-shahabi
(trans.). Tehran: Minuye Kherad.
(*Basic Problems of Phenomenology*)
- Heidegger, M. 1394 [2015]. *Hasti va Zaman*. S. Jamadi (trans.). Tehran: Qoqnoos.
(*Being and Time*)
- Hirsch, E. D. 1400 [2021]. *Etebar dar Tafsir*. M. H. Mokhtari (trans.). Tehran:
Hekmat.
(*Validity in Interpretation*)
- Husserl, E. 1392 [2013]B. *Ta'molat-e Decarti, Moqadameh-yi bar Padidar-shenasi*.
A. Rashidian (trans.). Tehran: Ney.
(*Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*)
- Kant, I. 1388 [2009]. *Naqd-e Qoveh-e Hokm*. A. Rashidian (trans.). Tehran: Ney.
(*Critique of Judgment*)
- Palmer, R. E. 1398 [2019]. *Elm-e Hermeneutic*. M. S. Hanayi Kashani (trans.).
Tehran: Hermes.
(*Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger,
and Gadamer (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy)*)
- Young, J. 1399 [2020]. *Falsafeh-e Qarreh-yi va Ma'na-e Zendegi*. B. Khodapanah
(trans.). Tehran: Hekmat.
(*The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*)

How to cite:

Tavakoli Darestani, Hamed.; Ghasemipour, Ghodrat and Nikouei, Alireza. 2023. "Literary Theory and Its Relation to Continental Philosophy (With an Emphasis on Reader-response Theories)", *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi*, 14(2): 213-242. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2023.22468.2379

Copyright:

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi (Literary Theory and Criticism)*.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited.

