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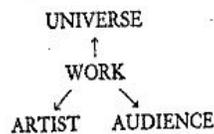
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Four Critical Theories from the view point of M H Abrams

Abstract :

To work on M.H.Abrams is most influential studies in the field of criticism and theory. Till today, the chief tendency of modern criticism is to consider the aesthetic quality in terms of relation of art to the artist. M.H. Abrams in his essay "Orientation of critical Theories" tries to the growth of criticism in relation of art, artist, and audience. Considering a whole work of art, there are four elements which are well distinguished and made important in almost all the theories, first, there is the work, the artistic product itself. Since this is a human product, the next common element is the artist. The work is directly or indirectly related to the universe inclusive of man, material things, events and ideas. The audiences come as the final element. On this frame work of artist, work, universe and audience, M.H. Abrams has spread out various theories for comparison. To make matters easier he has arranged the four elements in a convenient triangular pattern with the work of art, the thing to be explained in the centre.



According to this frame work, M.H.Abrams gives four critical theories i.e. Mimetic, Pragmatic, Expressive, and Objective theories.

Key words: Mimetic, Pragmatic, Expressive, Objective, M.H.Abrams.

INTRODUCTION:

Meyer (Mike) Howard Abrams (born July 23, 1912) is an American literary critic, known for works on Romanticism, in particular his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Contribution of him in the postmodern literary criticism cannot be avoided. Unfortunately, students who are doing research in M.Phil. & Ph.D. they are merely digging more deep on the investigated topics. They know Abrams only in context to glossary. Abrams stands unique because of his four oriental critical theories which cover up entire history of English literary theories and criticism. In literature nothing is existed out of universe, text, artist, and audience. Today we tend to think of the work of art in terms of the artist, who, acting through his powers of imagination, wilfully brings into being his creation. But this artist-centred interpretation of the text is really a more recent development, first seen in the early nineteenth century. As Abrams demonstrates in the "Orientation of Critical Theories" chapter of his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*. From Plato until the late 18th century the artist was thought to play a back-seat role in the creation of art. He was regarded as no more than "a mirror," reflecting nature either as it exists or as it is perfected or enhanced through the mirror. This artist-as-mirror conception remained dominant until the advent of the Romantic era (Abrams sets the date around 1800), when the artist began to make his transformation from "mirror" to "lamp"?- a lamp that actively participates in the object it illuminates.

Literary theory, Abrams holds, can be divided into four categories:

- 1.Mimetic Theory** - which focus on the relationship between text and universe (by "universe" he means all things of the world apart from audience, text and author)
- 2.Pragmatic theory** - which are interested in the relationship between text and audience.
- 3.Expressive theory** -which are concerned with the text-author relationship.
- 4.Objective theory** - the most recent classification, which focus on analysis of the text in isolation.

As Abrams stated above that nothing exists other than universe, text, author and audience, any form of

theory must fit into one of these four categories. Let's see these four critical into details.

1. **Mimetic theory:**

The first category of mimetic theories forms the oldest and is, according to Abrams, the "most primitive" of the four categories. According to this theory, the artist is an imitator of aspects of the observable universe. In *The Republic*, Plato divides his universe into three realms: the realm of ideas, the realm of particulars, and the realm of reflections of particulars (i.e., art and other "shadows"). The realm of reflections of particulars is the furthest removed from the realm of ideas (i.e., "ultimate truth"), and is therefore the lowest ranking of the three realms. Consequently, its practice, namely, mimetic art, is held in low regard. Plato's mentor Socrates seemed to agree with Plato's thesis, as he too ranked the third realm? mimetic art? at the bottom. In his famous analogy of the three beds, Socrates refers to the first bed, Bed 1, as the bed of ideas. Bed 2 is the bed I lie in, the carpenter's bed, which is the bed of the realm of particulars. Bed 3, the bed in the painting, is a representation of a representation of the ideal bed. Thus, being twice removed from the ideal bed, it is the most "untrue" of the three. Aristotle points out, however, that the value of Bed 3 (the painter's bed) is not dependent upon its relation to Bed 1 (the bed of the gods or ideal truth). Art, rather, is independent and should be assessed on its own terms. Aristotle thus frees the text from its relation to the universe to which Plato and Socrates bound it, while still acknowledging the text's imitative relation to universe. Aristotle shows that it is the "manner of imitation" and not the relation to truth which is important in art, and that aesthetic evaluation should be based on the assessment of both the "manner of imitation" and the emotional effect produced in the audience.

2. **Pragmatic theory:**

The second type of theories are pragmatic theories, which are concerned with the relation between text and audience. According to Abrams, these theories have constituted the dominant mode of analysis from Horace to the early 19th century, and much of its terminology is borrowed from ancient rhetoric.

Aristotle argued in his *Ars Poetica* that the three functions of poetry are to teach, to please, and to move. Cicero, the Church Fathers, and the Italian guides all developed a theory of poetry through this reinterpretation of Aristotle, and it was Sir Philip Sydney who in his *Apologie for Poetry* expanded Aristotle's theories into a specifically didactic theory of poetry. Sydney argues that poets differ from historians in that, unlike historians who deal only with what has been, poets also deal with what may be, and that such moral utopianism is what makes poetry, specifically epic poetry, and superior to history.

3. **Expressive theory:**

By 1800, we begin to see "the displacement of mimetic and pragmatic by the expressive view of art," a phenomenon due in part to the writings of Longinus, Bacon, Wordsworth, and, later, the radical Romantics of the 1830s. With this new "expressive view" of art, the primary duty of the artist was no longer to serve as a mirror reflecting outer things, but instead to externalize the internal, and make one's "inner life" the primary subject of art. It is around this time in the early 19th century that the "mirror", which had hitherto been the conventional symbol for the artist, becomes the "lamp".

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CONCLUSION

Abrams clearly identifies himself as a critical theorist, not a philosopher, not a psychologist, not a scientist. From his perspective, the purpose and function of critical theory is not to discover some "verifiable truth" but to "establish principles enabling us to justify, order, and clarify our interpretation and appraisal of the aesthetic.

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