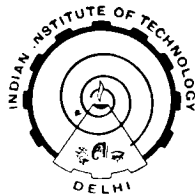


**ELUSIVENESS OF METHOD IN FORMALISTIC CRITICISM :
A CONSIDERATION OF THE CRITICAL METHODS OF T.S. ELIOT,
I.A. RICHARDS, JOHN CROWE RANSO AND CLEANTH BROOKS**

*Thesis submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirement of
the degree of*
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled 'Elusiveness of Methods in Formalistic Criticism : A Consideration of the Critical Methods of T.S.Eliot, I.A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, and Cleanth Brooks' by Shri S.N. Mehra, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, is a record of bonafide research work he has carried out under my guidance and supervision. The results contained in this thesis have not been submitted to any other university or institute for the award of a degree or diploma.

V.N. Arora
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Preface

Judgement is an inevitable part of criticism, and critics have used a variety of ways of trying to explain it. Sometimes they have appealed to self-evident principles, or accepted metaphysical standards, or simply the normal habits of mind of a quite self-confident society. On other occasions, critics have made their excursions into theory, trying to explain the proper grounds of critical judgement. My inquiry is into these proper grounds as they have developed and applied in critical practice. In doing so, I have in my first chapter had a glance at theoretical justifications of Romanticism and after, leading to the development of Modern Criticism. It is like a visit to a relation to whom we are also bound by duty, and from whom we can expect some pleasure. But I have made this visit to provide a framework within which to approach critical language itself. Also a consideration of Eliot's and Richard's approach is an inevitable beginning place in a study of this kind. Whatever the particular difficulties of their own theories, they have impressed a character on such investigations and are the masters of any who follow.

It is relatively easy to show that there is loss of confidence in the possibility of any objective way of criticizing and evaluating art. The more important part of

my task will be to show why most of the theories of New critical judgement have failed to provide a criterion of excellence that is both universal and effective. And also an attempt to show something of the character of the complex, rich and elusive vocabulary of criticism.

This study naturally has a ~~pre~~mise, though very general in nature and unable to be doctrinaire. The premise is that the first justification of criticism is to bring into focus and emphasize the function of the arts and, indeed of the humanities in general.

My debt to Professor V.N. Arora is far larger than that which a researcher conventionally owes to his supervisor; he has given me unfailing encouragement and guidance on all matters, from the most general issues of theory to the most practical points of presentation. I am also very grateful to Professor M.P. Jain, head of my department, for his interest and advise; to Professor P.P Goyal for valuable points from a literary view-point; to my wife for a thorough reading of the chapters in typescript.

S.N. Mehra

SYNOPSIS/ABSTRACT

The diversity of modern criticism has been increased by the direct impact of the challenging prestige and methods of science. Criticism has reacted variously to this impact. One reaction was simply to adopt a similar analytic rigour, either by trying to evolve hard-and-fast theoretical systems, or else, more frequently, by devoting attention exclusively to atomistic, piecemeal research. Modern historical, sociological, and formalistic varieties of criticism represent, at their best, the impressive if incomplete success of this reaction.

A second result of the impact of science has been the deliberate retreat from it into an aloof but half-hearted belief in "art-for-art's-sake," whether of the "simple," Nineteenth-century sort, or of the "complex" Twentieth-century variety.

A third reaction has been the attempt to reassert once again the classical function of humane arts and letters, as the Renaissance had earlier done with such sudden and fruitful results to itself and to Western culture as a whole. This reaction, most familiarly associated in England and America with Matthew Arnold and the classical values he tried to revive, has often tended, because of its defensive feeling, to narrow its ground. But the attempt to reassert such ideals, and to adapt criticism to them, has been successful only to the degree that criticism has lived up to its own initial precept and become humanistic: only to the degree that it has been joined, that is, with the constant desire to be as

original classical ideal: the active and integrated employment of the total mind. The criticism of art in general, is one of the many creations of Greek thought, resulting, as a by-product from the attempt to fulfil this ideal. The present richness and variety of criticism, in knowledge and approach, can be most profitably exploited by frequently referring to the ideals of the classical spirit to which criticism owes its very existence and original inspiration. Criticism will come closer to this spirit to the degree that it continues to experiment and to tap all available resources open-mindedly, but without losing its grasp of the primary human ends.

It is my intention to show that there is loss of confidence in the possibility of any objective way of criticizing and evaluating art. The more important part of my task will be to show why most of the theories of New critical judgement have failed to provide a criterion of excellence that is both universal and effective. Also a consideration of Eliot's and Richard's approach is an inevitable beginning place in a study of this kind. Whatever the particular difficulties of their own theories, they have impressed a character on such investigations and are the masters of any who follow.

My wish is to highlight the problem of critical judgement which lies in the elusiveness and complexity of literary works and in the temptation to apply to complex and elusive problems concepts which are designed to simplify. This shows not only in the reductiveness which treats complex matters as if they were simple but in the difficulty of

conceptualizing the critic's role. Is the critic an analyst of linguistic puzzles, an explainer of paradoxical metaphors, or irony as the principal of structure or an explainer of 'texture', a notion devised by John Crowe Ransom to implement his theories about the 'Ontological character of Poetry'? He is, of course, all of these things and none of them exclusively. To give a univocal and clearcut view of his task may clarify some of its possibilities while it obscures others. To specify is to limit, to create a well defined, but a much narrower relation to literature. My second and third chapters deal with T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards respectively as a consideration of their approach is an inevitable beginning place in a study of this kind and also because the "New Critics", particularly Ransom and Cleanth Brooks, refer to them continuously. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss "New Critics" chiefly Ransom and Cleanth Brooks. These critics have all tried to give their criticism something in the way of method or system, to develop through conceptual invention a critical vocabulary that not only increases the richness of our critical speech, but gives it rigour and precision. It was to be considered new in the sense of a revolt against the misty intuitions of others, against the whims of dilettantes, the personal tastes of aesthetes, against the casual. Earlier critics had been too personal, too lacking in method, perhaps serious enough about historical and philosophical matters, but inclined to regard criticism as a personal matter, a question of taste and not one for serious investigation. And it is perhaps a reaction

to this view of their predecessors that has produced in the new criticism its passionate high seriousness, its belief in method, in rigour, in analysis, in the close examination of texts.

But as far as these critics are concerned, their development of a rigorous method has consisted mostly in the presenting of a single term and a more or less systematic expansion of its explanatory uses. The degree and character of this "more or less" is what I have described in detail, along with the varying success or failure of the terms to do their prescribed critical task. But I think it is safe to say that these terms have raised as much dust as they have settled, that the questions concerned may have been unevenly illuminated but hardly systematically explored or clarified. They have presented not a method but a point-of-view. In the sixth chapter, I intend to draw conclusions.

Not much systematic attempt has been made towards a study of this nature. Scattered and scanty comments are available which have further confounded the issue. These critics have evoked considerable interest, but it is the kind of interest we take in the discovery of an interesting person, an attitude, a point of departure, but not the sort of interest we would take in a method of investigation, a technique with a number of steps, or in learning the rules which govern the solving of problems.

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