

Literary Scholarship, Literary Criticism: What's in a Name?

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Abstract

The use of the term 'literary scholarship' or 'literary studies' by workers and researchers in literary phenomena is not always reflexive, and pointing back at the *literary* as the direct object of the intellectual activity. This is not new, but goes a long way back to the first introduction of modern literature in Anglo-American university studies, and is part of the heritage of humanist philosophy. This paper is an enquiry about theory in literary studies, and therefore will look into a number of philosophical and theoretical accounts of literary phenomena to draw materials to substantiate the argument that at its core, literary scholarship or literary theory has an account of what literature consists of. This knowledge of the essential nature of literature, which is that it is art – of a certain kind, namely mimesis by means of language alone is what should guide the selection of works that are taught and researched in formal studies of literature.

Keywords: Aristotelianism, English studies, humanism, literary art, literary criticism, literary theory, the novel

1. Introduction

English studies was a humanist foundation in Nigeria. In both the University of Ibadan and the University of Nigeria, the oldest of the universities, literary studies was housed in the Department of English, and the approach to literature was Arnoldian humanism, and literature as 'a criticism of life' – 'the end and aim of all literature, if one considers it attentively' (Arnold 249) – was the central doctrine. Of course, the department of English as the domicile of literary studies was more or less the norm in the Anglo-American university tradition at the time; hence the American John Crowe Ransom was to state in his 'Criticism Inc.' that it is from the professors of literature, in this country,

the professors of English for the most part, that I should hope eventually for the erection of intelligent standards of criticism' (229). In Ransom's view, what was going on as literary scholarship was not 'intelligent criticism', and needed to be substituted. He was to go on to author a book that gave a name to a new movement in literary studies called 'the New Criticism'.

Today in Nigeria that question of 'intelligent criticism' apparently has not gone away. Scholars, however, continue to publish essays in literary journals without a sense of anything being amiss. And there are so-called 'literary theories' which drive these essays. Some of these 'theories' were in use in 1937 when Professor John Crowe Ransom published his 'Criticism, Inc.' and called them in the essay *diversionary*. According to him in 1937, 'The most important recent diversion from the orthodox course of literary studies was that undertaken by the New Humanists' (230). Marxism was another. The common trait of these *diversionary* engagements is that they 'were, and are, moralists; more accurately, historians and advocates of a certain moral system' (231). Some of the Nigerian universities have made changes in what used to cover 'English studies', presumably to give a clearer representation to the content of their programme as comprising English language studies and literature study. There may also have been an intention to be politically correct, as the national education policy had also created a divide between literature and English, giving the pride of place to English language. But whether the outcome of the self-questioning that took place within the discipline in the middle part of the twentieth century in the West has been taken onboard is open to question.

The demand for an 'intelligent criticism' was in fact to give rise to much brain-storming and theoretic discourse especially in America, but with mixed results. For example, what Ransom called *diversionary* because it paid lip service to the literary work, only to take off towards something that seemed to it more important, more pertinent and relevant to life to which the literary work and art itself must minister, or failing that stand down. This is very much in evidence in the practice of literary scholarship in Nigeria today. Some other contemporaries of Professor Ransom who found a challenge in the direct object of criticism toiled for an instrument of analysis of this object. Enquiries into the tools and methods of studying literature proliferated, both in the aspect of the *diversions* and literary theory itself. The path that Nigerian literary scholarship subsequently took seems to have been overwhelmingly the pursuit of things of importance which literature could be shown to provide a path to, not literature itself, although this was the very thing that provided the content of the academic discipline. If the alarm has been raised, and as Terry Eagleton puts it, yet 'such acts continue today, apparently in all their traditional confidence, [it] is doubtless a sign that the crisis of the critical institution has either not been deeply enough registered, or is being actively evaded' (Preface).

Organized Body of Knowledge

The need that Ransom is speaking about in his ‘Criticism, Inc.’ was probably first identified by the Formalists in Russia (1914-1916). Some of the first to take it up in America were the Aristotelians of the University of Chicago. It arose because although literature was, and has remained part and parcel of culture, and its public, according to Arnold Kettle, is divided between the elite and the masses, and their opposed interests and tastes:

‘good’ literature is (not unfairly) associated in the minds of millions with obscurity, affectation and all the intellectual and social snobbery of high-browism, while popularity has ceased to be an issue with the majority of serious writers and is even regarded with suspicion and contempt (64).

There are ‘serious’ writers; and there are ‘popular’ writers. And their productions are held in mutual disdain by their respective audiences. However, since the novel had also become a matter for academic study in a university setting, where it could not be that “‘good’ literature’ was automatically acceptable and deserving of study, while ‘popular literature’ was not, and since novels were not being accepted indifferently into the curriculum, how was the choice being made what to include and what to exclude? It was not enough that there should be a standard for ascertaining worth – worth, strictly defined for purposes of research and teaching, that standard needed to be objectively and transparently established. There could still be individual scholars who believed that their ideas were not to be confined to the classroom, but should also guide the general public in using that publicly available resource.

But Eagleton was to observe ruefully in the 1980s that:

criticism today lacks all substantive social function. It is either part of the public relations branch of the literary industry, or a matter wholly internal to the academies (Preface).

His preferred position is that criticism should be sustained as a social function; as such it can be nothing but what is recommended as beneficent to the public, a ‘type of unpaid public relations, part of the requirements in any large corporate undertaking’ (Eagleton107, quoting Peter Hohendahl). Given the complicity between the social functioning of criticism and ‘the public relations branch of the literary industry’, criticism as determined by Eagleton is secretly an affiliate of the industry-owning class, and propagator of their values. It leaves us with another determination of criticism, the one we are concerned with in this paper, which is ‘a matter wholly internal to the academies’. This is the criticism that Northrop Frye calls ‘science, ‘not a “pure” or “exact” science, of course’, but as a knowledge department, ‘no one doubts that scientific principles are involved’. It is this scientific element, that is, its systematic methods in accumulating and transmitting knowledge about

some specific *object*, that ‘distinguishes it from literary parasitism on the one hand, and the superimposed critical attitude on the other. The presence of science in any subject changes its character from the casual to the causal, from the random and intuitive to the systematic, as well as safeguarding the integrity of that subject from external invasions’ (7).

In spite of Frye, however, and the neo-Aristotelians and the New Critics, the professional community in the Anglo-American tradition has not chosen, apparently, to take a clear stand on criticism between social functionality and the ‘matter wholly internal to the academies’. In Nigerian professional practice – and the signs of active encouragement from the West are everywhere in evidence, the attitude is somewhat harder on the side of social functionality, for when it took on African literature tended to go with Ngara who holds that ‘the African critic cannot see himself in isolation from the African politician, philosopher, theologian, or educator, all of whom are looking for African solutions to their problems’ (6). This African approach not only hardened over time, but also appears to have been increasingly in favour of breaking away from the business of the academy as such in everything but in name, concerned solely with the ‘question which, with the immense field of life and of literature lying before him, the critic has to answer; for himself first, and afterwards for others’ (Arnold 14). Currently, there are but few Nigerian universities with a ‘Department of English’, as in the old days. Some are departments of Literature and English, some of English and Literary Studies.

Academic disciplines are usually identified by the body of knowledge they cultivate, like physics, ‘an organized body of knowledge about nature’ (Northrop Frye 11). For this reason, he objects to calling the discipline concerned with the organizing of a body of knowledge about literature by the name of ‘literature’, and argues rather that ‘Art, like nature, has to be distinguished from the systematic study of it, which is criticism’ (11). He does highlight a point here that tends to be forgotten, or perhaps to be avoided, by Nigerian and African academics working in the field, namely that literature is art, that the semantic content of the notion ‘literature’ is this specific hyperonym *art* (see Sandor Hervey). It is an object that can be studied systematically; and this systematic study, whether the art be music, painting, sculpture, or literature is what is called *criticism*.

The ‘systematic study may, of course, be distinguished from the ‘organized body of knowledge’ and ‘the intelligent standards of criticism’ by means of which the systematic study is carried out. ‘Criticism’, therefore, has tended to be thought of in terms of an operation, corresponding to the systematic study. The organized body of knowledge corresponds to what the Formalists called literary science.

Frye’s use of physics is not entirely fortuitous, for it shares with poetics, as with mathematics, the end morpheme -ics derived from the Greek -ikē that marks an organized intellectual activity. Accordingly, his understanding of

criticism as the organized body of knowledge about art rests in classicism, and specifically in Aristotle's *Poetics* (*Peri poietikē*), sidestepping the humanism which had sought to lower the bar from the level of intellectual culture to the everyday in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Some scholars think that literature is too important a matter to be left to the experts, but we still leave surgery to the experts, although having or not having it might make the difference between life and death. There is no doubt that people make use of literature however they think they can, whether to search for a motto for life, for titbits for self-nourishment as Arnold suggests, or a means for justifying violence, or exclusion, or racial supremacy, or whatever. But the reason why it is assigned an academic discipline and housed as one among others of a similar kind in a university is not for the study of these uses that can both go to infinity and conflict among themselves and violate reason itself. The extent of possibilities is beyond what any rule or a combination of rules can account for. It is with the rules that explain the object itself, the work of art, that the discipline is concerned, and the investigation of this object to understand it. This is what we see in Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example. The everyday interest is referenced approvingly in Eagleton, while the academic cultivating of verifiable knowledge is rather scorned. For the vast majority of readers of literary productions, their possible uses are expectedly the focus of interest. The academic readers must be the minority – and that is a good thing, just as pharmaceutical knowhow pertains to a few compared to the users of the products. But whereas the tastes of the public change, often as new attractions are supplied, the academic professionals usually continue to revisit the literary productions judged to be art, and take interest in the new attractions in search of literary objects that demand sustained study. This activity is what Heidegger calls *preserving* of art works, and it is a vital cultural function, especially for 'their own native sphere' (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 39). But it is not the attitude of the collector that is meant:

The more solitarily the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open that such a work *is*, and the more essentially is the extraordinary thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down. But this multiple thrusting is nothing violent, for the more purely the work is itself transported into the openness of beings—an openness opened by itself—the more simply does it transport us into this openness and thus at the same time transport us out of the realm of the ordinary. To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work. Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created be the work that it is. This letting the work be a work we call the preserving of the work. It is only for such preserving that the work yields itself in its createdness as actual, i.e., now: present in the manner of a work (64).

Roland Barthes notion of 'the death of the author' is in fact an old idea in

the philosophical tradition going back at least to Hegel. It is encountered here in Heidegger's remark that 'the more solitarily the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings', the more manifestly clear that there *is* a work of art. The author-names commonly displayed on covers and title pages of modern literary works are often treated by readers as keys for use in accessing the work – we note, of course, that the formulation 'accessing the work' puts on its head the real dynamic of the reading event as Heidegger describes it above, namely that it is 'to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work'. Reading 'transport[s] us out of the realm of the ordinary', or as Robert Jauss puts it, 'negates the real interests of [the reader's] everyday world', thereby he/she 'attains an "aesthetic attitude"'.

But granted that the vast majority of literary artworks come along with their authors' names, still there are some like *Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – as there are indeed oral poems and folktales whose authorships are unknown, and yet perfectly readable. Academic study of a work of art, that is, devoted reading, is to this end: letting 'the work yield[] itself in its createdness as actual'. The literary work of art is first and foremost a totality: it *is*. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is shown to comprise a certain number of components which are held together in organic unity, so that *it is*, means that it is one object, one action, whole and complete. To properly see it, as Heidegger brings out above, one must proceed without presuppositions: the work discloses itself in the openness of beings, and the reader has the role of an observer – we may say, therefore, a phenomenological reader, for it is only such that has no vested interest in trying to appropriate the work on behalf of one personal or group project or another, but will let it yield itself 'in its createdness as actual'. In disclosing itself, it simultaneously discloses a world in which time is the time of the work, and so also space. Thus, the work brings the reader into its own world – instead of the other way around – its world where nothing is mediated, but speaking is taking place, and action as well. Only its preservers may have the commitment 'to stay within the truth that is happening in the work'. The devoted reading that can lead to this is not what can be expected of everyday readers who are searching for something in the work, sometimes just entertainment or diversion, a message or some 'consumable'.

Northrop Frye calls the academic discipline we are concerned with *criticism*, which puts the accent on an event, *judging*, *deciding* by explicit methods that the critic has before him or her an art object. And the tools at the critic's disposition for this task he calls 'an organized and systematic body of knowledge', a *science*, which echoes the formalist notion of a 'literary science'.

Criticism, like art, is a word not greatly favoured in the writings of Nigerian professionals in the field, but it needs to be stressed that it is at the centre of the profession's engagement – and not in Eagleton's sense of 'public relations', although this is quite an interesting word, and seems to capture an attitude and a mood relevant to what is being done in the name of literary scholarship. In fact, it frequently occurs in PhD theses and sometimes in journal articles that the scholar's aim is to 'raise awareness' about a specific social or political problem, and then as part of the Conclusion, recommendations on the ways in which the political authorities should respond and deal with specific identified social problems. But the conception of 'literature' or 'literary studies' is rarely as the name of a discipline, the same way that 'English' stands as the name of an academic engagement in which one studies how English works, what things are called in English, the English sound system, the rules for combining these names to create sentences, how these sentences may be interpreted, and so forth. The other half of the programme, the literary, is either speculating about history or culture, political or social/sociological issues, or ethics and public morality, areas in which he is no more knowledgeable than the next man.

Literary Scholarship

The study of literature is associated with a whole raft of subjects including artist personalities (like *Chinua Achebe* by C. L. Innes), the sources of inspiration and influences on the artists; their target audiences, style and stylistics; the life preoccupations and engagements of the artists (Like David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic*), the environments where they grew up (works like *Chinua Achebe's World* by Robert Wren), or a singular achievement (like Chinwe Okechukwu's *Achebe the Orator*). These can involve deep research and generate genuine knowledge to be cultivated in a department of literary studies. They may play some role in the central task of the discipline, which is criticism, but not a substitute for it. Ransom makes an interesting list of what he says are 'not criticism' ; namely Personal registrations, which are 'declarations of the effect of the art-work upon the critic as reader'; Synopsis and paraphrase; historical studies, which 'include studies of the general literary background; author's biography, of course with special reference to autobiographical evidences in the work itself; bibliographical items; the citation of literary originals and analogues, and therefore what, in general, is called comparative literature'; linguistic studies; moral studies; and 'any other special studies which deal with some abstract or prose content taken out of the work. Nearly all departments of knowledge may conceivably find their own materials in literature, and take them out' (235-236). The study of ideas and issues of interest in a book, for instance, can be engaging. But these are not of interest to the discipline as such, as they can also

be found in newspaper stories, television episodes and serials, films, home videos, political speeches, sermons, and a vast range of media. What may make them of interest to a critic is that they are involved in the making of an art work – and for that reason cease to be worth discussing for their own sake.

Today in Nigerian literary scholarship, there are new historicists, post-colonial advocacy, and advocacies of many different sorts, without any evidence or a clear demonstration that the work presented as the primary text in the study is a work of art. This demonstration about the art-nature of the object of study belongs properly to criticism. Increasingly, stories of the kind where the issues of the moment in the sociopolitical world are preferred by the commentators writing for literary journals, which in turn lead to more of the same sort of stories being produced. Vibrant criticism, with the capacity to identify and analyse literary works precisely as literary works of art naturally produces the opposite effect, that is works that task the critical mind, works that do not fade away and become dated over time like in the fashion industry. Indeed, works of the kind can sometimes be ‘difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing’, as Foucault phrases it (327), but in the current mood of literal mindedness may just be put down as an example of how not to write a novel or a poem.

What some have called ‘the age of theory’ was the search for ‘the critical idiom’ as John Drakakis phrases it, that would be adequate for characterizing literary art as such, but there were also internal pressures coming from the art world itself; for example, the explosion in novel production to the effect that the other forms were beginning to look like distant and unrelated things, as if it needed a theory specific and adequate to it. Commonly these focused on the historical junctures that were appropriate for their formation, as in Lukács’s *Theory of the Historical Novel*, where writing is premised on:

a homogeneous world, [such that] even the separation between man and world, between ‘I’ and ‘you’, cannot disturb its homogeneity. Like every other component of this rhythm, the soul stands in the midst of the world; the frontier that makes up its contours is not different in essence from the contours of things: it draws sharp, sure lines, but it separates only relatively, only in relation to and for the purpose of a homogeneous system of adequate balances (32-33).

Other theories focused on the materials out of which novels were made, the apparent logic of their construction and cohesion, preoccupations, and their provenance. On provenance, for example, a French novel, an English novel, and in our own time an African novel were presupposed to have specific features deriving from their place of origin, while a Victorian novel or an eighteenth century novel was presumed to carry the imprint of the age which was part and parcel of its character.

This pattern of thinking resulted in proliferation of classificatory concepts:

war novels, novels of apartheid, dramas of interpersonal conflict, traditional festive drama, the bourgeois novel, political novels, aristocratic drama, middle class aesthetics, and so forth, as well as proliferation of approaches to literature, particularly, the novel, and a loose understanding of the concept of theory. According to Judith Ryan, for instance:

Throughout most of the period following World War II, 'literary theory' referred to the systematic study of literature, including both its nature and its function. It involved categorizing intrinsic features such as style, imagery, narrative modes, genre, and the like. Some studies of literary theory also paid attention to extrinsic aspects of literature, such as its relation to various contexts, and to different angles of approach that could be taken to understand literary texts (1-2).

Using theory 'as a blanket category' (2), reduces its value as a term, and with everything in one basket, it is hard to know the relative standing of one to the others. However, it seems awkward that for one and the same object – if indeed we are dealing with the same object, there should be so many theories. And so, there is a possibility that some of those amount to what Ransom had called diversions. Ryan notes that 'many of these theories emerged from history and the social sciences rather than the humanities'. Lowry Pei was to draw the consequence that something was likely to be lost in all this; for there were forays into:

psychology, theology, political theory, philosophy, linguistics ... [it is] not difficult to extend the list. We have Marxist criticism, Freudian criticism, structuralist criticism – once upon a time there were historical criticism and biographical criticism – more schools than I need name exist and are coming into being; but in each case the adjective that precedes 'criticism' is more important than any text. Marxist or Freudian or anthropological or feminist or Christian thought, the critic takes for granted, is more important than the single work of art. But I want to ask. What happens if we try to focus on literature itself? (41-42)

What gets lost is the work of art and the discourse appropriate to it, namely criticism, while the critic is concentrating 'an amateur way of engaging another discipline' (Pei 41). Whether it is psychoanalysis or history, or linguistics, and so forth, there are experts who have the knowhow, the tools of research, and the appropriate material to study and account for the specific phenomenon in question. The same ought to apply to the literary scholar. There is a proper object, a literary work of art, or as Aristotle calls it, a *poem*, and there ought to be a certain expertise and knowhow required to deal with it. This object is not less important than the object of a historian or a linguist. As a matter of fact, as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger sees it, the literary object comes before all other human productions:

Poetry is the foundation which supports history, and therefore it is not a mere appearance of culture, and absolutely not the mere 'expression' of a 'culture-

soul'.... [It] is the inaugural naming of being and of the essence of all things—not just any speech, but that particular kind which for the first time brings into the open all that which we then discuss and deal with in everyday language. Hence poetry never takes language as a raw material ready to hand, rather it is poetry which first makes language possible.... [The] primitive language ... in which being is established (*Existence and Being* 306-307).

German philosophers going back at least to Hegel continue to give accounts of poetry which should give critics pause. Of course, Hegel has been called 'the greatest irrationalist in the history of philosophy' (Lukács 18). The difference is that Heidegger is proceeding in a phenomenological way. In the above, for instance, he brings out what is absolutely clear, that poetry *manifests* language, by virtue of which it makes all the various productions of language possible. And so, 'the essence of language must be understood through the essence of poetry' (307).

The way, however, in which poetry manifests language is by creating art, by weaving words into a work of art, whose organic vitality becomes manifest 'as the work sets itself back ... into the naming power of words' (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 45). Whether the theory industry is talking about history, style, theology, Marxism, or Freudianism, the interest is to bring out what the novel – it is often the novel – is saying, and the weight of the demonstration is the showing that this is what the novel is actually saying, and there is no adverting to the fact that being a work of art has something to do with the expressiveness of the novel; for instance that two readers can hear the work differently, without either being necessarily in error.

The Nature of Art

The New Critics were but one school in the age of theory. The other main one was neo-Aristotelianism. They emphasized different aspects of the literary, the New Criticism focusing on 'ambiguity, irony, paradox and "tension" in literary works, the semantic definition proposed that literary discourse was distinctive for possessing a high degree of "implicit meaning" or "semantic density"' (Lamarque 329), but with an 'insistence on the text as an ultimately self-sufficient artefact' (Emig 188), while the neo-Aristotelians sought 'an instrument adapted to dealing with poetry as such' (Abrams 26), emphasized the concepts of plot, character, theme in their critical analyses and built systems out of these. The New Criticism movement was to run out of steam in the late 1950s. Neo-Aristotelianism lasted longer, and according to Habermas in a paper of 1980, it 'enjoys a certain success today' (1758). A clear aspect of the long-term impact is the introduction of 'literary theory' in the programmes of many departments of English, literature, and literary studies. Another long-term impact is the application of theory loosely to any generalization about literature based on what is necessarily a limited corpus. Whereas physical

sciences can proceed by way of such inferences, inference from even one literary work, if it is one indeed, may occur only by strict selection from the text, and consigning everything else to silence. Inference has to be backed by open and transparent assessment for the ‘plausibility argument’ to apply. A more important problem is that ‘theories’ based on what texts register or enunciate can only speak for a very small number of texts, as the possibilities of enunciation and registration are infinite. Accordingly, post-colonial hybridity, Marxist class struggle, historicism/new historicism monitoring registration of contemporary historical realities and place names, and so forth are taught as literary theories insofar as the features and trends may be made out in some literary works.

However, a literary theory in the strict sense has in view the entirety of the literary field, irrespective of provenance or form, genre or historical epoch. Such is the general statement that lies at the heart of *Poetics*. The course on literary theory should similarly be organized around a theory or theories that offer an account of the entire phenomenon of literary, and closely follow the evolution of literary history for updates and significant departures.

The nature of art is the central problem of literary theory. It is a kind of statement from which ‘the form or matrix for descriptive statements can be derived’ (Mulder 10). When we speak of literary studies, the work of the first order of importance is Aristotle’s *Poetics* of which the opening chapter yields as a distillate about poetry that we are dealing with *mimesis by means of language alone*. All the major statements of the *Poetics*, and the minor ones as well derive from this notion. Some of the major ones are that poetic art is of one of three forms, lyric, drama, and narrative and the modes are either tragic or comic; the poem to is composed, and in terms of organic structure has a muthos, character, words, and thought, and may have melody and spectacle as well. The major constituent parts – the organic elements – can be shown to give rise to further subdivisions. This breakdown and the following of the strands in their full implications is the core of literary studies, the essential knowledge cultivated and transmitted by the discipline.

Also essential for literary studies is reflection on the nature of the work of art, with special reference to literary art. The relevant philosophical principle is *agree sequitur esse* – literally, ‘action follows being’, namely ‘the action posited gives information about the nature of the being behind the action’. In much of what has been called literary theory, the poem is taken as a discourse event or even as straightforward communication, and the presupposition is that the necessary discourse elements are in place. Thus the literary work is read in a transactional manner:

Language *re-produces* reality. This is to be understood in the most literal way: reality is produced anew by means of language. The speaker recreates the event and his experience of the event by his discourse. The hearer grasps the discourse first, and through this discourse, the event which is being reproduced. Thus the

situation inherent in the practice of language, namely that of exchange and dialogue, confers a double function on the act of discourse; for the speaker it represents reality, for the hearer it recreates that reality (Benveniste 22).

For some, reading is a pure process of reception, ‘characterized as pragmatic and aims to act upon the hearer to indicate a behavior to him’ (237). The task of ‘indicating a behaviour’ to members of the public from ‘the immense field of life and of literature’ is assigned by Emmanuel Obiechina to ‘the committed writer, as well as the other intellectuals of society, [who] has the duty of explaining his predicament to the individual and, what is more, of helping him to evolve new values which will accommodate the shock of change’ (34). Quite apart from the question as to how such reorientation of the masses may be achieved since the scholars’ researches are discussed in conferences and published in journals which are read by people of the profession, the notion *literary worth* must be seen as far from straightforward. Might it not conceivably strike some as the novel with the most readily discoverable and appropriable lessons, while others are thinking of critically engaging ones?

As has been mentioned, literary products are in the public domain; for ‘written discourse creates an audience which extends in principle to anyone who can read’ (Ricoeur 101), and in handling it, readers exercise their capacities. But it must also be observed that the kinds of things the reading public takes delight in tends to encourage more of the same from the writing community, while writers like Wole Soyinka who work, so to say, with the back to the reading public have to write as prompted by the Muse, not by demand from the public. Such a writer has to have strong inner motivation to work in the given an environment. However, while it is not up to the scholar to tell the public what to read, it is certainly up to him or her to say what deserves critical attention, what may be recommended to other scholars, and what may be demanded as mandatory reading for students. It is up to him or her also to say why this is important, and why they deserve a place, a permanent place in the archive of the literary tradition.

Conclusion

Art is a major part of the embodiment of culture, and in everyday language covers everything that involves skill, ingenuity, imagination, and so forth. So, to some ears, calling literature art may not sound like saying something particularly noteworthy. However, art and aesthetics theories make a distinction between what Hegel calls the complete arts and the incomplete or ancillary arts. In his own words:

It is of course the case that art can be used as a fleeting play, affording recreation and entertainment, decorating our surroundings, giving pleasantness to the externals of our life, and making other objects stand out by artistic adornment.

Thus regarded, art is indeed not independent, not free, but ancillary (7).

Literature as a complete and independent art is what Heidegger is talking about where he says ‘The more solitarily the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open that such a work *is*’. The complete arts are marked by *self-contained and self-subsisting existence*. It is therefore a very important question how these self-subsisting human creations work internally, for they are not only a stable element within culture, but as Heidegger says, they are ‘the foundation which supports history’. Knowledge about this object is the core of literary scholarship/literary studies; from it the approaches to literature, which some treat as *theories* of literature, may draw for validity. But literary productions themselves can also be dependent arts, even parasitical, attaching to one point of view or another and deriving sustenance therefrom. There are novels, for instance, that are pure propaganda on behalf of one social discourse or another. There are some that may strike members of one group as propaganda, but not others. It is by means of literary theory, not an approach to literature as such that a principled demonstration can be given as regards the character of a given work. As propaganda, a literary product may contain the features that a Marxist, a psychoanalytic, an ecocritical, or a postcolonial critic is after, and give rise to a vibrant discussion. But it will still be an example of what Ransom calls a diversion, as the discussion does not provide a guide as to whether the work the discussion is based on is worth preserving – for its own sake; for the sake of culture; for the sake of humanity – as an instance of what the human spirit is capable of. It must also be mentioned that the homage to the human spirit is being denied when a great literary production like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, instead of ‘*mimesis* [as] *poiesis*, that is, construction, creation’ (Ricoeur 141), is read as a *representation* of what obtained in a certain place and time, which the author personally witnessed or had received through someone else. Background and influence studies, as well as engaged and protest analysis can also tend in that direction.

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