

New Criticism: An Approach to Literature

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Abstract

Twentieth Century is the period of transition and evolution (from the mythological world to the scientific universe; new discoveries and researches, inventions and experiments. It emancipates the intellectual person from orthodox ideas and thoughts and leading them the progressive and reformative attitude. The scientific points of view enforced the heart and soul of human beings and escorts human mind to scrutinize all standard theories and principles that make a milestone in the field of knowledge. Such forceful revolutionary investigative attitude inspires the readers to think and rethink again and again to achieve something new which is so far hidden in the field of science, anthology, sociology, Psychology, economics and humanities.

Key Words:- Twentieth Century, Theories, Principles, Research, Criticism

The literary criticism is not untouched with the gust of scientific approach and searching aptitude of the readers. They began to efface almost all established standards of literary theories on the basis of their limitations and partial method of evaluation. Perceiving the halo of the modern age, J.E. Spingarn used the term New Criticism in his address in Columbia University in 1910. In 1941 John Crowe Ransom published a book, New Criticism which stung literary scholars all over the world. The inspiring genius of the movement is J.C. Ransom round whom rotates a galaxy of modern critics like Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, R.P. Blackmur, Rubert Penn, Austine Warner, Kenneth Burk and Ivor Winters in America and its leading representative in England are T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, William Empson and others.

Before the emergence of New Criticism as a strategy to evaluate a piece of literature, there were several types of literary criticism

in vague. The prominent of them are philosophical criticism, classical criticism, Historical criticism, Biographical, Psychological, Moralistic, Cultural criticism etc. In addition to all these it was divided into periods and groups for the purpose of the assessment of literary standard. But it is obvious that none has defined poetry and literature in suitable form. That is why J.E. Spingarn at a stroke rejected all types of criticism proclaiming.

We have done with the old rules. We have done with the genres or literary kinds... we have done with moral judgment of literature..., we have done with technique as separate from art.... We have done with race, the time, the environments of the poets work as an element in criticism.”

Though he has not settled the question of the valid method and scope of literary criticism yet he gets credits for speaking boldly and clearly against so influential method of prominent criticisms.

The germ of New Criticism evolves in the critical writings of Ezra Pound. In his 'Polite Essays', he appeals the readers to evaluate a piece of literature as a student of science does.

"When studying physics we are not asked to investigate the biographies of all the disciples of Newton who showed interest in Science,..." but who failed to make any discovery. (Why Books page - 4)

In science we recognize only those discoveries, researches and theories which stand on their own right, we never bother about the biographical, historical, sociological, psychological or philosophical aspects of the scientists. The same attitude should be applied to the works of literature. Regarding the language of poetry, he favours simple language charged with meaning to the almost possible degree and classifies poetry into three kinds: melopoeia, phonopoeia and Logopoeia.

Melopoeia is a kind of poetry whose words are charged with plain meaning in musical form. Phonopoeia casts images upon the visual imagination of the readers and Logopoeia exhibits 'the dance of the intellect among words.' In prose phonopoeia leads the readers towards 'utter precision of words', Melopoeia lulls the sense for 'exact sense of language' with musical repercussion. The ingredients of poetry are language with its various modes of uses in a literary and poetic composition, the architectonic quality, the form and the structure of the text. In 'Teacher's Mission, (English Journal) Pound manifests the importance of text in literature.

"All teaching of literature should be performed by the presentation and

juxtaposition of specimens of writing and not by discussion of some other discussers opinion about the general standing of a poet or author." In support of all these, Pound in 'A Retrospect' deals with the techniques and forms of poetry without concentrating on meaning in content or context. Such hints anticipate the presaging of New Criticism and its dimension.

T.S. Eliot's Tradition and Individual Talent and 'The Function of Criticism' provide immense allusions and antecedent for New Criticism. Tradition stands for the relationship of any poem by any poet to other poems by other poets and the second term 'Individual Talent' establishes an intimate kinship between a poem and its poet. Elucidation by comparison and analysis is the prominent prescription for criticism. Textual analysis involving comparison is considered as the tool of the new critics. 'Individual talent' involves poets' personal experiences, emotions and feelings, thoughts and ideas, impressions and images, phrase and rhythm, musical harmony and cadence like Wordsworth spontaneous over flow of powerful feeling or emotion recollected in tranquility but these raw materials don't work as the allocated. These materials begin to formulate as a poem in presence of a catalyst (personality). It means these substances don't work directly as words Wordsworth considers but indirectly as T.S. Eliot's. For example appropriate chemical substances kept in the same test tube would not combine together to form new chemical compounds without the collaboration with catalyst and the catalyst which stimulates the reaction does not leave its own existence in new chemical compounds. In the same way

personality of the poet participates in the composition of a piece of literature and escapes to remain as the part of the formation. So the best poetry is impersonal and its excellence keeps the personality and personal emotions out of its frame. The impersonal theory of poetry forbids to meditate on historical, sociological or biographical details about the poet. It suggests to take the poem as a work of art independent of the personality and emotion of the authors.

If 'Tradition and Individual Talent' is anti-intentional theory, the function of criticism is anti-affection. It is against those who judge a poem in terms of the emotional and the intellectual effect it has on the readers. The function of critics is the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste.' A sound critic should keep his 'personal prejudices' and 'cranks' out of his own criticism.

I.A. Richards's critical works have directly influenced the idea of New Criticism. His 'The Foundation of Aesthetics' conveys the concept of beauty and 'Meaning of Meaning' pursues nature of signs and their interpretation. Signs may be symbols in scientific writings but the same signs charged with on 'emotive meaning' emerge as poetry. In other words there are two uses of language the first scientific (symbolic) and the second emotive (charged with emotion). The first is suitable in natural science and the second in literature. His all later works are extension of these two ideas or concepts. In 'Principle of literary criticism' he locates aesthetic experience within the range of other experiences flourishing as poetic experiences. To him poetic experience is not mysterious; so the

discussion of poetry should be free of all contamination of pseudo philosophy or mysticism. After observing the salient traits of Richards' Critical works, Cleanth Brooke remarks:-

“At any rate, the net effect of his criticism has been to emphasize the need of a more careful reading of poetry and to regard the poem as an organic thing.”

William Empson is the first critic who pierced the bondage of language and found that the language of poetry has the value of ambiguity. This ambiguity accentuated many times when we abolish the punctuation marks. Without the punctuation marks words become tantalized phrases which require close and attentive reading for detail and comprehensive interpretation. One may try to remove the ambiguity on the risk of depriving the poet of the depth and layers of meanings.

T.E. Hulme, in his 'A Critique of Satisfaction' investigates the deceptive nature of philosophy in poems. The nature of philosophy seems impersonal, objective, logical and convincing but its intensive reading with intellectual fervour reflects the conclusion which is purely personal and isolated, so unacceptable for others. Though it is difficult to detach oneself from personal ideas and emotional significance one should not be imbued in them during the evaluation and analysis of a poem. Literary criticism should not be involved with the intellectual and emotional contents of a poem. A critic should take poem as a part of the physical world of nature or the religious and ethical world of absolutes concentrating on the relationship between phenomena and absolutes. Philosophy in poem is

bamboozled by the personal emotion and the appetite of satisfaction, in the same way literary criticism is marred by the intrusion of the critic's personal impressions and contentment. To avoid such type of stigma from one's own criticism it is essential to maintain objectivity and dispassionateness leaving the paraphrasable content alone.

Hulme categorized poems (Poetry) into two parts, the first the Renaissance art and the second Byzantine art, the former imitates the living things and the later arranges the lines angles and curves manifested in poems. The new poetry is geometrical which conveys that a poem does not mean but is. The new poetry requires new vocabulary for its explanation and exploration.

In Romanticism and Classicism Hume invented two terms the architects blocks and stringly steel strip, the first represents curves in an approximate manner and the second in accurate mode. The Romantic is satisfied with the function of language as architects blocks while the classical and modern poets demand greater precision in expression and know where to exert pressure on language.

“The great aim is accurate, precise and definite description. The first thing is to realize how extra ordinary difficult thing is. It is no mere matter of carefulness you have to use language, and language is by its very nature a communal thing, that is, it expresses never the exact thing, but a compromise that is common to you, me and everybody.”

This quoted passage illuminates sufficient light on the nature of language and moulds the concept of new critics to give much thought to the language of poetry.

On the instigation of above mentioned critics' works, New Critics renounced all types of current criticisms. Each of these types of criticism must have dominated over the reign of literature but now lost their power and influence. On the fertile ashes of traditional critics New Criticism emerges as a practical critics applied to evaluate a poem on the standards of its organic components.

The inspiring works of Ranson's *The World's Body*, *The New Criticism*; Allen Tate's *Reactionary Essays on poetry and ideas*, Blackmar's *Language as Gesture*, Cleanth Brooke's *The Well Wrought Urn* and others shape the form of New criticism and Newer criticism. New criticism is nothing excepting the stress on the text. ‘A poem is a thing in itself with a definite entity of its own, separate both from the artist and its socio culture milieu in which it is produced.’ The emphasis is laid on the study of the text and its word by word analysis. Its study must be objective and the function of the critic is to recognize the nature of the object and its existing autonomy. One should illuminate a detail and comprehensive analysis of the complex inter relations and ambiguities of elements within the work. In the enmesh of the work there survives on interaction of words figures of speech and symbols. The basic components (Words, images and symbols) of a text contain a central theme entangled in paradox, irony and tension. Tension is a balance between extension and intension. The function of critic is to exemplify the bondage of the under consideration text as an organic whole.

In short, New Criticism is an approach that prefers to check the extreme bio historical techniques and allows us to appreciate a

piece of literature in all its totality. It succeeded in providing the much needed mid-course correction.' Several types of

literary approaches show the slippery features of language leading the reader to post structuralism.

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