

Romantic or classical



Matthew Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" is a criticism in itself of what great literary artists could have done and what literature could have become. In depth, Arnold's work discusses his critical and personal perspectives on the role of criticism in consequentially transforming not only literature but also the landscape of society positively and constructively as well.

Furthermore, Arnold sought to strengthen his arguments on the matter and present a rebuttal of the various criticisms put forth against his ideas and points of view, and prove that criticisms are of great importance in fuelling creativity and fostering the advancement of literature. However, Arnold implicitly distinguished differences between the positive and constructive types of criticism as compared to the off-putting and unconstructive nature of some criticism.

Arnold argued that "a critic may with advantage seize an occasion for trying his own conscience, and for asking himself of what real service, at any given moment, the practice of criticism either is or may be made to his own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others." (pp. 414) Arnold's arguments on the ideal nature of critics formulated his perspectives on how and when criticisms may be considered valuable.

Under the pretexts of Arnold's arguments, we realize that unless criticisms are aimed towards the greater good – that is, to present censures and critiques for the purpose of fuelling creativity, fostering change and advancement, and ultimately to affect a change that would positively and constructively change the lives of man and the landscape of society – they

are deemed ineffectual or inadequate. Arnold also discussed creativity under the context of developing literature.

Arnold said, “ It is undeniable that the exercise of a creative power, that a free creative activity, is the highest function of man; it is proved to be so by man’s finding in it his true happiness. ” (pp. 414) The multifaceted structure of the human mind allows man to express creativity in so many ways and create different outcomes out of it, such as the expression of creativity through developing criticisms and then consequently formulating good literature.

The excerpt from Arnold’s “ Sweetness and Light,” he explored the dynamics of culture based on the motivations that constitute a part of its bases or foundations. Arnold said, “ Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection. It moves by the force... but also of the moral and social passion for doing good. ” (pp.

427-248) Since Arnold has framed the origins of culture not on mere curiosity, but on man’s desire to seek and create perfection, he said that culture then serves a greater purpose to create positive and constructive change, accomplish human needs, and foster the convalescence of human nature. By and large, the arguments of Arnold meet the standards and dynamics of romantic aesthetics and poetry. Based on Wellek’s discussions on the Classical and Romantic movements, classical poetry was defined as “ poetry for the dead” while romantic poetry was defined as “ poetry for the living.

" (pp. 259) The primary difference between the Classical and Romantic movements that set the distinction between the nature of classical and romantic poetry lies in the major themes that constitute the dynamics of each style. Wellek said, " Ancient religion and the life are past and gone, and hence classical, while for instance, America, discovered in modern times, is romantic. " (pp. 260) Since Arnold's perspectives and arguments were related to the development of the present time, the society, and expansion of human nature, his views on poetry are romantic in nature.

2. Abrams's Theories of Art Abrams' theories on art were primarily tied to the modernist perspective of criticism. In the discussion on the " Orientation of Critical Theories," which were attributed to art, the modernist perspective of viewing, realizing the significance, and interpreting art focused on a single perspective, and that is of the artist, and not on the many factors that exist in art's external environment that contribute criticism and interpretations to it.

The aesthetic theory, as Abrams defined, " displays its full measure of rhetoric and logomachy which seem and inseparable part of man's discourse about all things that really matter... Its aim, however, is not to establish correlations between facts which will enable us to predict the future by reference to the past, but to establish principles enabling us to justify, order, and clarify our interpretation and appraisal of the aesthetic facts themselves. " (pp.

2) Abrams' definition of the aesthetic theory of viewing art leads us to understand that interpreting and labeling meanings on pieces of art should be based on established principles of aesthetics. On the other hand, the critical theory of viewing art " has its own kind of validity... Such a criterion

will, of course, justify not one, but a number of valid theories, all in their several ways of self-consistent, applicable, and relatively adequate to the range of aesthetic phenomena. ” (pp.

3) If the aesthetic theory of poetry lies in the principles and nature of aesthetics as seen on the perspective of the artist, the critical theory of viewing art is dependent on the existence of standards and decisive factors, which literally and actually define the features that make up art and the pennants that define aesthetics. Another theory of art criticism discussed by Abrams is the view of art within four elements or coordinates – the universe, the work, the artist, and the audience.

In this theory, the interpretations of art are oriented in the perspectives of one of the factors within the external environment of art. The pragmatic theory, as opposed to the aesthetic and critical theories of viewing art sees art as a vehicle for the artist’s accomplishment of a higher goal or objective. Art, in this case, becomes a tool utilized to achieve something meaningful to the artist, or even the factors that constitute art’s external environment.

If the pragmatic theory sees art as an instrument to do something, the expressive theory on the other hand, sees art as a vehicle to express the artist’s thoughts and emotions. Art, in this case, is personal that results from the artist’s thoughts and emotion translated to a concrete piece of art. Another theory defined by Abrams is the objective theory of viewing art. This particular theory focuses on the facts and standards of art.

The act of viewing art is by looking at the art in itself, and not considering the thoughts and perspectives contributed by the factors existing in its external environment. Art, in this case, is seen and interpreted as is. Based

on the definitions of Abrams of the different theories of viewing art, Eliot's poetry subscribes the orientation of perspectives and interpretations of art to the four factors elements of coordinates of art, specifically the perspectives and interpretations of the audience, while Hulme's poetry subscribes to the expressive and pragmatic theories of art criticism.

Eliot himself defined the views and perspectives of art as something that should be personal and experienced by the audience, that is because the audience "enjoy the poetry" and not because the audience "acquired the scholarship" to appreciate art. (Schofield, pp. 1) Hulme's poetry, on the other hand, was defined as an instrument to express language that is real, affecting or appealing to human emotions. (Comentale & Gasiorrek, pp. 98) 3. Abram's Theories in Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction"

Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction" is an exploration of the features of art and literature from the past until present time, which sets apart classical art and literature and the modern representations of art and literature. Woolf discussed the two arguments on the difference between the concrete art and literature materials that constitute the classical and modernist perspectives, but ultimately admired the simplicity yet timelessness of classical works on art and literature.

Woolf said, that the works of classical artists or writers "certainly have a strange air of simplicity" but were representations of "accomplishments that we can scarcely refrain from whispering that the fight was not so fierce for them as for us" considering the complexity and the demands of writing in our modern world. (Woolf) Certainly, there is something about the features of the classical perspectives on art and literature that allow them to withstand

the passage of time and modernity, that is “ the flesh of their work has a living, breathing, everyday imperfection which bids us take liberties with it we choose.

” (Woolf) Woolf continues to set the distinction between the classical and modern literature in order to construct the framework of the foundations of modern literature that makes it incomparable to the eminence and distinction awarded to classical arts and literature. However, Woolf ascertained one thing, and that is, the dynamics and position of modern literature is still uncertain as compared to the solid standing of classical literature.

After all, Woolf said, “ We only know that certain gritudes and hostilities inspire us, that certain paths seem to lead to fertile land, others to the dust and the desert, and of this perhaps it may be worthwhile to attempt some account. ” (“ Modern Fiction”) By this, Woolf meant that art and literature is something unprompted and natural, which are borne out of the creativity of artists or literary writers. At this point, the foundations of modern literature have been presented as something that is compliant and accommodating to the artist or literary writer.

While on the other hand, classical art and literature remains as forceful and influential because it talks about the realities of life. This feature or characteristic of classical art and literature seem to blur the standing or position of modern art and literature because its dynamics cannot be contained in a single word of definition due to its compliance to various factors, and that is on the varying perspectives of modern artists and writers. Woolf said, “ this may be, the problem before the novelist at present, as we

suppose it to have been in the past, is to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses.

He has to have the courage to say that what interests him is not longer ‘ this’ but ‘ that’: out of ‘ that’ alone must he construct his work. ” (“ Modern Fiction”) In simpler terms, the desire and inclination of modern artists and literary writers to present something that deviates from established classical arts and literature become the problems and difficulties that challenge their courage and capability to present artistic and literary works set against the backdrop of our modern world.

Based on the thoughts and points of view discussed by Woolf in “ Modern Fiction,” we realize that it subscribes to the expressive theory and the coordinates of art criticism, specifically on the varying perspectives of art and literature from the viewpoint of the artist, the audience, and society or the world. Woolf has comprehensively discussed how modern literature constitutes the individual and unique expression of the artist or the writer, according to his personal perspectives and interest that deviate from established standards from the classical movement.

4. Modernism The emergence of modernism as a trend in arts and literature, which consequently influenced the changes in the cultural and aesthetic identities in the West, was as Lewis put it, “ has been gradual and imperceptible. ” (“ De Descriptione Temporum”) However, as a means to discuss how the world has suddenly witnessed the inception of modernist perspectives, Lewis explored the fusion between the Medieval and Renaissance movements that have brought about changes in the culture and aesthetic identities of society as a whole.

Lewis said that although the force and influence of modernism was unnoticed by many, it may be felt or realized by contrasting society's culture and aesthetic identities with the culture and aesthetic identities of the past. Lewis continues to reiterate that the changes and transformations that we see at present time were borne out of the continuous evolution of the past. Therefore, it was safe for Lewis to say that our culture and aesthetic identities at present time were a fusion between the Medieval and Renaissance movements that evolved and continually changed through the passage of time.

As Lewis said, " nothing is quite new; it was always somehow anticipated or prepared for. " (" De Descriptione Temporum") From Lewis' discussions, we understand that between the periods of time as defined by the author, that is in a metaphorical sense " Between Jane Austen and us, but not between her and Shakespeare, Chaucer, Alfred, Virgil, or the Pharaohs, comes the birth of the machines.

" (" De Descriptione Temporum")I believe that beyond Lewis' thoughts and perspectives on the matter, the persistent creativity and conscious and curious nature of human beings have progressively influenced the shift in the culture and aesthetic identity in the West. In Scott's book " Refiguring Modernism: Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West, and Barnes," the author's definition of modernism was similar to Lewis' discussions on how the continuous evolution of culture and aesthetic identities through the passage of time have been the precursor to modernism.

According to Scott, the inception of modernism is similar to a spider web. " The spider's actions of repeatedly attaching, launching out into the unknown,

and landing for the next anchoring point suggests agency, poly valence, and the ability to make selective use of existing structures, or to seek new ones – not all of them man-made. ” (Scott, pp. xv) What Scott meant was that growth and development is a natural part of life. Man is continually learning, which consequently influences the introduction of new theories and ideas that are integrated into man’s way of life and nature.

Therefore, the changes in culture and aesthetic identities are brought about the desire of man to make something more out of art and his creativity. This same inclination of human nature to change and look to transform culture and aesthetic identities have been the same reason for the formation of different periods in time, from the Medieval to the Renaissance in the West, and so on. Lewis said, “ our assumption that everything is provisional and soon to be superseded, that the attainment of goods we have never yet had, rather than the defence and conservation of those we have already, is the cardinal business of life.

” (“ De Descriptione Temporum”) The transformation of the Old Western Culture and aesthetic identities during that period of time to modernism, may then be defined as a fusion of man’s desire to reveal or express change that is meant to overpower the existing cultural, social, and political landscape of society during that time to develop a more progressive and vanguard culture and aesthetic identity that sets itself as a better society than the past.

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