

Exercising Loaded Autonomy Of The Text: An Elucidative And Definitive Approach To New Criticism

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Abstract

New criticism is another corporeality of the 20th American literary criticism. Although a very abrasive type of literary criticism, this approach is not much arduous to follow .it is not a conceptual *figment*, but a visible and *de facto* visage of the texts. this kind of approach on the part of teachers and experts isn't derailing and disturbing for the students who are apprentices in the field of literary criticism .the present paper attempts to streamline this hermetic school of literary criticism through a definitive and expository approach to it .further this paper attempts to disambiguate and simplify some of the recondite and esoteric terms that have been used by various New critics while elucidating 'New criticism'.

Keywords: New criticism, hermetic, abrasive, expository, disambiguate, de facto.

As we are acquainted about the various predominant critical modes of 20th century .these predominant critical modes were biographical, historical, psychological, romantic and impressionistic .however these modes of criticism were soon succeeded by a new type of criticism that discarded the former schools of criticism and hasten away from the ambit of foregoing conceptual chimeras known as "the New criticism".

The term "New criticism" was coined as early as 1910 in a lecture of that title by Joel Spingarn , advocated a creative and imaginative criticism which bestowed preponderancy to the aesthetic qualities of literature over historical, psychological and moral considerations. Spingarn was obliquely related to the new criticism that developed in subsequent decades .however in 1941 the term was made current by the publication of John Crowe Ransoms's "*The New criticism*" that remained bodacious and held full prominence until late in the 1960s.some of the vital features of new criticism originated in England during the 1920s in the work of T.S Eliot and Ezra pound, as well as in the seminal studies by I.A Richards and his pupil William Empson. Other members of this school are: F. R. Leavis , Kenneth Burke, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, R. P. Blackmur, W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., Rene Wellek. The New Critics tended to be eclectic on matters of theory, concentrating instead on what R.P Blackmur called the critic's "*job of work*."

Elucidating New criticism

New Criticism is an appellation appertained to heterogeneous and very colossally vigorous effort among Anglo-American writers to focus critical attention on literature itself. Like *Russian formalism*, following Boris Eikhenbaum and Victor Shklovskii, the New Critics evolved approaches of reading that provide a monumental complement to the literary and artistic emergence of modernism. In the specific context of Anglo-American literary study, however, the New Criticism appears, in retrospect, as part of an epochal project to create the curricular and pedagogical institutions by which the study of literature moved from the genteel cultivation of taste to an emerging professional academic discipline. In this respect, the New Criticism exhibits many similarities to *Structuralism*, just as it had an impact on the development of the French *nouvelle critique* and later, structuralist literary criticism as exemplified in the early work of *Roland Barthes*. The New critical practices were also being pioneered by American critics, known as "*Fugitives*" and "*the southern Agrarians*", who promoted the values of the old south in reaction against the alleged dehumanization of science and technology in the industrial North.

However some of the vital critical manifestoes of the "New criticism" are listed below:-

- I. New criticism considered a work of literary art as autonomous (power to govern itself and independent of any outside control) and could not be judged with references to considerations beyond itself.
- II. It discards the role of the life of an author, his times his intensions etc.in producing a literary work of art.
- III. New critics have a very stringent and rigid posture towards the text as a solid unchangeable entity(the text is fixed and unalterable)
- IV. As strict formalists, they advocated that literature can't be reduced to an ideology (visionary theorizing) or history.
- V. The exclusive focus of the new critics was on the isolated text and rejected its relation to the biography of the author and to the history of his period. Such relation according to them distracted the readers focus from examining the intrinsic merits of the linguistic pattern.
- VI. Like T.S Eliot, they believe in the impersonality of Art, which means that art can be interpreted without the reference to life, society etc.
- VII. For most of the New Critics, the essential job was "*practical criticism*" or "*close reading*," in which the poem or literary text is treated as a self-sufficient verbal artefact. In this general orientation, the literary text as such was generally viewed as a privileged site for shaping and disseminating cultural values held to be essential attribute of the aesthetic specificity of poetry. By careful attention to language, the text is presumed to be a unique source of meaning and value, sharply distinguished from other texts or other uses of language (particularly scientific language).

Analysing some of the important figures of New Criticism and their contribution towards it.

I.A Richards (1893-1979)

I.A Richards is also one of the major figures of New Criticism. His important works are; *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) written with C.K Ogden, formulated Basic English and is an important contribution to linguistics, principles of Literary Criticism(1924),*Science and Poetry*(1926),*Practical criticism*(1929) and *Coleridge on imagination*(1934). His *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) is arguably the first book in English that attempted to unfold a compendious theory of criticism, a view Richards himself took in describing all previous speculation about literature as a "*chaos*" consisting of "*random apercus*" and "*brilliant*

guesses". According to Richards, a theory in criticism must offer both a theory of value and a theory of communication, on the assumption that poems communicate value, grounded on the reconciliation of conflicting "*impulses*" in the experience of the poet.

The book very succinctly reports in detail an experiment in critical reading in which students were presented with the texts of poems without their titles or the names of their authors. Put simply, this experiment represents a severe complication for Richards's theory of poetic communication, which he had assumed in his previous work to be relatively unproblematic and based almost entirely on "emotive" effects. In the experiment, students were given the texts of the poems and asked to write brief commentaries on them. For the most part, the experiment showed that poetry (as typically read or misread) did not reconcile conflicts but induced them, that instead of communicating valuable experience it provoked confusion and incomprehension. The student responses, or "protocols," show a wide, sometimes bewildering range of irrelevant associations, "doctrinal adhesions," and confusions or uncertainties about sense, feeling, tone, and intent. *Practical Criticism* turned attention to the importance of teaching as it disclosed a problem that had largely escaped critical investigation: how do readers actually read? What do they actually understand, or fail to understand, and why?

Much of the "*principles of literary*", is comprised of chapters which gave the psychological background to particular facets of aesthetic appreciation and communication. In chapter XI, "*A sketch for a psychology*", Richards reminds us that the mind is the nervous system and is thus a system of impulses which are influenced by various stimuli. Our response to certain stimuli depends upon the needs of the body at a given moment. These stimuli may be either new or independent or associated with former experiences.

Richards continues the discussion of language in practical criticism when he analyses the "four kinds of meaning" all articulate speech can be regarded from four points of view:

1. Sense: the state of affairs or the items presented for consideration. This includes the raw material for analysing a literary piece of art.
2. Feeling: by feeling, Richards means the whole digest of emotional attitudes, desire, pleasure etc. that words evoke. However this feelings stays away in some types of discourse—mathematics for example.
3. Tone: the attitude of the speaker to the audience.
4. Intension: the speaker's conscious or unconscious intension, the effect he is trying to promote.

Chapter thirty four of the principles of literary criticism is devoted to "*the two uses of language*, "*emotive*", designed to arouse emotions and "*scientific*, used for the sake of reference, true or false which it causes.

In *Science and Poetry* (1926) Richards unravelled his theory as it applied to the modern crisis of values. Following Mathew Arnold, Richards presumed that poetry could be an intellectually respectable substitute for religion in an emerging age of science. As an advocate for such a substitution, Richards urged that poetry; should be regarded as presenting, not statements, but rather "pseudo-statements" valued for an "*emotive*" meaning that could change our attitudes without requiring us to believe in what he called the "*Magical View*"(as found in myth or traditional religion).

"*The meaning of meaning*" starts with the proposition that there is an essential disjunction between language and reality, that it is wrong to believe that "words in some way are parts of things" (to use the words of C.K. Ogden in the meaning of meaning). Ogden and Richards stress that words are used to "point to" things and their meaning does depend on the things

they are used to point to, their referents, a preposition in contrast to Ferdinand Saussure's view of language.

However it is an admitted fact as well as an established reality that I.A. Richards is a bigwig in the new critical approach. In the words of R. N. Wellek,

"The stimulus Richards gave to English and American criticism by turning it resolutely to the question of language, its meaning and function in poetry, will always insure his position in any history of modern criticism".

John Crowe Ransom (1888-1974)

John Crowe Ransom is another major figure whose contribution in new criticism can't be denied. The seminal manifestoes of the New criticism had been proclaimed earlier by him with the publication of a series of essays entitled "the New Criticism" and a very grave and influential essay "Criticism, Inc.", published in the world's body (1983). This essay succinctly expresses a core of New Critical principles underlying the practice of most "New Critics" whose view often differed in other respects. As Ransom acknowledges, his essay is motivated by the desire to make literary criticism "more scientific, or precise and systematic"; it must, says Ransom, become a serial business". He argues that the emphasis of criticism must move from historical scholarship to aesthetic appreciation and understanding. Ransom's position is that the critic must study literature, not about literature. Hence criticism should exclude:

- 1) Personal impressions, because the critical activity should "*cite the nature of the object rather than its effects upon the subject*".
- 2) Synopsis and paraphrase, since the plot or story is an abstraction from the content of the text.
- 3) Historical studies, which might include literary backgrounds, biography, literary sources and analogues.
- 4) *Linguistic studies, which include identifying allusions and meanings of words.*
- 5) Moral content, since this is not the whole content of the text. This includes a portion of the text
- 6) Any other special studies, which deal with some abstract or prose content taken out of the work.

However, Ransom urges, that the critic should "*regard the poem as nothing short of a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre*", which can't be reduced to prose. He stresses that literature and literary criticism should enjoy autonomy both ontologically and intuitionally. His arguments often have been abbreviated into a characterization of new criticism as focussing on "*the text itself*" or the words on the page.

Nonetheless in later essays, Ransom modified his position so far as to concede that poetic language was the union of "*logical structure*" and "*local texture*," without compromising his insistence on the "*rich contingent materiality*" of poetry. As he later said in his essay "The Literary Criticism of Aristotle," "*the critic never ceases to be impressed with his fine object*" and, as a literary man himself, "*starts with a spontaneous surge of piety, and is inducted by the contagion of art into a composition of his own*". But Ransom also saw the value of academic criticism and the virtues of more precise abstract argument and literary scholarship. Increasingly, he moved away from the conservative ideology of his earlier essays to a position of mediation and acceptance of a wider range of critical practice by other critics who did not share his political or cultural views but were nevertheless encouraged by

him and published in journals with which he was associated, such as the *Southern Review*, the *Sewanee Review*, and the *Kenyon Review*.

T.S Eliot (1888-1965) the arraage of the New Critics to T.S. Eliot was pervasive, but two germinal ideas from his essays shaped both New Critical theory and practice. In "*Tradition and the Individual Talent*" (1917), Eliot argued that the literature of Western Europe could be viewed as a "*simultaneous order*" of works, where the value of any new work depended on its relation to the order of the tradition. Thus, the work of the "*individual talent*" does not so much express a personality as it affects and is affected by the literature of the past. Eliot was responding in part to complaints that modern poetry was too hard to understand, too austere, metaphysical, or unfamiliar. Eliot's essay asserts that difficult language reflects an equally difficult modern historical and psychological predicament. The point, however, is general: poetry as an historical process and a response to human predicaments is difficult, especially as the literature of any age is also a response to previous literature as a whole. Eliot stresses the intellectual and objective element the whole of past literature will be "*in the bones of the poet with the true historical sense*", a feeling that the whole of the literature from Homer and within in it literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. "No poet has his complete meaning alone. For proper evaluation, you must set a poet, for contrast and comparison, among the dead poets.

In "*Hamlet and His Problems*" (1919) Eliot further proposed that the effects of poetry stem from a relation between the words of the text and events, states of mind, or experiences that offer an "*objective correlative*". Eliot suggests that there is a unique experience to which the language of the poem corresponds: the poem means just what it says, but it is the "*objective correlative*" in experience that makes the intellectual and emotional value of the poem intelligible. Ironically, Eliot propounds this idea while arguing that *Hamlet* is a less than satisfactory play because no sufficient correlative (or too many correlatives) can be found. A more encompassing irony is that both the origin and the collapse of New Criticism are contained in this point, where the precision of language demanded of the poem cannot be shown to determine a correlative meaning, "*Objective*" or otherwise.

In suggesting that literature could be treated as a simultaneous order, a system, Eliot opened the way to more explicitly speculative and theoretical studies of literature, while in focusing attention on the fundamental operations by which literary works create intelligible structure, he provided an analytical example for critics that went well beyond traditional protocols for assigning critical praise or blame. While Eliot himself evinces no strong inclination to pursue either explicit theory or critical technique, Richards pursued both, partly in an attempt to appraise the value of modern poets such as Eliot in explicitly theoretical terms and quite explicitly to advance the cause of English Studies, first at Cambridge and later, at other universities as far removed as China. Other critics, notably Leavis, pursued the questions as opportunities to reevaluate literary history, explicitly as a "*great tradition*," continuing into the modern age, though far less in terms of the establishment of university departments and programs than in a kind of stubborn, amateur pursuit of issues of taste.

Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994)

Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994), the founder of the *Southern Review* and one of the foremost American literary critics of the twentieth century, produced an important text, "*The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*"(1947) and *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), *Understanding Poetry*(1938) argue for the centrality of ambiguity and paradox as a way of understanding poetry. With his writing, Brooks helped to formulate formalist criticism, emphasizing "*the interior life of a poem*" and codifying the principles of close

reading. His *Understanding Poetry* is a revelation and a classic statement on the on the exact method of reading and teaching of a poem in the classroom. It is a text book of a group of selected individual poems with detail introduction and a glossary of literary terms. In this book Brooks condemns the three long established notions: poetry is the best realization of the best mind, poetry is not a substitute for an actual emotional experience and poetry is a beautiful statement of some high truth. But neither Brooks brushes aside all these approaches and argues that the true function of literary criticism is neither message-hunting, emotion-catching, nor explaining the beauty in terms of the characteristics of poetry. He propounds the concept of „organic nature of poetry“. *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) is an outcome of the synthesis of various ideas about poetry and here Brooks appears as an advocate of modern poetry. His tradition of poetry is in terms of the poetic language which is special and characterized by paradox, irony, wit, ambiguity, dramatization of experience, organic interrelationship and complexity. He considers a poem an independent structure. All poems possess some common properties- such as metaphor, paradox, irony, tone and attitude. Structure and form is not same thing in poetry. He rejects Ransom's dualistic theory of structure and texture. He argues in favour of an organic unity of structure. This unity is achieved through psychological, imaginative and dramatic process; logic and reason have no place in the unity of the poem. The essence of poetry is metaphor and metaphor is ontological not logical. Since a poem is an organic whole like a plant or human body, it can't be paraphrased. By paraphrasing we demolish the parts and the whole poem as well. Its metaphor, irony, ambiguity, tone, attitude and the total experience of the poet embodied in the poem get disintegrated and subsequently lost meaning. They do not convey meaning outside the poem or in isolation. He wrote three important essays "The language of paradox, The Heresy of paraphrase, and Irony as the principle of structure are considered the main marrow of the language and structure of his poetic theory.

Richard Palmer Blackmur (1904-1965) was one of America's foremost literary critics. He is in many ways the paradigmatic New Critic as essayist. Blackmur in particular reflect an increasing degree of sophisticated concentration on matters of poetic form, technique, and value. His criticism; like his poetry reflects his conviction that literature is the bearer of all the modes of understanding of which words are capable. In 1935 the publication of his first volume of essays, *The Double Agent*, marked the beginning of what was to become known as the New Criticism. He approached criticism as the necessary expression of the man of letters contemplating the modes of words and their value. Blackmur has a sense of penetrating vision. He has an approach to appreciate both literature and criticism. He is a poet in his criticism because every sentence of his prose struggles to be poetry and in his essays criticism has become a part of literature or literature has become a part of criticism. To him both creation and criticism are works of art which present an organic expression of culture because art and culture are interrelated to each other, he says. He is concerned with the power and precise use of language and its structure of poem. To Blackmur, the poet can get control over his material by employing most appropriate words and good poets always use words faithfully and avoid the blending and warping of words. Words encounter with each other by producing tension among them and generate a new kind of language. In view of Blackmur, language goes beyond the denotative and connotative activity and takes the reader into the season of myth, dream, history, religion and even silence. Blackmur's criticism of poetry reveals that the poem cannot exist in isolation because poetry is not a self-contained autonomous entity but has a serious social nexus between the poet and his society and reader. In a nut-shell, Blackmur is a balanced critic, incorporating neo-classical, romantic and

modern elements in the whole body of literary criticism. His critical insights are distilled in his essays particularly in essays titled „A Critic’s Job of Work’, „language as gesture’, „A Burden for Critics’ and „A Featherbed for critics.”

William K. Wimsatt, Jr. (1907–1975) Professor of English at Yale University, a leading apologist and theoretician of formalist criticism. He formulates his theory by drawing inspiration from both the ancient critics (Aristotle and Longinus) and the contemporary (T.S. Eliot and Chicago School). He lays stress on the objective approach to criticism decriing affective theory as „less a scientific view of literature than a prerogative” because affective theory is purely a psychological method interested in exploring the mind and the intention of the poet, the poem, and the reader. He argues to disregard these factors while evaluating a poem because „since the poet and the reader both are outside the poem, their implications will be an importation of meaning from outside”. So, this type of interpretation is quite irrelevant. Only the words on the page are relevant for interpretation. Wimsatt produced important books- *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the meaning of poetry* (1954), *Hateful contraries* and *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) in collaboration with Cleanth Brooks. *The Grammar of Criticism*” is discussed in his „Hateful Contraries’ on the basis of diction, imagery, metaphor, paradox, ambiguity, irony, myth, theme, and genre. Wimsatt’s, *The Verbal Icon* (1954) contains seventeen critical essays in four sections which are regarded as the milestone in the history of objective literary criticism in America. Two of the important essays- *The Intentional Fallacy* and *The Affective Fallacy* co-authored by his young philosopher friend Monroe Beardsley (1915–1985) reflect the organicity, autonomy of poem and how it should be interpreted. A fallacy is an invalid mode of reasoning, and Wimsatt and Beardsley claimed that it is fallacious to base a critical judgment about the meaning or value of a literary work on „external evidence” concerning the author’s intentions. Aimed at biographical and impressionistic criticism, the former dismissed attempts to gauge the poet’s intentions through examination of historical context; whereas the latter argued that the poem is not to be judged based upon its emotional impact on the reader. Its target was a certain kind of Romanticism (a concept that crops up several times in the original article) along with an assortment of associated notions, including „sincerity”, „fidelity”, „spontaneity”, „authenticity”, „genuineness”, „originality”. The dispute between intentionalists and anti-Intentionalists has been the basic issue of New Criticism; as the former believe in pure linguistic artefact. Here is a clash not only between styles of criticism but between fundamentally different conceptions of literature: the Romantic conception which sees literature as a vehicle of personal expression and the Modernist conception which sees Literature as pure Linguistic artefact or, in Wimsatt’s terms, as „verbal icon”. It has been a vogue to explore the mind of the poet to judge or evaluate his performance or quality. Critics determine the meaning of a work in the origin of the poet’s mind or his intention. The main thing according to the authors in a poem is not a product of inspiration or a fit; it is related to the intellect not with the heart. The key words of the intentional school are: sincerity, fidelity, spontaneity, authenticity, genuineness, originality. The authors suggest replacing these words with „integrity, relevance, unity, function, maturity, subtlety, adequacy” because the latter are concerned with the aesthetic aspect of work. The authors also explain the difference between the external and internal evidence for the meaning of a poem. Finally, the authors discuss the question of the poetic use of allusions and notes which should be studied within the framework of the verbal expression, not the oracle of the poet. *The Affective Fallacy* is a critical document of affective psychology. Both the fallacies go side by side and are the long cherished obstacles to objective approach of criticism. In author’s view, the affective fallacy

is an erroneous way of analysing a work because the critic or reader lays emphasis on his personal, emotional and psychological bias influencing the interpretation of the work. The affective fallacy is confusion between the poem and result meaning what it is and what it does. Both the fallacies undermined poetry and criticism as an art.

Defining the terms associated with New criticism

Explication de texte: The detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and ambiguities (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work. The students are supposed to give an account of a work's meaning and its stylistic features.

Close reading: Applied to the detailed analysis of a literary text, usually a short poem or a prose excerpt. In a modern tradition inaugurated by Laura Riding and Robert Graves in their book *A survey of modernist poetry* (1927), the close reader typically attempts to account for and justify the presence of all the text's features of sound and sense, usually detecting sonic correspondences such as internal rhyme and alliteration, along with ambiguities of meaning, and complex deployment of rhetorical figure, all integrated into a formal unity.

Ontological critic: A critic who recognizes that the text is a concrete entity with a fixed and unchanging meaning.

Prosody: the mechanical or structural elements that comprise poetry, such as rhythm, meter, rhyme, stanza, diction, alliteration, etc.

Intentional fallacy: the term was proposed by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley. The erroneous assumption that the interpretation of a literary work can be equated to the authors stated or implied intentions or private meanings. Thus it signifies what is claimed to be the error of interpreting and evaluating a literary work by reference to evidence, outside the text itself, for the intention (the design and purposes) of its author.

Affective fallacy: the reader's emotional response to a text is neither important nor equivalent to its interpretation, confuses what a poem is (its meaning) with what it does. The term was coined by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley.

The heresy of paraphrase: the work of art is not equal to its paraphrase. A paraphrase will miss the poem's uniqueness, with its many connotations and various complexities of thought. Paraphrase can't reproduce the poem, nor does stand in for analysis. The term was proposed by Cleanth Brooks in an essay under the same title.

Tension: A term that is synonymous with conflict. It designates the oppositions or conflicts operating with/in a text.

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