

Classification of Literary Theories----in Terms of the World the Text Engages With.



Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper in its present form will discuss the concept of the classification of literary theories in terms of whether they stress the reader, the author, the text itself, or the world the text engages with. It will try to deal with a familiar theory and demonstrate how it emphasizes one of the above four elements; by applying the theory to a literary text.

Introduction

Plato was the first philosopher-scholar who has a formal and systematic shape to criticism. But he was not a professed critic of literature and his critical observations are not embodied in any single work. He was a discerning critic both in poetry and that of philosophy, between the truths of poetry and truths of life; in his attack on poetry he directly discerned the poetic method. In Aristotle's view it is the principle of imitation which unites poetry with the other fine arts. Longinus is the first romantic critic. His vision is large. He constantly views poetry in relation to the author and the time of the author. Dante was the first to make the division of the power of language into 'signum rationale' and 'signum sensual' which is exactly a distinction of 'semantic' and 'phonetic'.

Objectives

The present paper is an attempt to make an analysis of the theory that literary theories may be classified in terms of whether they stress the reader, the author, the text itself or the world the text engages with. Here, illustration will be given choosing a theory that is familiar and demonstration would be done by applying the theory to a literary text.

Methodology

The proposed study is analytical. The method of close reading of the text as devised by the New Critics is followed.

Hypothesis

The proposed paper intends to study and explore the theory of universal appeal and try to demonstrate how it emphasizes the world the text engages with.

Review of related literature

To quote Pro. S. Ramasamy and Prof. Sethuraman "The classical literary tradition, as interpreted by the Italian scholars of the 15th century, formed the basis of the so-called renaissance criticism". One of the phenomenons of 20th century literature is that criticism has blossomed as a separate and autonomous creative genre, proceeding out of the fields of fiction, drama and poetry, but in a sense partaking of a life of its own. The term "impressionistic criticism" may be said to include the work of all critics who bring to the analysis of literature no single method, dogma or principle; but who judge each literary work by the immediate personal impression it produces on the critic. According to the psychological critics, literature at its best demonstrates the universal mythology and symbology which modern Psycho-analysis claims to have discovered. Modern sociological and materialistic critics present literature as a reflection of history, especially of the historical development of economics, technology and class relations. Their concept of characterization in literature portrays the individual as motivated mainly by this environment rather than by his internal will; his destinies are determined by the economic, social, industrial and political processes going on about him.

Statement of the problem

Any literary piece of writing is a work done by the author in order to evaluate his feelings and more precisely his understanding of life. He portrays life as he sees it all around him and so every writer acts as a reformative agent in the society. Now, this universality is exactly what is meant by the phrase the world the text engages with. Any literary text engages with a world and that is the world of the thematic aspect of the writer as well as the reader along with the text itself.

We can elaborate this with an example. Let us take Shakespeare with whom we are familiar. In his drama named King Lear, we can see the world of Lear only containing his daughters, their husbands and some ministers. There are again two plots in the same drama-----the main plot and the sub-plot. The main plot is the one where the story begins and ends and the sub-plot shapes, reshapes and moulds the main-plot. The sub-plot helps to bring in the climax in the main plot.

The story of King Lear in the main plot begins in a scene of the palace where King Lear is found discussing about the distribution of his Kingdom among his three daughters. He was discussing this with Kent, one of his faithful. Kent opposes to his proposal as it would be very whimsical to make a foolish display of his fondness by his daughters. But, as we all know Shakespeares heroes fall due to their own tragic flaw in nature or Hamartia and as such King Lear does not pay a little heed to anyone.

In the court-scene, the King asks his daughters to say about the amount or quantity of love they have for their father. His eldest daughters namely Goneril and Reagan flatter their father to the extreme point in order to please him. But Cordelia his youngest daughter could not do so and her speech could not please King Lear as he loved Cordelia the most and had planned before hand to give away the best and most part of the Kingdom to her. But, to his great surprise Cordelia was unable to flatter his dear father and the King had to condemn her from the country. At that time among her suitors, the King of France married her and took her away to France.

But as ill-luck would have shown it, the King was tortured by the two daughters and he had to run away from his Kingdom as disguised as mad person had to stay here and there in order to save his own life from the evil clutches of his daughters.

At the end of the play, Cordelia comes to her father's rescue but she was hanged to death and the King also died lamenting the death of his beloved daughter. Gloucesters illegitimate son Edward helps the sisters Goneril and Regan in killing both Cordelia and Lear. Many of the characters meet their tragic end one killing the other for revenge and hatred in the main plot as well as in the sub-plots.

Conclusion

In this story of King Lear, the text engages itself with the world around it. The story of Lear is not merely a story (historically)

but it can be found in every society from time to time down the ages. In every time and age man's fall is actually caused due to his own fault and thus it is appealed universally. In this way the theories of literature stresses upon the world the text is involved or engages itself with. The world that is to say, the author, the reader etc., is stressed by the text to think, act and react upon the literary context.

The world of King Lear of Shakespeare lays stress upon the present world of the Lears' of all time to think and act so that they may not fall victim to such embarrassments for their own foolish acts. The text does not give one much relief but on reading the text the reader also at times should think of the remedies to the problems.

Thus, the world the text engages with is emphasized and they may be classified at times under the same.

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