

THE NEW MILLENNIUM - AN AGE OF POST - THEORY

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Abstract

Literary critical discourses have become increasingly unhelpful to students or to a reader interested in literature. The history of literary theories is one of moving from one enclosure to another new one. The theories have been destructive than being helpful to the creative or theoretical faculties in man. Most recent critical approaches are in a denial mode when most of the critics begin with a disclaimer saying that their views or opinions are not theories at all. They signal a deep dislike for literary theories. Therefore a basic understanding of fundamental facts on theories is needed. It is profitable to see how they influence the creation of a paradigm. A general explanation of a paradigm is given. The views on paradigm are drawn from Thomas Khun. (1962) and Karl Popper(1959) which are philosophy of science. The present article makes use of them in studying the nature of literary theories. The article concludes by promoting a sense of need for a new shoot of life; a new bearing to the creation and criticism of literature proper.

Keywords: *Literary, criticism, Paradim, identification, analysis, speculation*

Paradigm and Theories

The idea of paradigm is that a group of people are united in subscribing strongly to a certain theory or methodology often without realizing other possibilities. It becomes the criterion for identification, analysis and criticism and even solutions. It becomes an inflexible box, blinding one to other possibilities.

Theory involves speculation, supposition, ideas, explanation based on general principles independent of the thing considered. This thing considered is a literary text and these theories are independent of literature. Every new theory creates a people subscribing to a world view, and a group of people subscribing strongly to the theory. A polarization begins and an intense focus is provided and a basic consensus ensues within the committed group. But what happens when one enters such a community, it may place him or her in an enclosure to disable one from seeing or considering other valuable source of ideas. A history of literary theories so far has been one of shift from one enclosure to another moving one generation or the other from literary texts.

A paradigm represented by texts other than the literary text which is popularization and philosophical - theoretical works are deliberately circumscribed. They truncate and distort history and hence are deceptive. And research studies often emphasize theoretical texts to the neglect of original literary texts. The movements have been from one enclosure to another. Their trust was not one of defending or proving right but trying to overthrow the other theories before them. These theoretical exercises and the grand multi-narrative of the market and capitalist oriented globalization together are aiding the overthrow of literary studies and the humanities

Literary Canons and the Literary Theories

The literature is too cramped and confusing. The status is in doubt. The New Millennium brings forth indeterminacy and a trust deficit on the integrity of literature, and the text as evidence of fact. Some latest theories though convincingly discoursed, the narrative construct and the sense and the import of meaning is questioned. And one is led to a sense of purposelessness and lack of pursuit. The latest theories are not about literature, however shrewd or intelligent or fact based they may be. One is left with anxieties. The theories lead us nowhere as far as ones interests in literature and art are concerned.

Literary Theories and Globalization

The lost moorings are - purpose, value, quality, standards, meaning, the reason for its existence, the centrality, etc of literary critical discourse have been un-tethered by axes to grind - "theories" like structuralism, post structuralism, post-modern, post-colonial and the rest of the cuts which brought about the death of the text, the author, the meaning and form. Thought is successfully disabled. The neo-liberal economy finds humanities inefficient and these theories have made it hard to justify the reasons for their existence and study.

Are we to consider literary texts as products of art for sale? If so, one is to apply one's mind and skill to make the product sensational with an attractive packaging, with alluring promotional, advertisements and the rest of the marketable and globally competitive. Values other than consumer attractiveness and consumer convincing are not considered. There may be unintended readable meaning and value in them. Therefore it does not demand or invite any criticism other than corporate social responsibility which again is an economic concern. The human mind which seeks aesthetic or art experience is frustrated by theories and commercial practices. Assumptions from every field of study and everywhere have a predatory effect on literary pursuit and on the enjoyment of art. Christopher Brumfit might have been very general in his statement when he wrote, "In other words, our response to literature is part of our response to history, to ethics, to politics, to understanding what we are and what other people are. In other words, we do not have knowledge of books, we use our knowledge: our response is both active and shared" (Brumfit C.J.1986) but that is what is needed without being confused.

The Nature of Thought and Theories

All theories being thoughts and all thoughts being limited and are little, little, enclosures and are divisive and separatist in nature can only cause blankness. We are at a dead end. One is dazed into belief or faith on these theories because they are full of facts and judgments. Thought founded on facts, the ideas, opinions, or considerations are unconscious thoughts. And the unconscious thoughts are always limited and are enclosures.

These noisy arguments on theories from each enclosure are deafening and madding. The result is the neglect of literature. All peripherals have been brought into the study of literature like race, gender, economics, politics, sociology, psychology, theology, philosophy all of which have their own pretty little myriads of enclosure of theories, very comforting, very appreciating unconscious thought, and ready arsenals for the apocalypse of literature. One may call them contexts or co-texts or whatever. All roads may lead one to Rome but all co-texts may lead one away from the literary text.

Nature of Art and Theories

One goes to literature to be in the timelessness of an imaginative-creative piece of life. The timeless present or the timeless “now” it offers is a moment of joy. The unconsciousness is kept in abeyance or inactive. The theories always shuttle between the past and the future and are time bound, are antithetical to the timelessness of the art.

There is no aesthetic space: capitalist globalization is a grand and multi narrative institution, hybrid and a public space. It has turned every space into a market place where none of these theories post modernism or others are for sale.

Valentine Cunningham opens a little doorway in his “Reading After Theory (2002)” suggesting a way leading to traditional close reading of texts. The “tact” suggested are “the gentle” “caring”, “loving touch” of an un-manipulative reading in close-up, hands on textual encounters showing a rational, proper, moral even, respect for the primacy of text over all theorizing about text.

Whatever be the strength of the power and the spread of its jurisdiction, as long as the human psyche remains in its illusion of an individual being separate from the rest of the human beings and refuse to see the fact and the reality that every individual is an integral part of one humanity, the employment of complex variety of sensations will remain and multiply; the inequalities of all kinds thrive and the objective of globalization to bring about a single planetary culture is untenable. The churning is endless, no birth of anything new but a continuous abortion, painful and disappointing. This is equally true of literature and literary criticism and the churning by the theories must stop and give way to the post-theories.

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