

The movement of literary criticism through ages

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Abstract

The word criticism is derived from Greek word meaning 'Judgement'. It is an exercise in judgement. Literary criticism is the exercise of judgment on works of literature. To examine the excellences and defect and finally to evaluate the artistic worth is the function of criticism. It is not as simple as it appears because we have a host of conflicting views, theories and definitions. Cause of such diversity bring out the complexity of nature of criticism. Critics vary in their attitude, intellectual pre-occupation, prejudices and predilections. A critic with religious beliefs and a set of ethical values will hold a view consistent with his aesthetic appreciation.

The literature cannot be profitably studied without a simultaneous study of literary theory and criticism. This study deals with the movement of literary criticism movement through the ages. Theory of criticism is also closely connected with the theory of poetry. This in turn is connected with the spirit of the age.

Keywords: literary criticism, movement, function, literary theory, nature, poetic worth, judgement, evaluation

1. Introduction

Literary criticism is the play of mind on the work of literature and in asking questions and answering them. The purpose is better understanding and appreciation of the pleasure. Inquiry helps us think rightly about literature. In this way is built up a theory of literature. The inquiry may be directed towards a particular work of literature and distinctive qualities may be examined. The matter, manner, technique and language are assessed. Certain rules may be formed and literary work tested against them, with reference to other similar works of literature. Thus, reader is helped by critic in formation of idea of literary merit. The task of writer is facilitated in the process. Both indiscriminate praise and indiscriminate fault finding are bad. The intellectual and moral environment in which a poet, a live will have effect on their attitude and personality. Hence we see a change in criticism visa vis development, social and behavioral sciences – psychological, sociologic, economic thoughts bringing out new approach to criticism. Marxism gave rise to Marxist theory of literary criticism. Existentialism after World War II accounts for existential criticism.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Nature and function of literary criticism

Criticism is the science of forming and expressing correct judgement upon the value and merit of works of literature. It is only through criticism that intellectual appreciation and clear understanding becomes possible. The business of literary criticism is in the first instance to distinguish between a good book and a bad one and that done, to help us to recognize for ourselves and to get full value out of literary quality when we meet with it, thus opening up for us the whole world of pleasure and imaginative experience and intellectual stimulus which is waiting to be explored but which without a qualified critic's help, we would not discover for ourselves. Summing

up, evaluation, interpretation and explanation are now considered as the chief functions of literary criticism. It is an activity of many sided kind; it may consist of theorizing or judging, legislating or appreciating. The inquiry may be directed towards a particular work of literature and distinctive qualities may be examined. The matter, manner, technique and language are assessed. Certain rules may be formed and literary work tested against them, with reference to other similar works of literature. Thus, reader is helped by critic in formation of idea of literary merit.

2.2 Principles of Literary Criticism

We now consider what standard of judgement a critic should follow and what qualification and instruments/equipment should he possess. Every literary work has three elements; matter, manner and capacity to please (aesthetic pleasure). Earlier, critics devised rules by which technical excellence – plot construction, diction, style, meter and language – of literary work. These rules have always changed with time. Essential quality of literature is not how rigidly such rules are followed but appeal to the imagination. Human nature and subsequently principles of literature are held universal and permanent. We observe three such principles:

2.2.1 Principle of truth

It is the final test of merit. Here we must remember truth of literature is different than truth of science or logic. Poetic truth is the truth of idea, the generalized experience which forms the content of a work of art must conform to the generalized experience of the human race. As morality of the West is markedly difference from the morality of the East; but not withstanding these differences, there are certain principles which as principles are universally accepted by all civilized societies. Morality is the aggregate experience and wisdom of

a given society or of society in general. The matter of books which are in conflict with morality is ex-hypothesis condemned by this supreme test of truth.

2.2.2 Principle of symmetry

This principle implies right selection and arrangement of material. Writer should select certain aspects of reality and not all reality and then his material should be so arranged as to throw the selected aspects of reality into sharp relief. Aristotle stressed on this. In his view it is essential for that artistic beauty on which the imaginative appeal of literature depends. The critic must examine if the various parts of the composition are originally related to each other or not, whether they are proportionate to each other and to the composition as whole or not. The test of the symmetry is indirectly a means by which the presence of the dominant artistic quality can be discovered and measured.

2.2.3 Principle of Idealization

The selection made for artistic treatment should be so made that unpleasant aspect to aesthetic consciousness of reader is kept away or minimized by virtue of which a work of art gives pleasure. The critic in order to perform his task must be gifted and qualified individual who possesses the following qualification. First, he must be a man of high sensitivity, a man of sound common sense understanding taste and clear thinking. Secondly, he must be widely read, possibly in many languages. Thirdly, he must have proper training and technical skill in the different branches of literature. Fourthly he must rise above all prejudices and predilections, personal, religious, national, political etc. Fifthly, the critic must have imaginative sympathy. He has to understand the real meaning and purpose of the writer. He must see things from writer's point of view. Sixthly, he must have a sound knowledge of human psychology. Literature is mirror of life and knowledge of life is essential.

2.3 Type of Literary Criticism

Legislative criticism was earliest in time. The critic sought to teach writers how to write and laid down canons, rules, formulae of literary composition. This school dominated sixteenth century and died its natural death in seventeenth century.

It occasionally raises its head in trickle of hand books of composition and "creative writing" assembled by American academics. Judicial criticism seeks to pronounce judgment on works of literature on the basis of certain rules. Such rules are derived often wrongly from Greek and Latin masters. Dr. Johnson may be regarded as a typical example. Obviously, no proper evaluation is possible in this way. Theoretical criticism deals with literary aesthetics. Attention is not on a particular work but study is made of the process of creation and the basic principles of artistic beauty and in this way a literary theory created. Sydney's "An Apology for poetry" was beginning of this school and Dryden later contributed to it significantly. S.T. Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria" put a full stop to it. Best theoretical criticism has come from the pens of poet-critics. Evaluative criticism is concerned with the assessment or evaluation of the worth and the significance of art. The work is examined with reference to standards which

may be aesthetic, moral or purely personal and thus an attempt is made to estimate its place and importance. We find in case of T.S. Eliot considers moral and ethical standard as necessary to determine greatness of work of literature. Such evaluations are subjective and likely to differ from critic to critic and age to age. Historical criticism views a work of art against the background of age in which it was written. Historical criticism examines a work with reference to social milieu and thus seeks to account for his shortcomings and excellences. It also examines a work with reference to other works in the same genre and determines its importance and place. Often, the critic with pre-occupation with history forgets merit of work under consideration. Biographical criticism considers writers' family background, ancestry, personal circumstances, friends, profession, occupation etc. and also character and temperament and ideas and beliefs of writer. T.S. Eliot's famous theory of the impersonality of poetry is a warning against the pit falls of biographical criticism. Comparative criticism seeks to evaluate a work by comparing it to other works of similar nature, wither in the same or in other language. Mathew Arnold was the advocate and exponent. He also suggested "Touchstone Method" for measuring intrinsic excellence of a work of art. This method expects critics to have thorough knowledge not only of any one literature but a number of literatures. Comparison must be made between works of same type and genre. It can be both illuminating and interesting. Descriptive criticism is the analysis of work, aims, methods and effects. Dryden's criticism begins with self-justification, the poet discussing his own works and defending against hostile attack as in prefaces. His essay "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" is a good example of descriptive criticism. Impressionistic criticism seeks merely to record of personal response. It is a record of the critic's own responses, application of aesthetic beauty, untrammelled by rules and regulation. The critic does not evaluate a work nor does call it good or bad. He simply conveys how he has enjoyed. Much of romantic criticism is individualistic. Walter Pater is impressionistic in his criticism. Often such critics are wayward, unbalanced and erratic, most of this belongs only to past. Textual or Ontological criticism in modern age this is a new trend. Consideration is the thing in itself and is studied examined analyzed without consideration of extrinsic factors as biography, history, sociology, psychology. Critic concentrates on structure, diction, language, image meter, tone, theme etc. We may call them New Critics or Formalists. Psychological criticism based on Freud, Jung, Bergson and others. It provides critic as precise terminology and allows him to discuss the creative process. Dr. I.A. Richards is one of the ablest and most prominent practitioners of this type of criticism.

2.4 Important critical and literary terms

It is very much important to understand certain terms often used in discussing history and principles of literary criticism. To avoid confusion and misunderstanding one has to get familiar with these terms. These are not the definitions of the term but simply taken just the correct descriptions. Aesthetics deals with enjoyment and appreciation of beauty. In late nineteenth century this was used synonymously with a movement 'art for art's sake', without any reference to its

moral effect. Walter Pater was its best exponent. Allegory is basically a technique of vision seeking to convey abstract and philosophical truth through material/concrete examples. These are often stories having moral significance. Allegories are purposely didactic. They may appear in prose, poetry or drama. Fables and Parables are special forms of allegories. Burlesque is a term applied to farcical composition in which a serious subject is treated ludicrously, to ridicule. It creates laughter through exaggeration. Subject matter may be trivial. Term parody is often used in place of burlesque. The word parody is more correctly used to a ludicrous imitation of a single work and lacks farcical connotation. Classic, Classicism and pseudo-classicism. Any artistic achievement of permanent excellence may be called classic. More specifically it refers to the art and literature of Greece and Rome and in India even Sanskrit. Simplicity, restraint and order are the distinguishing marks. These are often opposed to enthusiasm and romanticism. Neo-classic implies not only new but also false because the body and rules and not the spirit of antiquity are reproduced in imitation. Diction: It is a choice and arrangement of words in a line of poetry. Eighteenth century poet paid special attention to it. Euphuism: It was a prose style during Elizabethan era. John Lily was its pioneer. It uses constantly balance and antithesis, complex scheme of alliteration, simile, metaphors and other figures of speech. Expressionism: The artist is not much concerned with exact moods revealing his ideas in detailed manner but with sensation that lies behind. Unarticulated details of brooks, meadows, cows, trees will give idea of 'pastoral' peace. In literature it springs from some motive. Writer is ready to sacrifice all conventional practices so as to express intellectual or emotional abstractions which he wishes to express. Expressionism is essentially modern. T.S. Eliot's and James Joyce are its most famous exponents. Fable: A short, allegorical tale in prose or verse designed to convey a moral lesson. Characters are generally but not always speaking animals or inanimate objects which symbolize human beings. This term is also used in literary criticism in the neo-classical period for the plot or action of a narrative and particularly of an epic poem (Watt and Watt). Farce: At end of seventeenth century it was used for any short humorous play in which plot and incidents are exaggerated. Boisterous stage business, loud laughter, slapstick and horse play. In general, farce bears the same relation to high comedy that melodrama bears to high tragedy. Humanism: In the fifteenth century the word humanism was used for Graeco-Roman culture which took place held hitherto by medieval scholasticism in Christian Europe. Philosophy less abstract and more concerned with relationship between human beings was called Humanism. From this time onwards its influence is overwhelming. For a humanist, life here in this world and not the other world is a matter of concern. Impressionism: Objects should be presented not in great details at the time of observation but the way they have impressed an artist. Impressionist work subjectively. In literature, in all elements of his composition episodes, characters, settings, moods, the artist attempts to present through a highly selected details the impression that his material have made on him. Often this is sketchy. Vincent Van Gough is the greatest example. Imagery: Images are essentially figures of speech such as simile, metaphor etc.

They are called images because in them one thing is imagined or expressed.

Imagery is used in poetry to decorate language and to convey the meaning clearly and vividly. Melodrama: It was originally very popular romantic play. Tense sentiments, exaggerated situations and highly emotionalized music and songs were elements of it. It originated in France. Finally, as an adjective this term is used to short stories, novels and in fact all forms of literary art that are marked with melodramatic devices and moods. Naturalism: Often used as synonym of realism, it means that the artist attempts accurately to imitate nature. Nowadays it is used to express a slavish attempt to reproduce details from life with selection. Sometimes called photographic realism. In French literature Flaubert, Zola of nineteenth century attempted to approach life in scientific manner, recording external appearances like a scientist. Moore, Hardy gave rise to violet outcries about obscenities of the French naturalist. The word in English still carries with it at least to some mind a bad connotation for much vulgarity and obscenity has often justified in the name of Naturalism. Realism: This term is used loosely in literature. It signifies works which depicts life as it is. Hence Realism is commonly opposed to idealism, romanticism and escapism, all of which suggest a flight away from reality into imagination. There are of course degrees of realism. To some it may be revelation of sordid, unpleasant details. Romanticism: In loose sense, it is a tendency in art to represent life as it is not – either with the help of imagination, to distort real world or to escape from it entirely into shadowy realm of romance. Often romanticism is opposite to classicism also. Imagination, emotion, subjectivity, love of the past love of Nature and faith in the supernatural in various degrees are characteristics of romantic literature. Scholasticism: Formal intellectual culture which prevailed in Christian Europe during Middle Ages (Twelfth century to fifteenth century) schoolmen who studied in medieval universities; presently taken as meaningless hair splitting discussion. Surrealism: Technique of a small twentieth century group of painters and writers who violate conventions by attempting to create reality through eccentric distortion of objects presented. In literature, surrealism has taken a direction of seeking effective expression by throwing words out of normal and logical sequence by violating the demands of logic and rational control. Symbols and Symbolism: Symbols are essentially words which are not merely annotative but also evocative and emotive. Through symbols a writer can express much more than by use of words. A symbol can be used to express 'pure sensation' or the poet's apprehension of transcendental mystery. Edmund Wilson defined symbolism as an attempt by carefully studied means a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors to communicate unique personal feeling. In symbolic poetry the poet communicates unique personal feeling, he makes use of image words for the purpose. Symbolism is oblique or indirect mode of expression which suggests much more than is actually described. It deals with the infinite and the absolute and in the words of Y.B. Yeats, gives 'dumb things voices and bodiless things bodies' Tautology: It means meaningless repetition.

3. Materials and methods

The present paper, under the title of the movement of literary criticism through ages.

To examine the notion of the movement of literary criticism. The first step is to clarify the movement of literary criticism. This is a survey on of the movement of literary criticism and differences between these movements.

3.1 Structuralism

Russian formalism's intense interest in the major questions informing the practice of literary criticism (i.e., what makes a literary work literary) greatly influenced other critical schools that emerged in Europe. Most importantly, the literary theory known as structuralism developed as an outgrowth of linguistic theories aiming to understand the relationship between language and the human experience. While similar to New Criticism in its emphasis on close readings of the text, structuralism evolved as a distinct school of literary criticism.

According to the Swiss theorist most commonly associated with structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), language is the foundational structure that informs all human experience—our ways of knowing the world and, therefore, our reality. Saussure understood language as an overriding structural system whose components in which he referred to as signs gain meaning in relation to one another only when they are considered within the overriding structural system. For example, specific words are given value through their place within a particular language; they do not contain pre-existing concepts and ideas in and of themselves. Consider, for instance, the word sister. According to structuralism, there is no inherent value bound to the construction of the letters s-i-s-t-e-r, but there is a concept attached to the word that is signaled by this linguistic unit; in this case, the English language gives meaning to the utterance sister. Saussure named the overriding system of language the *langue* and referred to its utterance, or the active use of the language in everyday life, as *parole*. As an approach to reading literary texts, structuralism emphasizes the importance of examining linguistic structural elements as they manifest in a literary work and looking for patterns that reveal the systematic nature of language and its uses in literature.

Subsequent schools of literary criticism, such as New Historicism and reader-response theory, criticize structuralism for what they perceive as an overly narrow focus on the internal machinations of a text at the expense of other influential factors—such as a work's historical and political context (in the case of New Historicism) and the role a reader plays in producing the meaning of a work (in the case of reader-response theory). In contrast with structuralist critics, New Historicist critics understand a literary work as dynamically engaged with historical events; they approach a text as a way of understanding how we interpret historical moments (rather than simply recording them). Instead of emphasizing the linguistic structure of a text, as does structuralism, New Historicism aims to unveil the subjective nature of our understanding of history itself.

Despite the critical challenges to structuralism that have emerged in the 20th century, the structuralist theoretical school has continued to influence subsequent literary schools as well as our contemporary reading of literature, ensuring that we acknowledge the role of language in forming cultural

meaning and the importance of a work's internal structure in creating its overall significance as a piece of literature.

3.2 Formalism

With the early 20th century's new forms of literature also came new ways of approaching literary theory and criticism. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the meaning and value of a literary work had been understood primarily by elements outside the work—such as the author's intention for the work, or the historical context from which the work emerged—rather than the work's internal structural elements and use of language. Two new critical movements—namely, Russian formalism and American New Criticism—challenged this traditional approach to reading texts. These schools of criticism, often known collectively for their formalist theories, drew attention to literary works as distinctly literary artifacts, able to be studied in their own right—rather than solely as reflections of an author's intention, or the biographical aspects of the work, or the historical moment in which the work was composed.

Russian formalism, associated with Russian critics Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson (among others), aimed to ascertain the qualities of a literary work as a kind of scientific object, emphasizing the so-called literariness of the text. American New Criticism, led by American critics such as John Crowe Ransom and Cleanth Brooks, also focused on the internal workings of the text, rejecting the author's biography and emphasizing the importance of analysis-driven close readings of literary works.

3.3 Modernism

No doubt all periodizing terms the Renaissance, the early modern period, the Romantic period, and so on resist definition, but there is perhaps something additionally resistant, peculiar and for many maddening about the 'postmodern'. Indeed, the postmodern appears to welcome and embrace a thinking of itself in terms of multiplicity. It resists the totalizing gesture of a metalanguage, the attempt to describe it as a set of coherent explanatory theories. Rather than trying to explain it in terms of a fixed philosophical position or as a kind of knowledge, we shall instead present a 'postmodern vocabulary' in order to suggest its mobile, fragmented and paradoxical nature.

Enduring through the first half of the 20th century, the literary movement known as modernism developed as a virtual denunciation of preceding aesthetic traditions— including Romanticism, a major artistic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the 19th-century predominance of realist, naturalist, and Gothic influences displayed in many novels of the Victorian period. Modernism, in contrast, was preoccupied with a new, distinctly pessimistic worldview that emerged among artists who saw themselves responding to a chaotic and unstable contemporary world that was characterized by the social, political, and philosophical upheavals occurring in Europe and the U.S. at the turn of the century.

In particular, modernism marked a turn toward innovative uses of traditional literary modes and techniques. New forms of narrative that defied convention were seen in the works of writers such as Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Franz Kafka. Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

Man (1916) employed an ambitious stream-of-consciousness narrative and experimental style that Joyce developed further in his masterpiece, *Ulysses* (1922), now considered an iconic modernist novel. British author Virginia Woolf also gave voice to the interior world of her protagonists through her use of stream-of-consciousness in her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Lighthouse* (1927). American authors such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald also became pioneers of modernism; Fitzgerald's nuanced portrayal of 1920s excess in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) led to the book's status as one of the great American novels.

In the genre of poetry, American modernist poet Ezra Pound abandoned traditional rhyme and meter and initiated an innovative form of poetics that came to be known as free verse, displayed in such works as Pound's poem "The Return" (1912). Another poet closely associated with modernism was T.S. Eliot. His poem *The Waste Land* (1922) relied on techniques that represented a divergence from and challenge to previous poetic and aesthetic traditions. The poem's fragmented structure, which employs multiple voices, points of view, and shifts in time, has been referred to by critics as a montage—a collection of fragments aligned in one artistic enterprise; that is, a kind of literary collage. Eliot's use of this collage aesthetic made his work unique and paved the way for other experimental works that would characterize the modernist movement.

The modernist era also saw an increase in the diversity of literary voices. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, for example, involved an upsurge of literature and art by African Americans such as Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Aaron Douglas, and Romare Bearden.

4. Conclusion

The beginning of the 20th century marked a significant shift in ideas pertaining to literature, particularly though not exclusively in Europe and the United States. Traditions including Romanticism, a major artistic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the 19th-century predominance of realist, naturalist, and Gothic influences displayed in many novels of the Victorian period. Pessimistic worldview emerged among artists who saw themselves responding to a chaotic and unstable contemporary world that was characterized by the social, political, and philosophical upheavals occurring in Europe and the U.S. at the turn of the century. According to unstable situation which happened in different areas, the movement of literary criticism changed greatly and emerged different movements. so, the study shedding light on the nature of the movement of literary criticism and focus on differences between these movements.

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