

Literary Criticism: From Modernism To Post Modernism

Mrs. Mohini Pandey, DR. A K Singh,

Research scholar, veer bahadur singh purvanchal university, jaunpur, india
Former principal, handia pg college (affiliated. To vbspu.)

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ABSTRACT:

Literature is the way of expressing one's thoughts. In Writing, Literature communicates a particular kind of emotions or thoughts. The critical study of literature is considered as Literary Criticism. So, the basic purpose of literary criticism is to assess or evaluate a piece of work by a particular author. It is basic nature of a human being to criticise others. In Literature also, right from classical period till date, we can see that critics have given their views on other writers work. For example, Aristotle was the torch-bearer of criticism and he discovered some fundamental principle of literature which became greatest doctrine of criticism later. He criticised Plato for his Theory of Imitation and propounded that poetry assumes a much higher place than philosophy and believed in the "pleasure principle". So, we can say that criticism prevailed in all ages from ancient to modern till date and it has paved way to new findings.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to present a view of criticism from the modern era to the postmodern era. The focus of this study is on two theories-one is T.S Eliot's Theory-Tradition and Individual Talent and second one is The Postmodern theory. Here, a contrasting picture of modern criticism and post-modern criticism have been presented.

KEYWORDS: Literary, Critic, Criticism, modern, Eliot, postmodern, Lyotard, Baudrillard.

INTRODUCTION

Literary critic is generally considered as the critical evaluation of literary studies be it any theory or art. In other words, it is the critical study of literature of a particular era. The word criticism is derived from the Greek word 'Kritikos' which means to judge so the work of a critic is to judge a literary piece of art or work.

In English Literature, criticism was first used by Dryden in his work 'The State of Innocence' (1677). He said that 'criticism meant a standard of judging well'. With the passage of time, criticism occupied a stable place in literature and the credit goes to Pope's Essay on Criticism (1711).

The Victorian criticism was based on order, decorum etc. Their attitude towards life was that of acceptance and compromise. Now coming to modern criticism, it possesses two important features-one is discarding the old concepts and the other is evaluation of the past writers.

MODERN CRITICISM

Modern Criticism has been defined by Stanley Edgar Hyman as-"the organised use of non-literary techniques and bodies of knowledge to obtain insights into literature". (Agarwal & Mundhra, S.C, 2002, p.400). So these non-literary techniques are the psychoanalytic associations ranging from primitive society to capitalistic society. Most of the critics have used metaphor as a canon of criticism and this metaphor gives direction to the work of the critic.

In the theory of Tradition And Individual Talent, T.S. Eliot has defined Tradition as a phrase of censure. According to him, the word tradition is used as a term which is applied to a work for approving a work of art as traditional, some obsolete work. So there is a lack of critical insight in a particular literary work. Then the essay proceeds by explaining the importance of criticism as a guiding path for creative activity. It acts as a breathing technique for any literary work. Then he explains the importance of tradition to Individual Talent by saying that Englishmen have a tendency to find out or praise certain aspects of a poet's work which are different from their contemporaries. So Tradition and Individual Talent go hand in hand.

Tradition is defined as that which is obtained with great labour. It comprises a historical

sense which enables a poet to view pastness of the past and also its presentness. So there is a close relationship between the past and the present. The past does not mean poets of the previous generation. To be traditional means to be conscious about the main current of art and poetry. So the awareness of this tradition helps in sharpening the sensibility of the poet and in paving the way of poetic creation.

Then in the second part of this Theory, Eliot explains the process of Depersonalisation. He compares Depersonalisation to a chemical process where platinum reacts with oxygen and sulphur dioxide to form sulphurous acid. Here the mind of the poet is considered as the platinum which react with the experience of the man to digest and transform the passions inherent in the poet. So the emotions and feelings are the elements which enters in the poets's mind and it helps in production of a grate work of art.

In the last section of this Theory, Eliot believes in the fact that tradition and impersonality of poetry are complimentary to each other. So the attention is diverted from the poet to the poetry.

So T.S Eliot was the poet of High Modernism. The writers in this phase emphasised on subjectivity and impressionism and 'fragmentation'.

POST MODERNISM

Now coming to postmodernism, it has been defined by J.A Cuddon in his Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory as-"an eclectic approach, aleatory writing, parody and pastiche". (Bary.Peter,2002,p.61). Since here 'eclectic' implies fragmented form so it appears similar to modernism. But the difference between modernism and postmodernism is that in modernism, fragmentation is taken in different mood. They assume fragmented form as a 'deep nostalgia' whereas the postmodernists celebrate fragmentation.

Postmodernism was established in literature as a theory with the publication of Jean Francois Lyotard's 'The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge'. He debates about Enlightenment in this book, mainly targeting Habermas who 'defends modernity against those he calls the neo-conservatives'(Bary,2002, p.64) . So under the 'postmodernism' ,He believes that the neo-conservatives would like to get rid of the uncompleted project of modernism. This will put an end to experimentation and will bring an 'order for security'.

The famous definition of Lyotard's 'incredulity towards metanarratives'(Bary,2002, p.64) is worth considering here. Postmodernism thus 'deconstructs' the basic objective of enlightenment.

Another Theory of postmodernism is Jean Baudrillard's 'Simulations'(1981).He is associated with 'loss of the real' which believes that images from advertising, TV and film industry has resulted in a loss of the distinction between real and imagined. So a culture of 'hyperreality' appears.

He asks in his essay whether a sign is an index of an underlying reality then the whole system becomes a 'simulacrum'.He then substitutes the 'simulation' for representation. An example of Disneyland would make this concept more clear. Disneyland has the effect of the 'real is no longer real'.With postmodernism, the difference between the real and what is simulated collapses-all the surface is without depth, just an image, this is hyperreal-as Baudrillard propose.

Finally, postmodern critics work on the themes of the literary works of the twentieth century and try to bring out the implications of these works. Then they try to find out the 'intertextual elements' in literature like parody and pastiche. There is an element of irony in the postmodern critical work. And they also challenge the difference between the high culture and the low culture rather postmodernist try to bring out a blend between these two cultures.

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