



Literary Criticism and Contemporary Critical Theories

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Abstract: A brief introduction to literary criticism and literary theory are given at the start. Then the indication of the word "Literary Criticism" and (literary theory) alongside with the root and advancement must be analyzed. Modern literary criticism is written in a variety of genres, including the article, review, survey, essay, literary profile, and bibliographical explanation. In any genre, the critic must be, in a sense, a political thinker, sociologist, and psychologist, as well as a literary historian and aesthetician. Additionally, this paper examines various critical, literary concepts and finally the conclusion is drawn by means of the review of literature indicated.

Key words: Literary theory, criticism, traditional critical theories structuralism, formalism, feminism, deconstruction, modernism.

1 INTRODUCTION

In this research paper, we are going to undertake a brief overview of the rise and development literary theory and criticism, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. One of the most significant changes that have occurred in the field of literary theory and criticism is where to locate the locus of meaning in a text.

In the discipline of literary criticism, it was originally assumed that meaning resides with the author. Thus, the purpose of interpretation then was to discern the author's intention which would unlock the textual meaning of the work. However, with time, critics began to focus more concertedly on the text itself, hence meaning came to be seen as residing with the reader. By subjecting a work of art to a particular theoretical construct, you can acquire a deeper understanding of the work and a better appreciation of its richness.

This research paper will enable you grasp the basis of literary theorizing and criticism by relating them to your everyday experience. It is also expected that by the end of this paper you should be able to apply theoretical perspectives to literary works. literary criticism and theory are unavoidable part of studying literature. Their aim is to explain, entertain, simulate, and challenge the student of literature. They make literature refreshing, informative and stimulating in many ways which help us to achieve a better understanding of literature. The analysis, study, and evaluation of individual works of art or literature as well as the formulation of general methodological or aesthetic principles for the examination of such works is called as Literary Criticism.

Since the earliest days of literary history, criticism has been a major aspect of literary theory and practice. Criticism is a term which has been applied since the seventeenth century to the description, justification, analysis, or judgment of works of art. For centuries literary criticism was considered as an art of writing poetry; it was an advice to the poet rather than the reader. It has been applied since the seventeenth century to the description, justification, analysis, or judgments of works arts. Criticism in modern times is classified in different ways.

M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* talks about four different critical theories: When the critic views art in terms of the universe or what is imitated, he is using the *mimetic theory*. When the emphasis is shifted to the reader, and the critic views art in terms of its effect on the audience, he is using a *pragmatic theory* that was dominant up to the end of the eighteenth century. But in the nineteenth century the emphasis shifted to the poet, and poetry became „a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling“ of the poet. In this case a work of art is essentially the internal made external. Therefore, when a critic views art in terms of the artist, he is using the *expressive theory*.

In the 20th century, the emphasis shifted to the work of art, especially under the influence of the *new criticism*. When the critic views art basically in its own terms, seeing the work as a self-contained entity, he is using the *objective theory*. Some critics have talked about theoretical and practical or applied criticism. *Theoretical criticism* attempts to arrive at the general principles of art and *practical criticism* applies these principles to the works of art.

Literary critics have also talked about other types of criticism such as *historical criticism* which examines a work of art against its historical background and the author's life while *impressionistic criticism* emphasizes the way that a work of art affects the critic. *Textual criticism* applies scholarly means to a work of art to reconstruct its original version while *analytical criticism* tries to get at the nature of a work of art as an object through the detailed analysis of its parts and their organization. *Judicial criticism* judges a work of art by a definable set of standards and *moral criticism* evaluates a work of art in relation to human life while *mythic criticism* explores the nature and significance of the archetypes and archetypal patterns in a work of art.

Above all, in this research paper we will discuss briefly some of the major modern critical theories which are quite significant for those who are interested in literature and they are structuralism, post structuralism, Russian formalism, Reader response criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, deconstruction, feminism, new historicism, post colonialism, modernism and postmodernism and they will be illustrated respectively.

1.1 Literary Criticism

The word "criticism" derives from the Greek *kritike*, it is the art of interpretation, analysis, classification and ultimately the judgement of the literary works. Literary criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature. It proceeds from the general methodology of the study of literature and bases itself on the history of literature. It is usually in the form of a critical essay, but in depth book reviews can sometimes be considered as literary works. Criticism may examine a particular literary work or may look at an author's writing as whole.

In contrast to literary history, criticism deals primarily with contemporary literary movements and interprets the classical heritage from the viewpoint of contemporary social and artistic concerns. Literary criticism is as closely related to an era's life and social struggle as it is to its philosophical and aesthetic ideas. Critical judgments about literature arose almost simultaneously with literature itself, originally as the opinion of the most respected and learned readers. The theoretical definition of literary criticism must be approached historically. For example, in the 17th and 18th centuries, in accordance with neoclassical aesthetics, criticism demanded only a dispassionate evaluation of a work, based on common sense, with some indication of individual "faults" and "beauties."

In the 19th century criticism evolved into a special genre of literature, and a writer was considered in relation to his times and to society. The history of literary criticism in the West, which is closely related to the history of literary schools and movements and the development of literary scholarship, directly or indirectly expresses the social relationships and contradictions of its time and in the first half of the 19th century, criticism in Europe won a place for itself as a literary profession.

Convincing literary criticism can influence the course of literary development and the entire literary process by consistently supporting progressive tendencies and rejecting alien ones. Marxist criticism, founded on scientific techniques of objective research and on the vital interests of society, stands in opposition to impressionistic, subjectivist criticism, which considers itself free from consistent concepts, a holistic vision, and a conscious point of view.

Criticism points out the virtues and failings of a work to the writer, thus helping him broaden his intellectual horizons and improve his technical mastery. Addressing himself to the reader, the critic not only elucidates the work for him but also actively engages the reader in the mutual apprehension of the work on a new level of understanding. A critic must be able to view a work as an artistic whole and to place it in the perspective of literary development.

Modern literary criticism is written in a variety of genres, including the article, review, survey, essay, literary profile, and bibliographical annotation. In any genre, the critic must be, in a sense, a political thinker, sociologist, and psychologist, as well as a literary historian and aesthetician. The critic must also possess a talent that is similar, but not identical, to the talents of both artists and scholars.

Criticism's responsibility in the literary process and the fate of both book and author raises the question of its moral obligations. The profession imposes weighty moral obligations on the critic and presupposes fundamental honesty in his argumentation, as well as understanding and tact in his attitude to the writer. Distortions, capricious quotations, "labeling," and unfounded deductions are incompatible with the very essence of literary criticism.

Literary criticism deals with analyzing, classifying, expounding and evaluating a work of art in order to form one's opinion. A fundamental rule of modern literary criticism may be summed up as; the 'answers' you get from a text depend entirely upon the kind of 'questions' you put to it. This implies that the same text legitimately means different things to different people.

As a result, for example, a Marxist critic would necessarily come up with a different interpretation from that of a Psychoanalytic critic of the same text, each of which is equally valid (providing that there is textual evidence to support the interpretation in question).

1.2 Literary Theory

The terms "literary theory" and "critical theory" refer to essentially the same fields of study and now undergoing a transformation into "cultural theory" within the discipline of literary studies, can be understood as the set of concepts and intellectual assumptions on which rests the work of explaining or interpreting literary texts. A theory as a body of rules or principles used to appraise works of literature while literary theory on its own, tries to explain the assumptions and values upon which various forms of literary criticism rest.

Literary theory refers to any principles derived from internal analysis of literary texts or from knowledge external to the text that can be applied in multiple interpretive situations. The fact that literary theory is an indispensable tool which literature uses to realize its goal of sensitizing and educating the audience. It concludes by stating that the difficulty often encountered in a literary text is often resolved by subjecting it to a particular theoretical analysis.

However, a persistent belief in "reference," the notion that words and images refer to an objective reality, has provided epistemological (that is, having to do with theories of knowledge) support for theories of literary representation throughout most of Western history. Until the nineteenth century, Art, in Shakespeare's phrase, held "a mirror up to nature" and faithfully recorded an objectively real world independent of the observer.

Modern literary theory gradually emerges in Europe during the nineteenth century in one of the earliest developments of literary theory. The current state of theory is such that there are many overlapping areas of influence, and older schools of theory, though no longer enjoying their previous eminence, continue to exert an influence on the whole. The once widely-held conviction (an implicit theory) that literature is a repository of all that is meaningful and ennobling in the human experience, a view championed by the Leavis School in Britain, may no longer be acknowledged by name but remains an essential justification for the current structure of American universities and liberal arts curricula.

We all know that different people will experience the same event differently. It follows, then, that different people will approach the same literary text differently. One person may be offended by a character's actions, while another finds them comic. One reader is energized by a story's political implications, while another is awed by the same story's philosophical bent. Literary theories emerged as ways to explain different people's views and responses to literature rather than insisting that one view is the best or correct view, literary theory attempts to find value in all views that are based on a careful study of the literature.

2 COMMON CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORIES.

In this research paper as stated in the introduction which tends to introduce a number of literary theories. The underneath are the most common critical theories which will be illustrated respectively.

2.1 Structuralism

Structuralism emerged in France in 1950 and it is regarded to have its origin in the works of Swiss linguists Ferdinand Desassure in the early 20th century but soon come to be applied to many other fields such as philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, literary theory and even mathematics.

Structuralism was a literary theory which is based on "a system of ideas used in the study of language, literature, art, anthropology and sociology that emphasizes the importance of the basic structure and relationship of that particular subject. It is a method used by sociologist, anthropologist and linguists and other people to show how all aspects of culture are based upon some underlying structure. It is a system that implies aspects of human culture, that can be understood by means of overall systems or structure.

Structuralism was an intellectual movement which is based on universal truth. They emphasize logical and scientific nature of its results and considered descriptive of present. Structuralism is primarily concerned with understanding how language works as a system of meaning production. How does language function as a kind of meaning machine? Ferdinand Desassure was the founder of structuralism.

According to De Saussure, every language has different signs and these signs are composite of signifier (sound image of the word) and signified (concept behind the word). These signs give the meaning to the text and we cannot study text in isolation. He gave the concept of Langue and parole. Langue is the grammar rules, system and structure of the language and parole the act of utterances.

2.2 Post structuralism

Post structuralism emerged in France during 1960s as a movement critiquing structuralism. It is grounded in the concept of over determinism. "theory is not separate from reality nor reality is separate" from theory post structuralist doubt about the existence of concrete reality. Post structuralism rejects the notion of single truth and criticizes grad theories that claim to uncover truth including religion, social science and realism.

Post structuralist accept the structuralist idea of the universals in human thought as expressed on cultural phenomenon through binary opposition and subsequently applied as power and relationships that are created in the presence of pluralizing forces. PS emphasize the role of knowledge in achieving and sustain power. Knowledge is always centered contextual, partial and fragmentary but is never neutral. For PS to understand an object it is necessary to understand the system of knowledge that produced the object. PS emphasize history (diachronic) to analyze the descriptive (synchronic) concepts.

It is a late 20th century approach in philosophy and literary criticism. It is opposition to the structuralism. Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault are the founder of post structuralism. It denies the existence of universal principles which create meanings and coherence. It rejects the theory of Ferdinand Desassure of Signifier and Signified. It examines the other sources of meanings i.e. reader, cultural norms and other literature etc. Here readers replace the author. It is simultaneously rejection of Structuralism. Here no meaning and sign are stable. There is nothing outside the text.

2.3 Russian Formalism

Russian Formalism was developed in 1910 in Russia. its official beginning was marked by an establishment of two organizations, the Moscow linguistic circle and the society for the study of poetic language (OPOYAZ).

A formalistic approach to literature, once called **new criticism** involves a **close reading of the text**. Formalistic critics believe that all information essential to the interpretation of a work must be found within the work itself; there is no need to bring in outside information about the history, politics, or society of the time, or about the author's life. Formalistic critics spend much time analyzing irony, paradox, imagery, and metaphor. They are also interested in the work's setting, characters, symbols, and point of view.

For formalists, literary criticism is separate from other forms of analysis. it focuses on how language works. They study how literature works not what literature is about. They were primarily interested in the way the literary text achieves their effects and in establishing a scientific base for study of literature. I can say that Formalism is a critical approach that analyses, interpret and evaluate the inherent features of a text. These Features include not only grammar and syntax but also literary devices such as meter and figure of speech.

In the first half of the 20th century, Russian and Czech literary theorists worked to develop a theory of literariness: what made literary text different from, for instance, govt reports, newspapers articles etc. Formalist says that literature distinguishes itself from

nonliterary language because it employs a range of devices that have a DE familiarization effect. Here we can study text in isolation. There is nothing extra textual. The text is the most authentic itself. We pay utmost attention on the forms of the text. We focus on language and study linguistic devices in order to get maximum meaning of the text.

2.4 Reader Response Criticism

Reader response criticism analyzes the reader's role in the production of the meaning. the text itself has no meanings until it is read by a reader. Here reader is a producer rather than a consumer of meanings. It is a school of criticism which emerged in 1970, focused on finding meaning in the act of reading itself and examining the ways individual readers or community of readers' experience texts.

Reader-response criticism is a school of literary theory that focuses on the reader and their experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus attention primarily on the author or the content and form of the work. It argues that a text has no meaning before a reader experiences and reads it. Practitioners: I-A-Richards, Louise Rosenblatt, Walter Gibson, Norman Holland.

2.5 Psychoanalytical Criticism

Sigmund Freud developed the psychoanalytic theory of personality development, which argued that personality is formed through conflicts among three fundamental structures of the human mind: the id, ego, and superego.

This theory works on the psychology. It adopts the methods of reading employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. Psychoanalysis attempts to understand the workings and source of unconscious desires, needs, anxieties and behavior of writers, readers and specific cultural phenomena. They want to understand human behavioral patterns and cultural behavior patterns.

Through the scope of a psychoanalytic lens, humans are described as having sexual and aggressive drives. Psychoanalytic theorists believe that human behavior is deterministic. It is governed by irrational forces, and the unconscious, as well as instinctual and biological drives. Due to this deterministic nature, psychoanalytic theorists do not believe in free will.

Practitioner: Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones.

2.6 Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a philosophical critical approach to textual analysis that is most closely related with the work of Jacques Derrida. He gives the concept of binary opposition. The deconstructive method is used to show that the meaning of a literary text is not fixed or stable. Jacques Derrida says that all communication is characterized by uncertainty because there is no definitive link between a signifier (word) and signified (concept). once a text is written it ceases to have a meaning until a reader reads it. There is no solid meaning to the text. There is no possibility of absolute truth.

I can Say Deconstruction is an approach to understanding the relationship between text and meaning. Derrida's approach consisted of conducting readings of texts with an ear to what runs counter to the intended meaning or structural unity of a particular text.

2.7 Feminism

The concept of feminism in general has been concerned to an analysis of the trend of male domination of the society; the general attitude of male towards female, the ways of improving the condition of women. The basis of the feminist movements, both in literature and politics, is that western culture is fundamentally patriarchal (i.e., created by men, controlled by men, viewed through the eyes of men, and evaluated by men).

The 1960s saw the rise of a new, feminist approach to literary criticism. Before the emergence of Feminist Theory, the works of female writers (or works about females) were examined by the same standards as those by male writers (and about men) with the development of feminist theory, old texts are reexamined, and the portrayal of women in literature is reevaluated and new writers create works that more accurately reflect the developing concept of the "modern woman." The feminist approach is only partly based on finding and exposing suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) in literature.

Feminists are interested in exposing the ways women in literature both authors and characters are undervalued. Some feminist scholars have even divided individual words in western languages, suggesting that the languages themselves reflect a patriarchal worldview. Arguing that the past times in the west have been dominated by men whether politicians in power or the historians recording it feminist critics believe that western literature reflects a masculine bias.

As a result, western literature presents an inaccurate and potentially harmful portrayal of women. In order to repair the potential harm done and achieve balance, feminist critics insist that works by and about women be added to the literary canon and read from a

feminist perspective. It was the movement in favor of women. "Jane Austin, Francis Burney, Virginia Woolf, George Eliot " were the famous Feminist writers. Feminism is a belief that women should have equal rights to men.

2.7.1 In women's history there are three waves of feminism

First wave: The term commonly used to the nineteenth century and early twentieth century European and north American mobilization to gain voting rights and opens the professions to women. The key concern of the first wave feminists were education, employment, the marriage laws and plight of intelligent middle class single women. Kate Millet was concerned mainly to the treatment of women at the hands of male. Marry Elman's: thinking about women. Kate millet: sexual politics. feminine (1840-80) in which women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture and internalized its assumptions about female nature. The distinguishing sign of this period is the male pseudonym. Women chose male pseudonyms as a way of coping with a double literary standard.

Second wave: The term commonly used to refer to the emergence in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Europe and north America of a new "social movement" dedicated to raise consciousness about sexism and patriarchy. Legalizing abortion, birth control and attaining equal rights in politics and economic realms and gaining sexual liberation. The slogan "the personal is political" sum up the way in which the second wave feminism did not just strive to extend the range of social opportunities open to women but also, through interventions within the sphere of reproduction, sexuality and cultural representation to their domestic and private life. The second wave feminism did not just make an impact on western societies, but has also continued to inspire the struggle for women's right across the world. The major events in the second wave was the commission on the status of women was created by the Kennedy administration, with Eleanor Roosevelt as chair and as well the report issued by that commission in 1963 that documented discrimination against women in virtually every area of American life.

In second wave feminist (1880-1920) women protest male values, advocate separatist 'sisterhoods'. They used literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. It shows the direct analysis of women to literature. Female writers (gynocriticism) and their significance was studied. Elaine Showalter's a literature of their own (1920).

Third wave or post-feminist: Please note that post-feminist and third wave feminists believe exactly the opposite things. The third wave feminism does not argue as post-feminist do, that the time has come to be "done with" feminism. Indeed, third wave feminism is not a retraction, but rather an expansion of second wave work with focus in new directions. In third wave feminism women create 'female writing' in self-discovery.

2.8 New historicism

New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpret within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. It is based on literary criticism of Stephan Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michael Foucault, new historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs and prejudice. It examines both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times.

New historicists don't just want to appreciate literature through history, they want to know history better through literature. New Historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand intellectual history through literature, and literature through its cultural context, which follows the 1950s field of history of ideas and refers to itself as a form of "Cultural Poetics".

2.9 Post colonialism

Post Colonialism is the critical analysis of history, culture, literature and modes of discourse, specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France and other European colonial powers. It focuses on third world countries of Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Post-colonial literatures are a result of the interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. It is also used to analyses the texts and other cultural discourses that emerged after the end of the colonial period.

It rejects the master-narrative of western imperialism. It concerns with the formation of the colonial and post-colonial subject. Post-colonialism is simply a lens through which we study literature that is set in colonized countries or deals with post-colonial issues. Edward Said, Homi k Bhabbha, Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad are the Few post-colonial writers.

2.10 Modernism

Modernism is a period in literary history which started around the early 1900s and continued until the early 1940s. Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman are thought to be the mother and father of the movement. According to M.H. Abrams's; The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts and style of literature and other art in the early decades of the present century.

T.S. Eliot is considered as one of the most important modernist poet. His two prominent poems where Eliot shows his modern orientations are The love song of Alfred Prufrock and The Waste Land. Modernism is the rejection of traditional 19th century norms and earlier contentions and represented by orientation towards fragmentation, free verse, allusions and Victorian and romantic writing.

2.11 postmodernism

A late 20th century style and concept in the arts, architecture and criticism which represents a departure from modernism and is characterized by the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, a mixing of different artistic styles, media, and a general distrust of theories. Postmodern literature is literature characterized by reliance on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and the unreliable narrator; and is often defined as a style or a trend which emerged in the post-World War II era. Jean Boudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Richard Rorty, Fredrick Jameson are the few famous post-modernists.

3 CONCLUSION

To conclude my research paper, I reached to the point that literary criticism and theory are the mandatory parts of literature. This research paper seeks to introduce students to some of the most important schools of literary theory and criticism in the 20th Century that have had significant impact on the study of literature. Their aim is used to explain, entertain and challenge the students of literature. Criticism is a term which has been applied since the seventeenth century to the description, justification, analysis, or judgment of works of art. They make literature invigorating, useful and animating from multiple points of view which help us to accomplish a superior comprehension of literature.

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