
ORIENTING THE ORIENTATION OF CRITICAL THEORIES

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Abstract

This paper deals with how the basic human trait of criticism develops in to literary criticism and the birth of the new criticism. It also speaks about how new criticism deviates from the previous criticisms by advocating close reading to judge a poem. It deals with intentional fallacy and affective fallacy and how they spoil the real and impersonal analysis of a poem. New criticism says that poetry should be freed from the clutches of the author, audience and the universe. There should be a poetic autonomy to deliver the poetic truth. This paper gives a brief account of the long tradition of literary criticism as done by M.H.Abrams in his essay 'Orientation of Critical Theories'. It analyses the classification of literary criticism under four categories made by M.H.Abrams and explains one by one. This paper points out that a survey has been made by M.H.Abrams genuinely and he gives reasons for the terminologies mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective he used in his essay. This paper concludes saying that mimetic is imitative of the universe, pragmatic is the impact created upon the minds of the reader, expressive is the expression of the author's inner feelings and objective is to consider the poem as an object.

Introduction

Criticism is a basic human trait. Every individual tends to criticize the other. By criticizing others the criticizer shows the criticized that he is this kind of a person. In due course, the criticized shows himself to others his own personality. In this human society criticism is possible in every area of human life. Human beings are analyzed, their characters are judged; human life is brought under scrutiny. Individuals are criticized either positively or negatively; but the individual is guided, modified and benefitted. So criticism is essential for human life.

Criticism in literature

Literature is created from human life, human life is the source of literature, and human life is devised from human experiences. Experience is teaching man what to do and what not to do. It corrects human life and rectifies man. When these experiences are recorded with aesthetic sense, then this is literature. So life is the source of literature. When life is criticized, literature also should be criticized. We can have the required end in literature also, when it is criticized.

Life, literature and criticism

Life is the source of literature as the human experiences in life are pictured in literature in order to seek an order in life. Criticism is employed in literature to modify it and to create an order in literature. So criticism seeks an order in literature. Life, literature and criticism are interconnected and they become the source of each other. Life gives literature, literature gives criticism. Criticism gives a better life and a better life gives a better literature.

New criticism

The poem and the criticism are twin born. Poems are written from the facts learnt from the society. So poetry is criticized. This criticism analyses the historical, sociological, and psychological background of the poem. So there comes automatically the biographical and traditional criticism. When a work of art is approached with these two theories, two fallacies are possible.

1. Intentional fallacy
2. Affective fallacy

Intentional fallacy occurs when a particular work of art is analyzed with a personalized intention. It will be analyzed intentionally. So it is intentional fallacy.

Affective fallacy deals with how a reader is affected when he reads a work of art and the opinion of the reader is the final to decide the quality of a work of art. Opinion of every reader will not be the same. So it is too difficult to decide the quality of work of art with carried opinions. It is also a fallacy. To decide the quality of a poem, it is a fallacy to know how the reader is affected when he reads the poem. So it is affective fallacy.

With these pitfalls we cannot judge a poem perfectly. So, new criticism was born as a response to earlier criticisms of biological criticism and traditional criticism. New criticism avoids intentional fallacy and affective fallacy and it adapts close reading to judge a poem perfectly.

Close reading

To unlock the meaning of a poem, close reading is advocated. Close reading aims at an entity which makes writing as a poem. It avoids the traditional method of

biographical and traditional criticism. Historical back ground is totally avoided. Poem according to new critics is seen as an organic whole. New criticism does not seek the help of any external components to judge the poem. The quality of the poem or any work of art, according to new criticism is judged by the internal components, like theme, plot, structure, figures of speech, metrical measurements and so on.

Four terminologies

New critics suggest four terminologies in literary criticism to find out the making of a poem. They are ambiguity, paradox, irony and tension.

- **Ambiguity** occurs when a word or phrase of an image is read out; it leads the word to get two or more meanings. It will confuse readers to find a solid meaning. For example: the boy chased a white dog in green trousers is an ambiguous sentence. When we read this sentence we tend to think that a white dog which is wearing a green trouser was chased. But the original meaning is the boy who was in green trousers chased the dog.
- **Paradox** is a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics. Example: Drinking a lot of water can often make you feel thirsty. It is paradoxical to say "If you drink a cup of hot tea, it will cool you down".
- **Irony** is a figure of speech in which words in literature are used to evolve an opposite meaning to the actual meaning in order to create pun.
 - Coleridge writes in his poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' as
 - "Water water everywhere,
 - And all the boards did shrink;
 - Water, water everywhere,
 - Nor any drop to drink".
 - During the voyage the ship was wrecked by sea wind and stranded somewhere else. There is water everywhere but not a drop to drink. The men who were in ship are in the midst of water but they cannot drink a single drop of water is an irony.
- **Tension** is a balance which is maintained between opposing forces in a poem. When all the poetic elements played at a point say a poem, tension is created. This tension makes any thing as a poem.
 - Critical theories as discussed above, changes its way at times according to the need to analyze the poem. So we get numerous critical theories. All these theories are compiled by M.H.Abrams; he has given a survey of all critical theories in his essay orientation of critical theories. This essay is the first chapter of his book "The Mirror and the Lamp". Romantic theory and the critical tradition published in 1953.
 - New criticism deviated from the earlier path and adapted a new way to judge the poem. Hence they are called new critics.

M.H.Abrams' approach towards criticism

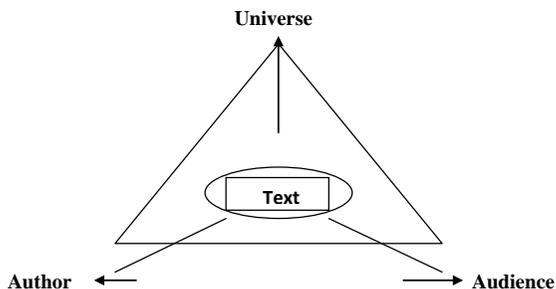
Abrams analyzed the things which are very close to the text. In a text, life of human being, flora, fauna and nature are written; all these things make the universe. So any text will speak about this universe which is very close to the text.

This universe should be written in the text by someone. That someone is the author of what he writes in the text. So the writer of text is the author. There is no text without an author. Author according to M.H.Abrams is very close to the text.

Text is the food which is to be served to someone. If the text is not read by someone, then there is no use of it at all. The food which is cooked by mother at home should be served and eaten by the members of the family. If not what is the use of cooking food at home. Any text should be read by someone and he is called audience. Any text will not have a meaning, without these three important constituents. Three important constituents of a text according to M.H.Abrams are the universe, the author and the audience.

Classification of critical theories by M.H.Abrams

M.H.Abrams classifies critical theories under four categories based on the relationship of the text with these three important constituents the universe, the author and the audience. To explain this he uses a triangle and at the top, universe is placed and the two bottom ends are allotted with the audience and the author horizontally.



According to Abrams, the theory which deals with the relationship between the text and the universe is mimetic. The theory which deals with the relationship between the text and the audience is pragmatic. Expressive theory is the theory which deals text in relation to author. The fourth theory breaks all relationship of the text with the above three constituents and considers poetry as an object. This is objective theory.

Mimetic theory

The word mimetic is drawn from the Greek word 'mimesis'. Mimesis means imitation. According to this theory literature is considered as an art of imitating the world. This theory sees in literature when it analyses the things which are imitated in it, that life is an imitation.

To substantiate this idea M.H.Abrams quotes three realms of Plato. Plato suggests three realms in his book 'Republic'. Plato classifies this universe under three realms:

Realm of Ideas

This represents the world of ideas. The world of ideas exists in ideas only. It is the world of God and world of perfection. It can't be seen and experienced but be felt. Ideal world is the imaginary world which is perfect with the place for human senses.

Realm of Particulars

This is the imitated world and it accommodates human senses. Here the particulars refer to the human senses. This is the imitation of the realm of ideas. Realm of particulars is created by imitating the realm of ideas. Realm of particular is removed from the original and created. It now becomes artificial to make the world of particular is modified and rified with comforts.

Realm of Reflections of Particulars

This is created by imitating the realm of particulars. It is an imitation of an already imitated one. Hence it is twice removed from the truth. The original is imitated doubly and so it is placed in the lowest rank. Art is the lowest form in the universe as it has no truth. Art is regarded very low. Socrates also substantiates this idea and he proposes three beds;

Bed of God,
Bed of carpenter and
Bed of painter.

Bed of God

It is parallel to the Plato's realm of ideas. It represents the world of God. In this bed god lies. As it is perfect and true, it is regarded as the bed of god. It can be felt only since God can't be seen but be felt.

Bed of carpenter

Tree is the creation of God and chair is created by carpenter with some modifications. To make this world a comfort zone, carpenter, the human being changes, alters its features. Now the god's world becomes men's world. It is used for our living as we want. This is the carpenter's world in which we live in. in the bed of carpenter we the human beings lie in.

Bed of Painter

It is a decorated world. Bed of carpenter is decorated. The original has no connection with the bed of painter. Though the carpenter creates the chair from the tree, the decorated chair does not depend upon the original that is the tree.

Aristotle's view of literature

M.H.Abrams says that Aristotle frees literature from the clutches of idea i.e. the original. Art according to Aristotle is an imitation of an already imitated world. So it is totally free from the original. Now according to Aristotle art is independent; and twice

removed from the truth. It does not reflect the original but this universe. Art is nothing but imitation. This mimetic theory was popular till 18th century, art imitates the universe.

Pragmatic theory

This theory concentrated on the result. It is a result oriented one. Any poem is a product and its validity is measured with its usefulness of it. The quality of a poem is judged on the impression created upon the minds of the tender ones who reads it. The reader's response is final. If the reader feels the poem is good, the quality of the poem is good. If he feels it is bad then the quality of the poem is bad. So pragmatic theory deals with the relationship between the text and the audience.

Mahatma Gandhi, after watching the play "Harichandra" became truth speaking till the end of his life. This is the impact created up on the readers' mind. This impact is the yardstick to measure the quality of a work of art.

Three functions of poetry

Aristotle in his 'Ars Poetica' refers three functions of poetry. They are to read, to please and to move. Poetry has a duty to this society (i.e.) making the society to act as it teaches. Mere teaching will be a useless one. From this teaching, this society should learn good lessons and create a good society by practicing the good lessons in life.

Based on this, Phillip Sydney suggests three functions of poetry and places 'to please' first and to teach second. Sydney orders three functions of poetry as to delight, to teach and to move. To Move means making this society to adopt good things and this is the required result. In order to adapt what they learn in their life, people should be taught things to delight first. So people would learn to adapt delightfully what they learn in their life.

So literature has a purpose of guiding this society. Society should be guided positively. Good literatures only can do this. So good literature should be created. Rules were formulated to create good literature. A rule book was established to assist the future poets.

Sydney in his 'Apology of Poetry' expands the idea of Aristotle as a didactic theory of poem. He differentiates poetry from his history. He says history records what has happened but poetry records what has to happen. What has to happen in this society is the guidance which poetry gives to it. This is moral utopianism and this makes poetry.

Dryden aims at the usefulness of poetry. According to pragmatic theory poetry is a trivial one if it is not useful. Dryden considers imitation as means for pleasure. So he stressed for rules in the making of poetry.

M.H.Abrams includes Dr. Johnson's views regarding pragmatic approach towards art. He maintains that Shakespeare's play is a mirror of life. Johnson claims that the purpose of writing is to instruct audience by pleasing. Johnson says writing should please the audience without violating the moral virtue.

The center stage of audience gradually disappeared as the speaker places himself at the centre. The making of poem takes the author's personal experiences as the subject matter of poet. The inner feelings, mental construction and poetic talents are counted and theory of expression came into existence.

Expressive theory

This theory expresses the inner feeling of the author as an external one. The private experiences are made general. The personal life of the author is universalized. As it expresses the writer, it is expressive theory.

We see the dominant role of expressive theory during early 18th century. Mimetic theory and pragmatic theory were gradually replaced by expressive theory. The author occupies the center stage during this period only. The lamp becomes the symbol of literature as author's life becomes the subject matter by the expressive theory so far the mirror has been the symbol of literature. This led to subjectivity and emotion and the question arose: Is the text a sincere, genuine and accurate reflection of the inner mind of the poet? John Stewart mills argues in his romantic manifestoes, "What is poetry?" and "The two kinds of poetry" that the lyrical form usurps the dramatic spontaneity is far more valuable than form or content; imitation of the external world is only a medium to express the inner feelings of the writer and audience is not at all warranted. According to Mills the audience is the poet himself. Since every poem is a soliloquy. He quotes Keats saying us "I never wrote one single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought. It is very clean from the words of Shelley. Shelley says that the poet is like a nightingale which sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.

Mills considers emotional state of mind is innate but skill is acquired. Based on this he classifies poets as born poets and made poets. He places Shelley under the born poets and Wordsworth under the made poets. Personal experience of any kind of poet becomes the subject matter of poetry and as this experience is expressed, this is expressive theory. Expressive theory tries to find out the personal experiences of the poet. Thus literature shifts from mirror to lamp as it illuminates the original instead of reflecting the universe.

Objective theories

Objective theory disconnects the text with universe, audience and author which were once considered very close to the text. This theory suggests that text should be seen as a text. It should not be related to anything else. Text is an organic whole. It has a life and it can live by itself. Text has internal elements to survive by itself. This can be compared to human body. Human body consists of many internal organs and by these organs it lives by itself. A human body can be considered a healthy one when coordination of these internal organs is good. According to objective theories, the

quality of a poem is judged by the coordination of the internal elements. If the coordination of the internal elements is high, the quality of the poem is high.

Viewing the text in isolation has been the dominant mode for criticism for at least half of 20th century. Its origin is found in Aristotle's 'Poetics'. Aristotle when defines tragedy he says tragedy itself is an object where the internal elements are working together to produce catharsis in the mind of the audience. The internal elements, Aristotle mentions here, are plot, character, thought, different melody and spectacle. These are inherent in any work of art.

As for objective theories Pope said "a poem is a poem and is written solely for poem's sake". It is widely accepted that we must consider poetry as poetry and not any other thing. This closely reflects Macheish's verse aphorism. 'A poem should not mean but be'. Under this objective theories two model of poetry are discussed. They are 'heterocosmic model and contemplation model'. Heterocosmic model deals with a unique, coherent and autonomous world and contemplation model considers each work as a self sufficient object and it is contemplated disinterestedly for its own sake. It distinguishes this view from the mimetic and pragmatic ideas of poetry having a purpose on him. Addison views that poetry makes new work of its own. Alexander Bamgurtten considers poet as a maker or creator. So the poem creates a poetic world consisting of poetic truth by internal coherence. This objective theory kindled many thinkers and paved way to blooming some new movements like Russian formalist movement and French formalist movement.

The early two theories, as discussed by M.H.Abrams in his 'Orientation of Critical Theories' the mimetic and pragmatic theories, view literature as written with a purpose and the critics job is to find out the purpose. The later theories expressive and objective M.H.Abrams says literature is an organic whole and it lives by itself. So it should be judged not with reference to the real world or to its impact created upon the minds of the reader but strictly on the coordination done by the internal elements.

Conclusion

The title of the book "The Mirror and the Lamp" suggests that the early critical theories of mimetic and pragmatic consider literature as a mirror since it reflects the universe and the later theories of expressive and objective consider literature as a lamp since it illuminates the original. So the mirror occupies the first part of the title of the book and the lamp the last part and this shows the transition of the role of the literature from the mirror to the lamp.