



Biographical Approach: Useful in Interpreting Individual Literary Work(The Intension of the Author Becomes a Guarantee for the Authenticity of Meaning of His Work).

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Abstract:

The present paper attempts how biographical approach is extremely useful in interpreting individual literary texts and gives originality, authority and authenticity of the literary work of any writer. The Western Theory of art has a history of over twenty five hundred years. This long history of literary theory has given shape to very large number of theories which are sometimes mutually incompatible. The number of critical approaches, their use and validity could present an especially difficult problem for the students of literary criticism. That's why main purpose of this paper is to focus on the biographical approach tends to relate the work to the life of the author and facilitate the way to understand literary work properly.

Biographical approach draws the attention of the readers from main content to the individual information of the writer but it gives immense interpretation of his work. This approach is one of the oldest and best established methods of literary study. It means that this approach sees a literary work chiefly, as a reflection of its author's life and personality or the life and the personality of the character in the work. This method is based on biographical details of the writer and it tries to examine the meaning of the literary work in the light of these details.

Most of the times some authors are criticized for their personal reflection in their work. But I would like to state here that if you want to get the meaning of any literary work thoroughly, read the background information of author. Because this approach even gives you nature and purpose or function of literary production. His literary work is the creation of his own feelings, personality and thoughts in his mind which he wants to put on the page. Hence, a certain understanding of the author's life and personality can be seen as an essential requirement for a proper understanding of the meaning of the work. It also follows that a literary work does not fall from 'the heavens', but this creation in the mind of the author and so a proper understanding of the work involves a study of the author's life and time.

One important thing which I bring in the light that 'God is the Creator of the World' and similar way this approach considers the 'Author is the Creator the work' and hence the meaning and purpose of the work as inseparable from the author's intention. And finally in literary criticism, the intention of the author becomes a guarantee for the authenticity of the meaning. In many cases the readers of this method seem to equate originality, authority and authenticity with the origin and in literary matters this sacred origin appears to be the author.

So, I mention here one thing that throughout the 19th century biographical approach persisted as the most dominant and unchallenged method in literary criticism. It was regarded as standard to measure

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the literary work of author. Even for the readers of the work, it was one approach to understand the literary work permanently in their minds. For instance, one can trace the origin of a number of definitive literary and critical pronouncements of the Romantic Period in some of the assumptions held by the biographical approach. Thus the definition of poetry by Wordsworth as “A spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, It takes its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility” is certainly with this view of literature as a mode of self expression. If art is seen as a mode of self expression. It is only natural to demand that the critic should examine the self of the artist in deciding the meaning of his work.

So, I think whatever may be its limitation this approach seems particularly fruitful while dealing with authors whose works have been biographical in nature. Now a days it is trend of writers to provide the detail evidence of their lives. Because authors have become self conscious and left many autobiographical statements that function as original meaning and source of work. Indeed, the biographical approach is even invited and demanded by the Romantic poet, who writes about himself and his innermost feelings. Most of them spoke of themselves not only in private letters, diaries and autobiographies but also in their formal pronouncement. e.g. Wordsworth's 'Prelude' is evidently an autobiography and it has to be read as such clue to understand other works. In such cases the biographical details not merely at to the reader's understanding, but appear to be absolutely necessary in understanding and evaluating poetry.

In the paper, I present this approach as a useful method to study literary work to students, teachers and standard to the critics to evaluate it. There are abundant instances in literature where the biographical approach has been extremely useful in interpreting about life and time/period of Byron can undoubtedly contribute to understanding of his poetry. Another example a sonnet like Milton's “On his Blindness” appears, more meaningful when one reads it with the biographical information that poet became blind when he was about fifty. The anguish of the poet and his efforts as seeking a religious solace appear meaningful when reader considers the biographical details of Milton.

Biographical approach to literature suggests that knowledge of the author's life experience can help in understanding of his or her work. Sometimes I admit here that biographical information can complicate one's interpretation of a work, but this complication of interpretation enable the readers to get detail background of the author that interprets the meaning of literary text. To this approach it was T. S. Eliot who set aside first in his famous essay, 'Tradition and Individual Talent' and he was supported later by I. A. Richards experiment of 'Practical Criticism' (1929)

In spite of this adverse criticism of T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, biographical approach remained a significant mode of literary inquiry throughout the 20th century particularly in studies of well known Victorian novelist Charles Dickens, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sylvia Plath (Confessional Poet) American poet Robert Frost, Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats and well known Award winner American writer Hemingway were important because of their literary work.

So we should have to remember that not fully but in the relation of some well known literary work biographical approach is an important source to interpret it. I would like to say that the application of the biographical approach to literature proper to poetry, drama, fiction brings out certain critical issues. e.g. literature which is predominantly biographical, not directly but indirectly at least author peeps into literary work as his one good achievement and expects to reflect himself in his own work not deliberately but naturally he attracts towards it and it becomes subjective in manner.

Let us consider some prominent examples of literary work that are subjective and demand the biographical information to interpret fully.

1) Sylvia Plath's poems (confessional poetry), we have to be cautious in interpreting and evaluating the poems. As a confessional poet she has reflected herself in the most of her literary work especially poetry. Her poems are directly personal in content, So in the case of such literary work we should evaluate the art of poetry and not look at the content or subject matter in the light of the poets biographical details. Sylvia Plath's “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus” are full of references to her marriage with the British poet “Ted Hughes”, the resultant unhappiness, her mental breakdown, her three attempts of suicide and her subsequent death. So I think these sensational details may help the readers to understand the hidden or connotative meaning of her work. Biographical approach or reference should not affect the proper evaluation of the poet's quality. But unfortunately some critics criticize this approach to apply the literary work to interpret it saying that it neglects literary qualities but it is not true.

2) Wordsworths, S. T. Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron were important in the Romantic Period because of their personal lives, not because of their poetry.

3) Ernest Hemingway, American novelist's novels have been studied mainly in the content of his personal life, from his early 'Nick Adams' short stories to his later classic, 'The old Man and The sea'. But unfortunately some critics have been given undue importance in his criticism to Hemingway's Hero for quite some time. The real Hemingway is in his writing; it is not the author but the novels should always matter among the critics.



4) Charles Dickens: Victorian novelist without doubt one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian age. He is the representative novelist of his age. Personally he was involved in various social activities as he got details about various sectors such as child labour, serious prison conditions, educational problems, legal problems etc. He was so much suffered in his own life and so finally he harnessed his pen for the amelioration of the pathetic conditions of the various problems in society, where people have to face. So when we get the detail biographical information of Charles Dickens and his life experiences, we can easily interpret his all literary works.

Thus, biographical approach is helpful to interpret the meaning of literary text. There are also some demerits of this approach such as it cannot be used indiscriminately, it is not applicable to the ancient authors to interpret the meaning, it is not taken as pure self experience, it is always personal; it ignores simple psychological facts etc.

However, in spite of its limitation, the biographical approach has played a crucial role in the history of literary criticism.

KEYWORDS :

Authenticity, Pronouncement, Spontaneous, Confessional, Amelioration

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